More Than Just …

The construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women's identities related to feelings of belonging and security, in the context of the multiculturalism discourse in the Netherlands

Sophie Kellenaers and Charlotte Tiebosch

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Student	Sophie Kellenaers
Student nr.	6166695
Email	s.kellenaers@students.uu.nl
Student	Charlotte Tiebosch
Student nr.	6114458
Email	c.i.tiebosch@students.uu.nl
Supervisor	dr. Tessa Verhallen
Email	t.l.verhallen@uu.nl

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Introduction

> "The fact that I wore a headscarf back then, made people ask questions like: where do you come from? Your headscarf makes you different. It wasn't seen as one of the identities of Dutch citizenship, you know. Now that I'm not wearing my headscarf anymore, I still get that question, so it's become clear to me that it's not even about that piece of fabric. It's in what we see as Dutchness. And we see that as: you are white, you have blonde hair, and your name is Anne. Then you are actually Dutch. Whereas, I would love it if (...) your cultural background is the baggage you take with you, and you can claim it at the same time. You shouldn't have to exclude one and hold on to the other. They should go together."[1]

This quote from Aziza[2] is one out of many other experiences where Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht[3] feel as if they are the supposed 'Other'. In Dutch society – on both a social and political level – Islam is classified by some as unfitting in Western culture. Islam is framed as non-modern, barbaric, and with a tendency to oppress women (Abu-Lughod 2013; Moors 2009; 2014; Said 2003). This frame is strengthened with the Western notion regarding veiling[4] which is also a symbol of the oppressed woman, and therefore framed as 'abnormal' and 'unsuitable' for Dutch culture. An example of the consequence of this frame is the ban of face covering in the Netherlands – popularly known as 'the burqa ban'[5] – which was implemented on the1st of August 2019. By expressing one's religious identity – wearing a headscarf like Aziza as an example of this expression – Dutch Muslim women are categorised as 'the Other' (Abu-Lughod 2013; Buitelaar 2010; Moors 2009; 2014). This frame of the Muslim woman as 'the Other' results in, first, public laws being made about private choices that, in a liberal society such as the Netherlands, should be considered as an intrinsically personal decision: such as, the implementation of the burqa ban. Second, this frame results in politicians assuming that Dutch Muslim women are recent-migrants, non-

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[1] Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021

[2] In the context of anonymity, pseudonyms are used in this thesis

[3] See for specific location: *Appendix 2: Map of The Netherlands and Utrecht*

[4] There are different types of veiling. The most common ones are the Shayla, Hijab, Al-Amira, Khimar, and the Chador. Some women in Utrecht do wear the Chador. An estimated 150 women wear a niqab or burqa (Barrington 2018; BBC 2018; NOS 2018). These types of veiling range in order to least covering to most covering. See for more information: *Appendix 1: Types of veiling*

[5] 'Burqa ban': Implemented under the law "Gedeeltelijk verbod op gezichtsbedekkende kleding". This means it is prohibited to wear face covering in educational and healthcare facilities, also in public transport and in government buildings. For example, it concerns a full-face helmet, a balaclava, or a niqab (Rijksoverheid 2020)

Dutch, and poorly educated (Moors 2009; 2014). Thereby, stereotypically lumping all Dutch Muslim women together, where individuality receives little to no attention.

With this in mind, we have been conducting an ethnographic research in Utrecht, The Netherlands, on the construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women's identities with regards to feelings of belonging and security, and thereby specifically emphasising on this supposed unseen individuality of Dutch Muslim women. Utrecht is known for its diversity since one out of ten *Utrechter*[6] regards themselves as Muslim (Omlo and Butter 2020). During our ten week fieldwork research, unfortunately amidst the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, we focussed on the experiences of Dutch Muslim women who identify as both Dutch and Muslim, and are in the age range of 18-35 years old. With Dutch Muslim women we mean both 'born Muslims' and women who have converted to Islam. Our participants all differed in their cultural background, where some have Turkish roots, others Bosnian, or Moroccan, and two women have converted to Islam.

Ultimately, we used triangulation in order to answer our research question, this consisted of sixteen unstructured/semi-structured interviews with seven women. Next to this, we have analysed Facebook groups and interacted in these groups, as well as participating in some online events. We have also done small talk with our participants via online events, WhatsApp messages, Facebook and Instagram chats, and phone calls. Eventually, we have had thirteen participants whom we talked to intensely, excluding the ones we chatted with during online events or private messages. The methods used – and specifically the issue of ethics intertwined with these methods – will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter three.

By focussing on this aforesaid individuality of our research participants we have been delving into a deeper understanding of how Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht construct and (re)negotiate their identity in relation to feelings of belonging and security. Doing ethnographic research has also contributed to this deeper understanding. The continuous construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women's identities as being supposedly 'dichotomous', puts these women in a difficult position. Here, feelings of belonging and security are greatly affected (Buitelaar 2010). With this thesis we aim to contribute to changing the aforementioned stereotypes about Dutch Muslim women, bringing back their individuality in society by voicing their experiences regarding their identity construction and (re)negotiation and feelings of belonging and security, while simultaneously

[6] *Utrechter*: a resident of Utrecht

questioning debates regarding the multiculturalism discourse. Ultimately, this thesis will answer the following research question:

How do Dutch Muslim women construct and (re)negotiate their (religious and national) identity in Utrecht in relation to feelings of belonging and security in the context of the current multiculturalism discourse?

With this question in mind, we believe that our research will contribute to both social and theoretical relevance. With the use of the emic perspective[7] in our research, we can contribute to this social relevance, since refuting the focus to individuality – rather than generality – will give Dutch Muslim women the opportunity to voice their opinions and experiences with regard to the construction and (re)negotiation of their identity in relation to feelings of belonging and security. By using the etic perspective[8], we also aim to contribute to the social relevance since, as researchers who are Dutch Non-Muslim women, we were able to gather our data as outsiders who provided questions formulated from an outsiders' perspective.

With this in mind, we have consciously chosen to change our stance in our research – also known as our epistemology – regarding gaining access to our research population. This specific change in epistemology, and the reason thereof, will be explained more thoroughly in chapter four. Additionally, both the emic and etic perspective may contribute to the theoretical relevance, as this could give a deeper layer in understanding already existing theories regarding Dutch Muslim identity in relation to feelings of belonging and security. That said, it is crucial to understand that this thesis is based on the meaning of our participants regarding their view on Islam and Dutchness, and not necessarily based on what those religious aspects or nationality entail. In doing so, we specifically look at this meaning making from an anthropological point of view. As Sinan Cankaya (2020, 93) said: "I am not telling The Truth, but believe me because I am telling *a* truth."

In the upcoming chapters, we explore how Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht construct and (re)negotiate their identity related to feelings of belonging and security, in the context of the multiculturalism discourse in the Netherlands. The first chapter lays out a theoretical

[7] Emic is the perspective of the research participants – in this case Dutch Muslim women (Kottak 2015)
[8] Etic is the research / scientific perspective – often classified as the 'outsiders' looking in. In this case the researchers (Kottak 2015)

framework which forms the basis in understanding key debates regarding the concepts of identity, Othering, security, and belonging.

Chapter two elaborates on the context of our research. Here, we focus on the multiculturalism discourse and the consequences it has in the Netherlands. In addition to this, we focus on feelings of discrimination, Islamophobia, and the current political field in the Netherlands, with a special focus on Utrecht.

Chapter three discusses our methods and ethical dilemmas. Subsequently, in chapter four, an explanation of accessing our field is discussed. The reason of changing our epistemology is also explained. This chapter also elaborates on the effects of doing online fieldwork in times of a global pandemic.

Thereafter, the empirical findings are discussed in four different chapters. Chapter five focusses on identity construction and (re)negotiation in relation to being categorised as 'the Other'. Here, we argue that individuality should be seen as the focus regarding the identity construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women rather than frames based on generalisations such as 'the homogenous Muslimah'. Notions such as claiming and the performativity of identity, feelings of accountability and responsibility, and recognition with regards to belonging are discussed.

Chapter six discusses the definition of our participants regarding feelings of security. Both direct and indirect feelings of security have an influence on how Dutch Muslim women describe feelings of (in)security. These feelings of (in)security concern a discrepancy, in which feelings of (in)security are not always complying with actual events, such as stigmatisation versus discrimination. This discrepancy – related to discrimination and stigmatisation – has an influence on feelings of accountability and responsibility.

Chapter seven focusses on the problematic frame in the Netherlands regarding Islam, as well as the difference between culture and religion. This chapter explains the disproportionate treatment our participants experience, together with the representations of Dutch Muslim women in the media and politics. The last empirical chapter, chapter eight, analyses the relationship between the concepts of identity, belonging, and security. This chapter focusses on the explanation of the intertwinement between these concepts. Here, Utrecht as 'home' is explained with regard to the notion of locality.

Finally, in the conclusion, all findings are combined with the theoretical implications mentioned before, to demonstrate how Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht construct and (re)negotiate their identity with regards to feelings of belonging and security, in the context

of the multiculturalism discourse in the Netherlands. Next to this, we discuss recommendations and discussion points regarding further research[9].

[9] No summary has been added to this thesis. This is in agreement with both our supervisor and our participants, where we concluded that it is deemed unnecessary

1. A theoretical approach on identity, feelings of belonging, and security

In order to comprehend how our participants experience and (re)negotiate their identities with regards to feelings of belonging and security, it is necessary to get a better understanding of the concepts which are intertwined with these experiences. These concepts are explained more in-depth in this chapter. First, we conceptualise the concept of identity, whereby we will focus on its fluidity, collectivity and sameness, and in- and exclusion. Following this, we explore the understanding of identity even more, as these are categorised as supposed 'dichotomies'. Then, we focus on national and religious identity, together with stigmatisation and performativity. After this, we explore the concept of the 'Muslim Other', where the focus will be on understanding orientalism and secularism related to the categorisation of the 'Other'. Finally, we end this theoretical exploration by focussing on the definition of security – together with its antonym: insecurity – locality, and lastly the conceptualisation of sense of belonging.

Conceptualisation of identity *Sophie*

Conceptualising identity starts with the understanding of the two concepts of identity: sameness of objects and the establishment of distinction. For that, identity is an ongoing connection between differentiating and similarity. Identity is to classify, and to associate or attach oneself with someone or something (Jenkins 2014). Demmers (2012, 19) adds to this that identity brings forward questions, such as "Who or what are you" and "How do context and structure, roles and norms, discourses and symbolic order impact our self-understanding?". These questions about identity can be answered differently by anyone and at any time, due to the fact that identity is seen as fluid and dynamic (Barth 1969). Identity is situationally based, contingent, and is constantly negotiated (Barth 1969). Hence, these factors make identity a complex concept, where others need to accept one's identity first (Barth 1969).

Not only do we have to take fluidity into account when defining identity. Demmers (2012) argues that identity needs to be viewed from an individual aspect, which she calls individual identity, as well as a social aspect, which she refers to as social identity. Tajfel (1981, 63) describes social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group". Social identity is then based on certain characteristics which are similar to others. People are part of more social

groups or categories, meaning, we do not have *one* specific identity as a static concept, rather it is changeable and constantly (re)negotiated.

As mentioned before, Demmers (2012) states the importance of the relation between individual identity and social identity. Adding to this, Verkuyten (2005) explains this is about the contradictions and paradoxes between the two. With this, both authors imply that the two concepts are separated. However, Jenkins (2014) argues that all human identities are constructed socially, meaning that there is no distinction between them. As a result, all types of identities should be called social identities.

While social and individual identity are two concepts, they cannot be seen as separate as they are in constant interaction. Thus, Demmers' (2012) and Verkuyten's (2005) notion on identity will be used, as well as the idea of identity being fluid.

Categorisation of sameness and collectivity

As stated in the previous paragraph, sameness can be seen as part of identity. Hence, sameness between people is part of collective identifications (Demmers 2012). Demmers (2012) states that a collectivity is multiple individuals who see themselves as similar. They portray similar behaviour or characteristics, such as beliefs and values. These individuals who form a collectivity, distinguish themselves by boundaries. Boundaries define a group, as it separates a collectivity from others (Demmers 2012). As boundaries are socially constructed and created through interaction, collectivity is too. This means that collectivity, and thereby the sameness between people, is interchangeable and adaptable (Barth 1999).

Jenkins (2014) describes that collectivity can be established in two ways. First, collectivity is established by how people (or members) of a collectivity see themselves. Second, members are ascribed to a certain collectivity; making the members unaware of this placement. The first mentioned collectivity can be seen as a group, as it is defined by the relations between the members of the collectivity. However, with regards to the second, when others ascribe an individual to a collectivity, it suits better to call it a category. Since, categorising groups is inherently connected to the humans' need of structure and routine. This results in the categorisation of groups in order to make sense of other people surrounding you (Demmers 2012; Jenkins 2014). With respect to Dutch Muslims, this means that they are being categorised as Muslim but not as Dutch (Jenkins 2014; Moors 2009; 2014). Individuals who have been placed in one category by others do not necessarily have to feel like they belong in this category (Barth 1999; Jenkins 2004). Not feeling like one

belongs in a certain category relates to the aforementioned concept of identity being fluid. The fluidity of identity means that people do not 'fit' in one static category. With this in mind, one person can thusly belong in more than one category. The act of categorising people into one category creates stereotypes and the in- and exclusion of people (Baumann 1999; Demmers 2012). With regards to Dutch Muslim women, they are often caught between either fitting in one or none category, resulting in the loss of their identity as being fluid (Baumann 1999; Demmers 2012; Moors 2009; 2014).

The process of inclusion and exclusion

As previously mentioned, Jenkins (2014) describes the formation of collectivity, formed by a systematic establishment of placing individuals in groups and categories. This placing is formed by sameness, boundaries, and thereby differentiation. While sameness brings individuals together, differentiation is a form of distinguishing between social relations and people (Verkuyten 2005). Due to these differentiations and boundaries, inclusion and exclusion can take place.

The act of creating groups and differentiation between individuals brings inclusion and exclusion, where some can be a part of the group and others are not. As stated before, collectivity can be forced upon us; others have the power to identify and categorise people to their standard. (Demmers 2012; Jenkins 2014). An example of this, is the labelling of the young Dutch Muslims as foreign, being excluded from Dutch identity (Foner and Simon 2015). Those who are included but do not share the same values as the majority of the group can be seen, according to Jenkins (2014), as 'bad' members and hence will eventually be excluded. If inclusion is being refused, the image of that person changes, since shared values are not present, and the person becomes an outsider (Baumann 1999; Demmers 2012; Jenkins 2014).

Having categories based on members and non-members allows the formation of stereotypes. Baumann (1999, 84) states: "It helps one to stereotype them with the greatest of ease and to make common sense predictions of how these others might think and what they might do next". General collective categories are being applied to individuals and combined with other stereotypes to construct a cumulative classification of incompetence and exclusion (Jenkins 2014). Group identities established by these categories will get a certain treatment from others which can be different from any other group. The difference in amount of discrimination against groups is an example. In order to see groups as equal,

community rights, which are bound to a specific group, are being used (Baumann 1999). An example of community rights is positive discrimination. However, these rights increase the boundaries between and within people, as this relates to the aforementioned concept of differentiation: creating boundaries based on sameness and Otherness. The increase in boundaries between and within people strengthens both inclusion and exclusion (Baumann 1999). Baumann (1999) explains that there is always a risk of being singled out or excluded from groups, although we wish to live in our own group. If one follows this line of thinking, it seems that being categorised as a Muslim makes it more difficult to belong to the categorisation of being Dutch, as Muslim versus Dutch are supposedly categorised as 'dichotomous'. This categorisation is explained next.

Negotiating identities *Charlotte*

As mentioned before, an identity is constantly (re)negotiated, dynamic, and fluid. According to Verkuyten (2007), the formation of group identification is often multifaceted and has the potential of having dual or hybrid identities. Group identities are also interchangeable, dynamic, and fluid – as well as their boundaries. In understanding the fluidity of identities more in-depth, one should look at national and religious identities as supposedly 'dichotomous'. With this, particularly focussing on Dutch and Islamic identities as being supposedly 'dichotomous', because of frames where Islam is categorised as 'unfitting' in Western society which are framed as 'clashing' with Dutchness.

National identity

In order to understand national and religious identities as supposed 'dichotomous identities' – and especially the interrelationship between these identities – we should understand the notion of nationness and national identity. This understanding helps us to develop a deeper perception of how Dutch Muslim women construct and (re)negotiate their identity. Anderson (2006, 6) states "The Nation is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" meaning that a group or nation is imagined by the Self with regards to the Other. Community as 'imagined' does not mean it does not exist. The 'imagined' connotation simply means that one does not *know* everyone within their nation, but still feels a certain bond with them. Anderson (2006, 7) furthers his statement in which the perception of a national community – relating to national identity – is often conceived as "a deep, horizontal comradeship". This national comradeship relates back to the aspect of

sameness which has been discussed before. National identities – formulated out of this sameness – have boundaries as well, where Triandafyllidou (1998) explains the contradictory notion of national identity – with regards to naming who *is* and who is *not* a member of the community. This contradictory notion entails whether nationness is ascribed by others or achieved within the self. The constant going back and forth of nationalists seems to be limited to the main question of defining who is 'Us' and who is 'Them' (Triandafyllidou 1998). This notion emphasises the boundaries with regards to national identity and relations to the ascription of the Self and the Other. The constant going back and forth of defining who is 'Us' and who is 'Them', assigns Dutch Muslim women in a complicated position. They *should* be perceived as being part of 'Us', since they bear the Dutch nationality. However, they will never be *completely* defined as being part of 'Us', since they carry something of a supposed 'Them': being Muslim.

Religious identity

According to Geertz (1973, 90) religion is: "A system of symbols which act to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." Geertz (1973, 91) then defines the symbol as "any object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception —the conception is the symbol's 'meaning'". These symbols are also defined as culture patterns which constitute "extrinsic sources of information" (Geertz 1973, 92). These sources of information can be seen as modes of reality and also modes of representation (Asad 1993). Asad (1993) states that it is within the different sorts of practices and discourses where religious representations receive their identity and truthfulness – to which others can thus reply within their social life. A religion is often an intense important factor of someone's personal life and can be part of the strong base of someone's identity (Verkuyten 2007). The formation of religious identity is fluid and dynamic as well and is often formed within this sense of collectivity which has been described before.

Perceiving identities as supposedly 'dichotomous', essentially contradicts the whole notion of fluid and dynamic identities. Therefore, understanding this fluidity in relation to (religious) identity is crucial. Religious identities in general – and Muslim identities in particular – are often framed as 'unsuited' in Western conceptualisations of the public sphere. For instance, wearing a hijab is framed by Western – including Dutch – notions as a

symbol of oppression and thus categorised as unfitting in the West (Abu-Lughod 2013; Moors 2009; 2014). These frames result in supposed 'dichotomies' in which Dutch Muslim women must constantly negotiate and explore their identities (Nagel and Staeheli 2009).

Supposed 'dichotomous' identity

The relationship between supposed 'dichotomous identities' – national/Dutch and religious/Islamic – has been constantly contested (Demmers 2012; Moors 2009; 2014). Demmers (2012) states that religions are regularly in the middle of a political minefield. Being Dutch and Muslim is often not easy in the perpetual battle who is part of 'the nation' and who is not. According to Kong (2009), the bonding of the Muslim community – due to the notion of being Othered – is enhanced and it calls on the sense of the already existent Muslim community called: *umma. Umma* thusly becomes the source of Muslim empowerment and collectivity. Wekker (2016) demonstrates that belonging to the Dutch nation hardly goes hand in hand with the image of having a different appearance, meaning other than white. She also states that this 'Dutchness' will never be achieved by non-Christian religions, as "the dominant representation is one of Dutchness as whiteness and being Christian" (Wekker 2016, 7). The focus with regards to supposed 'dichotomous identities' should be to constantly keep in mind that identities are in principle dynamic and fluid. However, this is often forgotten and classifies these identities as static. With this reification of identity a supposed 'dichotomy' is constructed.

Stigmatisation and performativity

To understand the framing of Islamic and Dutch identity as supposedly 'dichotomous', we must understand the notion of stigmatisation. We briefly touched upon the vital role inclusivity and exclusivity play on the conceptualisation of identity. Goffman (1961) proposes that in stigma, concepts of normality and abnormality play a role. These concepts are both socially constructed. The stigmatised – the one deviating from 'normal' – may feel marginalised, hated, and threatened (Goffman 1963; Ryan 2011). Goffman (1963) further states that being stigmatised because of one's religious affiliation can unfold into labelling, discrimination, and stereotyping. The stigmatisation of the identity of Muslims – specifically with regards to our research about Dutch Muslim women – is often based on Islamophobic notions: being a form of cultural racism based on attacking symbols of the Islam and

silencing Muslim voices[10] (Birt 2009). Islamophobic stigmas recurrently relay stigmatised messages based on the clothing of Muslim women. Veiling is explicit in which it is identifiable for others to portray Muslim women as ‘the stranger among us’ and hence they are stigmatised as ‘abnormal’ (Abu-Lughod 2013; Goffman 1961; Goffman 1963; Moors 2009; 2014; Ryan 2011).

This categorisation of abnormality, is what counteracts feelings of inclusivity. Identity, in this sense, is constantly under attack where one has to (re)negotiate in order to feel included. This is also inherently linked to the aforementioned concept of social identity, in which an identity is shaped and constructed by others and one’s social environment (Demmers 2012; Jenkins 2014). Trying to negotiate and construct one’s identity could potentially relate to the concept of performativity which is explained both by Butler (2002) and Guadeloupe (2009). The performativity of identity is the constant negotiation of one’s identity in order to feel included and accepted. Different identities come forward as certain performances in order to adjust oneself in certain groups. This performative dance ensures one’s acceptance in different communities, in angst of not being part of one at all (Butler 2002; Guadeloupe 2009). The performance of identity – with regards to Dutch Muslim women via clothing or veiling – is inherently linked to the potential of being stigmatised and labelled as ‘The Other’. Therefore, this performance might be applied to both inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand Dutch Muslim women might be included in the Muslim community for performing their religious identity via clothing, as this creates sameness (Jenkins 2014). Simultaneously, on the other hand they might be excluded from the non-Muslim community for also performing their religious identity via clothing, as veiling is categorised as ‘unfitting’ in the West (Buitelaar 2010; Moors 2009; 2014).

Understanding the ‘Muslim Other’ *Charlotte*

To elaborate more on the stigmatisation and labelling of Dutch Muslim women as ‘The Other’, it is important to understand how this notion of Othering is formed. We have briefly touched upon the stigmas of Dutch Muslim women in relation to their supposed ‘dichotomous identities’. However, it is also important to distinguish – and understand – exactly what this ‘Muslim Other’ means.

[10] This will explained more thoroughly in *Context: Discrimination, Islamophobia, and politics*

Orientalism

In the context of the Othering of Dutch Muslim women, one must understand how orientalism is portrayed and what the effects of orientalism are with regards to Othering. In essence, orientalism is connected to the hegemonic Western view of the European identification of ‘us’ against all ‘those’ non-Europeans (Said 2003). Orientalism frames the Orient – the Arab world – as “under-humanised, antidemocratic, backward, and barbaric” (Said 2003, 150). Superiority with regards to the orientalist discourse is seen as symbiotic to the West. Said (2003) also makes a distinction between orientalism and Islamic orientalism. Here, Islamic orientalism is the notion in which Islam is ‘estranged’ from the European Western culture, where Islam is regarded as unchanging and will not strive to obtain the same ‘modernity’ of the West. Muslims in this Islamic orientalist view are perceived to be ‘resistant to change’ and used to their “archaic, primitive, classical institutions” (Said 2003, 263). The formation of the ‘Muslim Other’ as being ‘backward and primitive’ is what comes afore in regards to this specific discourse. Creating even a bigger barrier between the Self (the West) and the Other (Muslim) is associated to the fear of Islam as the fear of losing the barriers between West and East (Said 2003). This fear of losing this barrier and the orientalist view on the Arab world, brings us to the alleged ‘connection’ of non-modernity and the position of Dutch Muslim women in the Netherlands – using veiling as an example.

Showcasing veiling as an intrinsic part of the performance of overt Muslim identity is seen as a threat to Western modernity, rationality, and liberalism (Moors 2009; 2014; Nagel and Staeheli 2009; Ryan 2011). This assumption is based on ethnocentric values whereby the West is portrayed as modern. While, the Other – in this sense the Dutch Muslim woman – is portrayed as primitive and oppressed (Abu-Lughod 2013; Khader 2018). For many, veiling has been the centre of political debates and controversy, because veiling is perceived as Muslims refusing to integrate in ‘normal Western society’ (Ryan 2011). Muslim women are constantly negotiating their identities, as they are in a constant battle of being categorised as ‘the Other’ due to the Islamic orientalist discourse (Asad 2003; Moors 2009; 2014; Ryan 2011; Soares and Osella 2009). Hence, it is important to understand the interaction between secularism versus religion, since this contributes in understanding the supposed ‘Muslim Other’.

Secular versus religious

To elaborate more on the understanding of the 'Muslim Other' in the context of an Islamic orientalist framework as being primitive and backwards, the notion of secularism is relevant. Secularism and religion are presumed as opposites because it is perceived by Western societies as impossible to exist simultaneously (Asad 2003; Birt 2009; Taylor 2007). The definition of secularism is strongly connected with politics, in which it is simply put as the notion of the state's prerogative of determining the separation between public and private, political and religious (Maclure and Taylor 2011; Nagel and Staeheli 2009). In this sense, secularist views believe that religion is part of the private. This relates, according to Mahmood (2009, 836-837), to "the rearticulation of religion in a manner that is commensurate with modern sensibilities and modes of governance". In other words, the position of religion in society is formed by concepts implied by the secularist state. Hence, religions have been confined into the sphere of private life, believing it to be anti-modern if combined otherwise (Asad 2003; Birt 2009).

Islam is often perceived by the West to be incapable of keeping religion privatised, implicitly stating to be anti-modern (Said 2003; De Koning 2020; Mahmood 2009). De Koning (2020) states that secularist states make a distinction between seemingly 'acceptable and unacceptable' modes of Islam. These two modes of Islam are part of Dutch management of religion and are categorised as who "belongs to the nation-state and who threatens it" (De Koning 2020, 128). However, because of the differences in views between the secularist and the supposed 'non-secularist Other', the framing of what is 'acceptable' and what is 'unacceptable' often gets mixed. The 'acceptable Islam' is connoted as being privatised, and everything which is not deemed as 'acceptable' – thus public – is subsequently being categorised as 'unacceptable' (De Koning 2020).

Secularism is supposedly framed as being the basis of universal development of human civilisation, though it is often not conducted in such a way (Asad 2003; De Koning 2020; Moors 2014; Said 2003). Secularism is complex, in which the spaces regarding secular, religious, private, public etcetera, should be seen as fluid and socially constructed by individuals (Nagel and Staeheli 2009). Asad (2003) mentions that there is no possibility of a universally agreed basis – either secular or religious. Dutch Muslim women – and Islam in the Netherlands – are often caught in debates with regard to secularism versus religious life, in which the 'versus' often relays in notions of orientalist views, and the

aforementioned concepts of who belongs and who does not. This could affect sameness and collectivity, where feelings of belonging and security play a role.

Perception of feelings of security and belonging *Sophie*

To broaden our perception and understanding of the ‘Muslim Other’, it is important to understand how this Othering relates to the Self – in this case the Self meaning the Dutch Muslim woman. We have briefly touched upon the concept of belonging. It is critical to understand the concepts of security in relation to the Self and the construction of feelings of belonging, as belonging is in close relation to feelings of security (Mackay 2014).

Security

To start with the conceptualisation of security, it is essential to understand the difference between security and safety. Both concepts focus on the protection of harm, but the cause is different. Safety is the protection against non-intentional failure (e.g. Natural disasters), while security is protection against intentional human behaviour and actions (Prins 2020). The concept of security – rather than safety – is therefore more applicable to the feelings of security and belonging of Dutch Muslim women.

Security can be understood as “a process of constructing a collective understanding of something as a particular kind of danger, an existential threat to state, society or ‘our way of life’” (Goldstein 2010, 492). The notion of security or threat cannot be defined by measurements, the feeling of ‘real’ security or ‘real’ danger is different for every individual. Due to this, security is socially constructed and intersubjective. It depends on the willingness to accept that something is secure or dangerous based on the security speech act, which is an expression of an individual that not only presents information but simultaneously performs an action (Austin 1962; Goldstein 2010). Due to this speech act (Austin 1962), security is an indicator of power as well. Meaning that the individual who declares something as a threat to security has the possibility that their declaration will be seen as legitimate and will be taken over by the hegemony. Consequently, it will influence others on their perspective on security (Goldstein 2010).

The meaning of security is closely connected to its antonym: insecurity. Insecurity in this sense is the feeling of risk, fear, and danger; it is the existence of something undesirable. Putting insecurity into practice, it could be described as the lack of comfort or the existence of threats (Crawford 2002). Hence, insecurity is, just like security, socially constructed and

intersubjective and can be described or perceived differently by any individual. Both security and insecurity are fluid and can change when perceptions change. The measurement of whether something is (in)secure will shift to the appropriate response. This response is based on norms, values, and principles (Goldstein 2010; Crawford 2014). Herewith, both security and insecurity influence the general idea of danger.

Feelings of security or insecurity depend on one's categorisation of violence. With this in mind, Galtung introduces the triangle of violence, to which three categorisations of violence are explained. First, direct violence: "A visible and expressive action" (Demmers 2012, 4). In other words, physical violence that one experiences and sees. Due to its visibility, direct violence is clearly recognisable for people (Demmers 2012; Galtung 1969). Second, structural violence refers to violence which is built on the unequal and unjust social system and structures (e.g. racism) (Demmers 2012; Galtung 1969). Third, and last, cultural violence uses aspects of culture to legitimise violence. Both structural and cultural violence are a more indirect and underlying type of violence (Demmers 2012; Galtung 1969). All three types of violence are being fed by a triadic construct consisting of behaviours (communication, action), attitudes (feelings, thoughts), and contradictions (grievances, a specific aim). Behaviour directly affects direct violence, such as attitudes affect cultural violence, and contradictions affect structural violence. When attitudes and contradictions are less visible, structural and cultural violence are also less visible (Demmers 2012; Galtung 1969). Due to this, these types of violence are not always labelled as violence because of the absence of realisation (Demmers 2012; Galtung 1969). Thus, as mentioned, the response to (in)security is based on norms, values, and principles, but so are these types of violence. One could conclude that the relation between these types of violence, the response to (in)security, and the impact of in- and exclusion, are all interrelated and thusly inherently socially constructed.

Inclusion and exclusion

As De Lint (2009) describes, the concept of security may seem to have a common function: making a declaration on security that has the ability to become legitimate. In other words, its power affects the image of people being dangerous or not, which can lead to exclusion of some (De Lint 2009; Goldstein 2010). With regard to Dutch Muslim women, Kong (2009) describes an example of exclusion in relation to Muslims. The image of Muslims has been changing over the years due to generalisations and the notion of security. According to Kong (2009), Muslims are supposedly portrayed as dangerous, who plan attacks on others. Due to

these extreme examples, the image of the Muslim changes and becomes a stereotype, which might result into the generalisation and categorisation of all Muslims as dangerous and extreme. However, Kong (2009) does state that one cannot claim this overall categorisation – Muslims being portrayed as dangerous – as evidence for every Muslim. When this generalisation *does* happen, it is then used to justify the exclusion of Muslims. In this case, the notion of security and the lack thereof, is followed by exclusion, formed by discrimination, hatred, and segmentation (Goldstein 2010). Hence, the concept of security affects the image of people, and creates certain stigmas of others as dangerous. Eventually, this may affect feelings of belonging as well.

Sense of belonging

As mentioned before in previous paragraphs regarding sameness and collectivity, sense of belonging refers to the experience and feeling of connectedness to a type of community or group (Hurtado and Carter 1997). Sense of belonging creates the feeling of being a part of a group and being accepted , where it is created by both the self and others and appears by boundaries between people (Macmillan and Chavis 1986). It is based on communities or groups where a sense of belonging is found; they have shared rituals, symbols, and beliefs (Barth 1969; Demmers 2012; Jenkins 2014).

Tied to a sense of belonging is locality. Locality is a fundamental part of identity and is, according to Nuttall (2001, 54) "a product of the structure of feeling referred to as "belonging (...) a defining attribute of personal and collective identity". Locality connects this feeling of belonging to a specific territory; a territory important due to kinship, roots, or residence (Lovell 1998; Nuttall 2001). Furthermore, locality is in close connection to memories: local identities and locality are formed and 'kept alive' due to memories and shared narratives (Lovell 1998; Nuttall 2001). However, by using the term locality, one isolates people into being the 'Other', having a certain local identity which is not inherently the same as one's national identity. While these identities can be overlapping, it can simultaneously create a conflict, being in circumstances "where they feel compelled to express one identity above the other" (2001, 59). This also relates to the aforementioned notion of performativity (Butler 2002; Guadeloupe 2009). Dutch Muslim women could experience this too – having to choose and being in between different identities – due to the supposed 'dichotomous identity'.

Thus, the position of Dutch Muslim women in the Netherlands is often complex due to the supposed 'dichotomous identity'. Moors (2009; 2014) explains that Muslim women who wear a veil are seen as the perpetrators of threat, however they are also receiving the threat as victims. Dutch Muslim women have regularly been spat on or insulted and some have been threatened (Buitelaar 2010; Moors 2014). During interviews that Buitelaar (2010) conducted, women explained their experience of a hostile Dutch environment and the feeling of insecurity due to threats, which affect their feelings of belonging. Having a sense of belonging within one's Muslim identity is interrelated to feelings of security. According to Buitelaar (2010), Dutch Muslim women are supposedly less connected with their Dutch identity. As mentioned before, being both Dutch and Muslim results in the continual (re)negotiation of the supposed 'dichotomous identity' (Buitelaar 2010; Foner and Simon 2015). Feelings of belonging and security influence this negotiation constantly.

2. Understanding the context of Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht

This chapter will provide the understanding of the context in which Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht construct and (re)negotiate their identities in relation to feelings of belonging and security. This context will be explained on the basis of some concepts such as multiculturalism, discrimination, and Islamophobia. First, we will explore the notion of the multiculturalism discourse in the Netherlands, in which it will be explained how this discourse evolved over the years as well as what it entails. After this, the context of discrimination, Islamophobia, and politics will be explained, where we will specifically focus on how Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht experience this.

Multiculturalism discourse *Sophie*

The Netherlands is a country of cultural diversity which, according to the UNESCO, is "a source of exchange, innovation and creativity" (UNESCO 2001, 4). While this shows the importance of cultural diversity, there is an ongoing discourse concerning multiculturalism in The Netherlands (Shadid 2009). To understand the research context, it is crucial to understand this multiculturalism discourse.

According to Shalk-Soekara (2005) multiculturalism can be seen as an ideology that refers to the acceptance of cultural diversity and supporting cultural difference by all. While Shalk-Soekara (2005) describes multiculturalism as an ideology, it could also be seen as demographical vision: an organised society with multiple cultural groups (Kymlicka 1995). Kymlicka (1995) states that every cultural group has their own 'societal cultures' where these "provide meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres"(1995, 76). Therefore, when these 'societal cultures' are not taken into consideration, these groups are threatened to extinction. This cultural extinction would "be likely to undermine the self-respect and freedom of group members" (Okin 1999, 20). Thus, Kymlicka (1995) states that every cultural group is entitled to be able to create 'special group rights'. With this in mind, special group rights are necessary to protect these cultures and "put minorities on an equal footing with the majority" (Okin 1999, 20). Both Kymlicka (1999) and Shalk-Soekara (2005) describe that a multiculturalist society can only be realised when one recognises cultural differences between groups, combined with a multiculturalist policy (Shadid 2009).

According to the liberal notion of equality, every individual should possess the same rights. However, these rights are based on the majority, making it impossible to deviate from the norm. This is inherently contradicting the so-called ‘same rights’ (Kymlicka 1999). The aforementioned concept of ‘special group rights’ is contrasting to this supposed liberal notion. This supposed liberal notion leads towards forgetting minorities, making them invisible. This is contrary to the notion of ‘special group rights’ by multiculturalists (Kymlicka 1999). Therefore, according to multiculturalists, liberalists are incompetent in recognising minorities since they are fixed on not deviating from the norm of the majority. These contradictions also shape the current multiculturalism discourse in the Netherlands.

Even though the Netherlands is seen as a multicultural country with cultural diversity, it is argued that the support for this diversity and the desirability for multiculturalism is flattening (Shadid 2009). It has been expressed in recent years by politicians, that the Netherlands should not become a multicultural society. In 2002, Balkenende, then chairman of the CDA (Christian Democratic Appeal), said that Dutch society shares common values. According to him, a multicultural society is not desirable, because there are differences made between people, where Dutch common values are ignored. In addition to this, the notion of fear has been used to withstand the idea of a multiculturalist society. Pim Fortuyn was a Dutch right-wing politician, who used this fear to his advantage. He stated that the Islam is a threat for Western society and that “a large part of Islam (...) represents a vital, aggressive, and at times imperialist culture, which is definitely out for world domination” (Fortuyn 2001, 8). A different example is one of Edith Schipper, a member of the VVD (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy). She stands up for the emancipation of women with an Islamic background, believing Muslim women to be oppressed, where veiling should not be a part of the Netherlands. She stated that every woman in the Netherlands should have the freedom to choose what she wants. Not being able to choose freely is categorised by Edith Schipper as an attack on Dutch cultural norms (Schipper 2016). Schipper’s statement regarding Muslim women as being oppressed by Islam, inherently contradicts her liberalist notion of Dutch women being able to choose freely. By stating this, she is stigmatising Islam as oppressive, and therefore taking away the free choice of Dutch Muslim women to wear a burqa, hijab, or any other form of veiling. This relates back to the notion in which Muslim women are framed as ‘The oppressed Muslim Other’ (Abu-Lughod 2013). With this in mind, in recent years, there have been an increase of statements regarding Islam in relation to the multiculturalism discourse, such as

the one above (Moors 2009; 2014). The effects of these statements on Dutch Muslim women is explained next.

Discrimination, Islamophobia, and politics *Charlotte*

According to the source of Omlo and Butter (2020, 7), the total count of Utrecht's residents on the 1st of January 2020 is 357,719, where one out of ten residents identifies as Muslim. According to the survey of Omlo and Butter (2020), Muslim women are more likely to experience discrimination on the basis of their religion. Why these women were more likely to experience discrimination is not made clear in the survey. However, as mentioned before, the liberal theories which are implied in a multiculturalist society are often intertwined with values and notions of the liberal state. These notions could have an effect on both gender and ethnocultural injustices. Both are serious injustices and should not be downplayed (Kymlicka 1999). This is one of the reasons why the current multiculturalism discourse has such an influence on the lives of Dutch Muslim women. Dutch Muslim women find themselves in the minefield of both these gender injustices and ethnocultural injustices. On the one hand, they are discriminated based on the performance of their religious identity through veiling, where this is explicitly identifiable for others to portray Muslim women as 'the Other'[11]. On the other hand, the gender component of them being women often carries a form of inequality as well (Okin 1999). Another factor which could possibly have an influence on these feelings of discrimination, is the fact that some Dutch Muslim women could be a part of the BIPOC group[12]. Physical characteristics – such as skin colour – could also be framed in the categorisation of 'the Other' (Wekker 2016). This is connected to the aforementioned notion of Wekker (2016), where Dutchness is supposedly never achieved other than by being white and Christian[13]. All these factors could potentially contribute to why Dutch Muslim women in Utrecht are more likely to experience discrimination.

In addition to this, these factors all have one common denominator: they are all interlinked with the stigmatisation of Muslims in the Netherlands, in which the main cause is Islamophobia (Abaâziz 2019; Omlo and Butter 2020). When talking about Islamophobia, this does not mean that it is in the literal sense of the word: the fear of Islam. According to Abaâziz (2019), Islamophobia is much more than fear. It is about Muslim discrimination and hate (Abaâziz 2019). According to De Koning (2019, 20), Islamophobia means: "The

[11] See *Understanding the 'Muslim Other': Orientalism*
[12] BIPOC: The acronym, which stands for black, Indigenous and people of colour (New York Times 2020)
[13] See *Negotiating identities: Supposed 'dichotomous' identity*

construction of a negative, generalising, and essentialist definition of Islam that leads to a hierarchical distinction between non-Muslims and Muslims. This is done to problematise the Muslims as a group based on their religion.". Islamophobia in this sense, is a widespread phenomenon in which it covers all facets of everyday life. It distinguishes itself into direct and indirect Islamophobic experiences. Examples of direct experiences of Islamophobia are refusals at internships or called names by strangers on the street for wearing a headscarf, khimar or niqab[14] (Abaâziz 2019). Examples of indirect experiences of Islamophobia include statements by politicians and media reports about Muslims and the Islam which are perceived as hurtful and insulting (Abaâziz 2019).

These indirect experiences of Dutch Muslim women are now part of the current political field, where the multiculturalism discourse is thoroughly debated. Even though the official Dutch government states on their website: "Everyone should have the right to make their own religious or ideological choices. This includes the choice to convert to a different religion or not to believe. The Netherlands makes no distinction between different religions or beliefs." (Rijksoverheid.nl 2020). Right-wing Dutch politicians and political parties are becoming more outspoken in their opinions towards Muslims. This was particularly visible in the election plans of the election in March 2021 whereby the PVV (Party for the Freedom) stated that Islam should be banned in the Netherlands, since it is a threat to Dutch culture (Partij Voor de Vrijheid 2021). Simultaneously, they declare that mosques should be closed, all under the guise of "Islam does not belong in the Netherlands" (Partij Voor de Vrijheid 2021, 4). The FVD (Forum for Democracy), another right-wing party who is gaining more popularity over the years, has stated that Dutch values should always come first. This means anything 'deviating' from 'Dutch norms' is categorised as non-belonging and thus not prioritised. Therefore, simply framing Islam as a 'deviation' form these 'Dutch norms'. (Forum voor Democratie 2021). Due to the increasing experiences of Islamophobia, may it be indirect in the political domain and direct in physical violence, many Muslim *Utrechters* perceive these experiences as a part of their daily life (Olmo and Butter 2020). 69 percent of all Dutch Muslims in Utrecht have experienced discrimination, mainly residents of the neighbourhoods Overvecht, Noordwest, Leidsche Rijn, and Zuidwest[15] (Olmo and Butter 2020). This context has explained the contemporary issues which are dealt with by our

[14] There are different types of veiling. The most common ones are the Shayla, Hijab, Al-Amira, Khimar, and the Chador. Some women in Utrecht do wear the Chador. An estimated 150 women wear a niqab or burqa (Barrington 2018; BBC 2018; NOS 2018). These types of veiling range in order to least covering to most covering. See for more information: *Appendix 1: Types of veiling*

[15] See: *Appendix 2: Maps of the Netherlands and Utrecht*

research participants who live their lives in Utrecht, which is where our research is conducted.

The concepts that are explained above, such as multiculturalism, Islamophobia, and discrimination, are all concepts to which Dutch Muslim women have to deal with on a daily basis. This contextual background is relevant for the empirical chapters in this thesis on the construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women's identities in relation to feelings of belonging and security.

3. Methods and ethics *Sophie*

This chapter explains the methodology used in this research, as well as the ethical principles underlying the study and ethical dilemmas we had to navigate. First, our search for participants is explained, followed by the different methods used in the field. Next, the effects of Covid-19 on our fieldwork are discussed. The chapter ends with our ethical considerations, highlighted by an ethical dilemma we faced when doing research online.

Gaining participants

From the eighth of February until the sixteenth of April, we conducted our ten-week fieldwork among Dutch Muslim women in the city of Utrecht, where we made use of qualitative research methods in order to get a better understanding of the experiences Dutch Muslim women have with regards to their identity construction and (re)negotiation of their identity. During this time, we were able to conduct interviews with seven *Utrechtse*[16] Dutch Muslim women, as well as talking with others via small talk or during participant observation in online events. Eventually, we have found thirteen participants willing to engage in our research, whom we talked to intensely, excluding the ones we chatted with during online events or private messages. We met these women via various online platforms, taking the current Covid-19 pandemic in consideration.

Due to the current Covid-19 pandemic, we experienced some limitations in gaining access to participants, since our study could only take place online. For this reason, we used online resources – such as email and social media – to find participants, before officially starting our fieldwork. We have sent eighteen emails; nine to Islamic organisations in The Netherlands (some based in Utrecht) and nine emails to various mosques in Utrecht in an attempt to gain participants. In addition, both Charlotte and Sophie joined and liked seventeen Facebook groups and pages on Facebook and Instagram. Here, we posted messages explaining our research topic after we got approval from the group admin. Examples of these groups are: 'Ladies from Utrecht', 'Sisters in Islam', and '*Bekeerlingen in Utrecht'*[17]. We also used Instagram and Facebook to send private messages to people and used WhatsApp and our personal contacts to find participants. Unfortunately, these attempts yielded to almost nothing, gaining only three participants, where two of three participants came from our own

[16] *Utrechtse*: someone who identifies as a woman and who is a resident of Utrecht
[17] *Bekeerlingen in Utrecht* means Converts in Utrecht

network. As a result, we chose to spread 100 flyers regarding our research in various locations in Utrecht in our fifth week of fieldwork. Nevertheless, this method did not work either, since we got no response. This phase of gaining participants – which lasted during our whole fieldwork period – was often time consuming and stressful, since we were constantly worried about not getting enough participants. For this, lots of patience, perseverance, and using the snowball method was needed to find participants that were willing to talk to us.

Methods

During our fieldwork period, our data has mostly been gathered by the use of unstructured and semi-structured interviews. We have conducted sixteen interviews with seven women, both online and offline. Some interviews we conducted together. During these interviews, one of us asked questions and the other observed and took notes. This was possible due to the complementary nature of the research, in which our research population was the same. In addition, when conducting an 'offline' interview, there was a possibility to observe surroundings too. This gave us the ability to simultaneously note other people's behaviour around us.

Apart from these interviews, we made use of small talk. Small talk was especially important, since it helped to build rapport with our participants, and it made our research known to others. We had small talk with every participant before conducting an interview. This was done via phone and before starting the interview itself. This created the possibility for both the participants and researchers to get to know each other and to gain trust. We also used small talk when talking with participants via private chat (on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp) and during participant observation.

Since our fieldwork took place in the context of a global pandemic, various restrictions were present at that time. The Netherlands was in a total lockdown, meaning that mosques were closed and gatherings with more than one person were not allowed. Hence, we conducted participant observation via online platforms. This was done by observing the aforementioned Facebook groups and by attending online meetings and gatherings. In addition, we closely observed media sources to gain more contextual knowledge on the current multiculturalist discourse regarding the framing of Muslims in both the media and politics. This knowledge was used in our interviews, when discussing these topics with our participants. Lastly, we kept a diary on a daily basis. This diary helped us to reflect on changes and ethical dilemmas we encountered. These ethical dilemmas will be explained next.

Ethics and dilemmas

With regards to ethical considerations, we considered the first rule of conducting an ethical anthropological research called *do no harm* as most essential, together with *privacy*. Both these principles are crucial to us, as well as to our research participants. We aimed for our research participants to feel comfortable, meaning they felt as if they could tell us everything. This concurs with the first, and most essential rule, when doing an ethical ethnographic research mentioned above. The communication had to be safe, as well as the environment in which it took place. With this in mind, building rapport was very important. However, we quickly noticed that there was a form of distrust among our research participants. This made it important for us as researchers to explain our research and our aim thoroughly and it meant that we had to adjust our stance in order to build this essential rapport. This specific adjustment is thoroughly explained in the next chapter, including the influence this might have had on accessing the field.

When it comes to specific ethical dilemmas, we realised taking an overt role during our fieldwork was not always as simple as thought before. An overt role is an important feature of doing research ethically since participants need to be made aware that they are a part of research (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). During our online research, we made sure people were aware of our presence by posting messages in gatherings or groups, mostly by direct private messaging the group admins. However, we will never know if all members (or those who have attended gatherings) have seen our message. This makes it possible that not all participants were aware of their role in this research. Adding to this, in some cases, we were not able to explicitly reveal ourselves as researchers since there was no opportunity for us to do so. This occurred during gatherings where we were not able to communicate with others. Next to this, when observing public media sources (e.g. Facebook and Instagram comments, Twitter, etcetera), we have not used an overt research role, as these comments were made publicly. Therefore, we have decided to anonymise every observation used in this thesis regarding these public media sources in order to respect people's privacy.

In sum, this experience has taught us that one needs to be mindful when conducting research online, keeping in mind that using an overt role could be difficult and even at times not possible. We argue that there is a thin line between losing an overt role and lurking. Thus, being aware of one's role is crucial when doing an online ethnographic research.

We believe that these methods and ethical dilemmas have been influenced by various aspects, such as epistemology. These aspects are explained next.

4. Access *Charlotte*

In this chapter, we elaborate on the change of our epistemological stance we have taken towards our research participants. Hence, it focusses on the influence of epistemology on both methodology, as well as ontology, since we believe that these are inherently connected. In changing our stance, from a supposed neutral stance to a more empathic and reflexive stance, we also had to adjust our methodology, as previously explained, which consequently had an effect on ontology. With this in mind, the notion of neutrality while doing an ethnographic fieldwork is discussed. Next, this chapter will also relay how this new empathic and reflexive stance influenced gaining access to our research field. Herewith, we particularly focus on the role of the researcher (us), as well as the contextual situation of Covid-19, and its influences on our research.

Stance

As briefly introduced before, the changing of our epistemological stance from so-called neutral to empathic and reflexive, was crucial for our research. We were now able to access our research participants and simultaneously build rapport and trust. This differs from the starting of our fieldwork, where we thought having little to no influence was beneficial in doing an ethnographic research of quality. This supposed 'neutral stance'– at least we thought – meant that we did not involve our own opinions regarding politics or certain experiences Dutch Muslim women were going through. For instance, this included our opinion of politicians who explicitly expressed Islamophobic statements or our opinions on the discrimination of wearing a headscarf. However, we quickly realised that using a 'neutral stance' was certainly *not* helpful in building trust and rapport, and therefore gaining access to our field. We experienced that our research population felt as if they were being categorised by us as 'the Other'. It also seemed to create a feeling of distrust, regarding us specifically and research in general. The specifics of these feelings and its influences on gaining access will be discussed more thoroughly later.

With this in mind, we quickly realised that we had to change our stance into an empathic and reflexive stance. As Verhallen (2016) mentions in her article, it is crucial for researchers to adjust in the field, in which she mentions the use of a reflexive stance. According to her, data is always "influenced by the researcher's gaze, their political and cultural identity, form of engagement, and the history which is brought to the research"

(2016, 457). With Verhallen's notion in mind, we concur that using an empathic stance, as well as a reflexive stance, is more beneficial in enhancing the quality of data and simultaneously enhancing and sustaining the relationship built with research participants.

Hence, due to our newly adopted stance, we opted to share our opinions and experiences on certain notions, as we realised the building of trust was of the utmost importance in gaining participants and thus access to the field. Next to this, we were reflexive of our own positions before talking to potential participants, during, and after interviews. We aimed to be transparent towards our research participants and told them we wanted to focus on them, as an individual, not as a categorised homogenous group. With this transparency in mind, we had a phone call conversation when meeting new participants to explain the notions of consent, our focus, and the choice to always opt out of participating. We also mentioned our view on the notion of 'the homogenous Muslimah' and the way Dutch Muslim women are portrayed in both media and politics.

Thus, we believe in line with Verhallen (2016), that using an empathic and reflexive stance, rather than a supposed 'neutral' one is more beneficial in enhancing the quality of data as well as gaining trust and rapport. Next, we will explain how this new empathic and reflexive stance is related to gaining access to our field.

Accessing the field

As said, changing our stance was crucial in accessing our research field, because some participants felt as if they were being categorised as 'The Other' and distrusted us. Some women mentioned they felt like lab rats[18], and wondered why the focus was always on 'the Muslimah' rather than their identity in all its facets[19]. Therefore, in using a reflexive and empathic stance – and thus explicitly stating our aim on focussing on individuality and identity in all its facets – we slowly gained access to the field by gaining trust. With this in mind, it is important to understand how this access was expressed and developed, before and after this change of stance.

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[18] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork and online gathering lead by Merve and Irem, 11/02/2021

[19] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork and participant observation in Facebook groups

Role of the researcher and Covid-19

Coming back to the aforementioned concept of our participants feeling they were categorised as 'the Other', they also mentioned that they felt like the focus in "these kinds of researches"[20] was only on their religious identity, in which they felt like there was little to no regard to other parts of their identity which they valued so much[21]. After explaining our aim of the research – explicitly stating we indeed wanted to focus on all facets of their identity – this feeling faded a little, though still sometimes lingered in the background. Slowly, we started to understand how our role as anthropologists doing research on Dutch Muslim women felt as if we were Othering them, even if completely unintended.

During our studies, we learned about the concept of being a 'sojourner' when first gaining access to the field (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). Being a sojourner is being "like a fish out of the water" (2011, 68). In other words, an anthropologist entering the field is completely perceived as an outsider in a new setting, having to adjust and learn customs in order to be accepted within the field. However, in our situation one could argue whether this 'sojourner' position was ever taken or could ever been taken. Due to our unique situation regarding Covid-19, we were still at the comfort of our own homes, as we were doing our fieldwork mostly online because of the lockdown in the Netherlands. This resulted in trying to access the field from an online setting. We never experienced ourselves as truly being a 'sojourner'. Of course at times, we had to adjust and learn certain customs, but this was always done while accessing the field online, creating a feeling of 'helicoptering' above our research field. It was easy to 'step out of the field'. The phenomenon of being a sojourner might not apply to us as researchers, however it did have a reversal effect. Our research participants were, in a sense, this supposed sojourner, like a fish out of the water, because they felt the outsider in our research: "like lab rats"[22]. This was seen in them expressing feelings of distrust and feeling like 'the Other'.

With this in mind, using an empathic and reflexive stance helped us to access our field and thus shrinking the gap and hierarchy between researcher and participant. Simultaneously, this stance also influenced our research to stop 'helicoptering', and truly immerse ourselves in the field as much as possible. When looking back, one could argue whether full participation was achieved, since online we were still perceived as loose entities, not completely being part of the community.

[20] Online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021
[21] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork
[22] Small talk with Kalil during online gathering lead by Merve and Irem, 11/02/2021

Thus, interestingly, our research population simultaneously had a certain distrust and feeling of "being the investigated"[23], whereas the situation of Covid-19 was also not favourable to break this pattern of the relationship between researchers and participants. With the empathic and reflexive stance, we explained our research aim with our focus on individuality. Ultimately, resulting into assurance for them to trust us as we expressed our opinions on notions such as the position of the Dutch Muslim woman in Dutch society.

With this being said, we believe that these past two chapters are eminent in understanding the following empirical chapters. By means of this, our methods, ethics, and stance have contributed in answering our research question, and therefore influence the upcoming empirical chapters.

[23] Small talk with Merve during online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021

5. An alien with tentacles *Charlotte*

> "I am a bit later. Just walking in the Kanaalstraat, I will be there in about ten minutes." Emre's WhatsApp message says. I ask her if I can get her something. "Can I have a cappuccino with soy milk?". Adding a monkey emoji with hands across the eyes. As I am standing there un-noticeable by others with the hot cappuccino and a ginger tea, I see people frantically cycling to their next location, a middle-aged man with a black fanny pack and white tennis shoes taking pictures, and two teenage girls giggling while holding a Starbucks frappuccino. It is one of Utrecht's first sunny days in February. While I am enjoying the sun, Emre is walking towards me. She is wearing a long burgundy coat, blue jeans, and a floral hijab. "Ooh yes! Cappuccino!" she says as I am giving her the drink. Trying to dodge the frantic cyclists and slow tourists, we look for a quiet spot to sit down along the canal. I notice people watching us. I shrug it off. While sitting down on our spot and Emre thanking me numerous times for the cappuccino, a man with mirrored sunglasses glides past us in the water in a red canoe. He is staring intently at us. "Hm." Emre says to me, rolling her eyes. "Does it happen often that people are staring?" I ask. "Yeah, all the time. It's completely normal! Ugh, I don't notice it any more you know." "What do you mean 'it's normal'?" I ask her. "It is just normal for me. You don't experience this because you look Dutch. I don't." At this moment, I realise that the privilege of always going unnoticed in Utrecht does not apply to Emre. The frown on Emre's face stays as she says "Of course, it's frustrating. But what can I do about it? It's not as if I can change for them."[24]

Illustrated in the vignette above, being explicitly seen as an outsider by others – meaning the supposed 'dominant group' – due to appearance is something that is deemed normal for Dutch Muslim women. Being categorised as the outsider – non-Dutch – due to appearance, is in line with the theory of Wekker (2016), where the dominant representation of Dutchness is one of whiteness and being Christian. Of course, some Dutch Muslim women are white. However, they are still categorised as an outsider – because of their religion which is not Christianity – but also because Islam is framed by the hegemony as 'exotic', and therefore non-white (Asad 1993; 2003; Said 2003). This chapter elaborates on how these experiences –

[24] Fieldnotes participant observation 26/02/2021

like Emre's – are voiced. We show that these experiences are one of identity and feelings of belonging being constructed, (re)negotiated, claimed, and performed. This chapter argues that, despite Dutch Muslim women continual attempt and need to redirect their message of identity to fluidity and individuality, they still have to constantly justify their actions and opinions against categorised frames by others, where these others force them back into generality.

The claiming and performing of identity

According to all participants, identity is perceived as something deeper than just 'one fixed thing', it is fluid and constructed[25]. This perception of identity is in line with the theory of Barth (1969), in which he states that identity is fluid and dynamic. Identity has layers, where each layer has a certain depth. It is situationally based, contingent, and therefore constantly negotiated. In an interview with Aziza, this perception of identity being fluid comes up:

> "I realise more and more how fluid it [identity] is. At certain times, I am that Hip Hop minded person. Other times it's more about religion. And other times I'm like, ah yes just me and my plants. It is really a bit of everything. Though, Islam for me is very often the basis."[26]

Many participants agree with Aziza, both on the fluidity of identity, as well as experiencing Islam as the basis in their identity formation. Islam creates structure and tranquillity. Islam is experienced as a way of thinking. It guides participants in answering life's questions, how to treat others, and shapes their norms and values[27].

Even though the conceptualisation of identity by our participants is inherently connected to the concept of fluidity, this does not mean that this is the case for others. This is in line with the theory of Demmers (2012), Jenkins (2014), and Tajfel (1981) regarding social identity. Social identity is socially constructed. People are in a sense part of a social group based on these socially constructed identities. However, as mentioned before, our participants experience that they themselves construct their identity as fluid, others – sometimes those who categorise them in groups, therefore forming their social identity – may not. This results

[25] Information gathered during interviews with Emre 12/02/2021; 26/02/2021; Hamida 25/02/2021; Aziza 26/02/2021; Karlijn 10/03/2021; Sofija 11/03/2021; Fadoua 13/03/2021; Senna 22/03/2021
[26] Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021
[27] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork and interview with Aziza 26/03/2021

into an experienced conditional aspect to the identity of Dutch Muslim women, in which they have to claim their identity – particularly when it comes to their Dutchness (see Nagel and Staeheli 2009; Wekker 2016).

All participants state they identify as Dutch, however they also state that this Dutchness is not particularly a 'given' to them, they have to claim it. In an interview with Emre, we spoke elaborately about why she experiences that she has to claim this Dutchness. Emre states:

> "Everything that does not look Dutch, people have trouble with. Whether it's skin colour, culture, or religion. If you fall outside of the norm, whatever that norm may be, then you have to fight. That shouldn't be necessary, because I am born and raised here. (…) It's not fair. It happens."[28]

Next to claiming Dutchness, other facets of identity have to be claimed as well. Every facet of one's identity is in some sense contested and impugned by others, which is in line with for instance Baumann (1999), Barth (1969), Jenkins (2014), and Verkuyten (2007). An example of this is when Aziza used to work in a record shop – at the time she was still wearing her hijab – and her colleagues talked about a new album of a Hip Hop group coming out. She showed just as much excitement as her non-Muslim colleagues, though her colleagues were still surprised that she liked Hip Hop music. Aziza states that this surprise was normal, but in that moment she had to explicitly state that she liked Hip Hop as well, despite their astonishment. They simply did not believe that someone wearing a hijab would like Hip Hop as much as they did[29]. It seems as if these different facets within their identities are static concepts, versus fluid experiences. Every part of their identity seems to be perceived by others as loose entities, to which they have to negotiate, claim, and perform in order to truly feel like one belongs. Emre captures the concept of belonging as: "Acceptance of your being"[30].

Next to this, participants also experience the performance of identity. This is in line with the theory of both Butler (2002) and Guadeloupe (2009), where the performativity of identity is conceptualised as different parts of identities coming afore in different contextual circumstances, in order to adjust oneself in certain groups. Most women state that they

[28] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021
[29] Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021
[30] Interview with Emre 12/02/2021 and 26/02/2021

believe this performance is inherently linked to their own agency. They decide what will and what will not come forward in performing their identities: performativity becomes instrumental. This is shown in an interview with Sofija:

> "I didn't know who I was. It was a struggle. Then I decided: I am what I am when it suits me. (…) Very often you are categorised as a foreigner or a Muslim if it suits someone to put you in that box. I've decided to turn that around. I am that person when it suits me. That is my identity."[31]

In this sense, this performance becomes a form of agency and is simultaneously instrumental. This form of agency and instrumentality ensures that our participants forcibly redirect their message to the argument which was stated in the beginning of this chapter: the fluidity of identity. They are more than just the one *or* the other, they are both[32].

Boundaries

The aforementioned instrumental performance has its boundaries, because other people are still trying to categorise our participants' individuality into generality: towards this reified image. These boundaries are tested by others, both outside the Muslim community and within the Muslim community.

First, the boundaries of the performance of identity results in the categorisation of always being seen as 'the Other' (see Asad 2003; Moors 2009; 2014; Soares and Osella 2009). Meaning, participants feel as if they are still perceived as an outsider: forcing this individuality to a categorisation based on generalisations, where the fluidity of identity is lost. Fadoua experienced feeling categorised as 'the Other' by the comments of her female colleagues when she was changing into her outfit for her colleague's wedding. "They acted like I was some kind of alien or something. Like when that headscarf comes off, suddenly my tentacles come out."[33] In such cases, we see that a Muslim woman – 'the Other' – is framed as such an exotic, strange, and weird thing to be that any other part of their identity is seen as a loose entity. The shock of someone when Aziza likes a new Hip Hop album, or Fadoua's feeling of being an alien, all relate to the categorisation of 'the Other', where this static version of 'the Muslimah' is created. The categorisation of 'the Other', as well as both these

[31] Interview with Sofija 11/03/2021
[32] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork
[33] Interview with Fadoua 13/03/2021

examples, are in line with Said's (2003) notion of Islamic orientalism, where Islam is categorised as something exotic and strange.

Most women agree that 'the Other' is a frustrating frame as it does not encompass who they truly are or identify with. This frame of 'the Other' is then dealt with in different ways. They state that being a part of a minority group – to which they feel a part of as well – and simultaneously being categorised as 'the Other' result in adjusting and always taking others into account. These others being: the supposed 'norm'[34]. Emre mentions that she sometimes feels ashamed when the Ulu Mosque in Utrecht is calling for prayer: "I thought, is this necessary? I was uncomfortable with other people hearing the prayer call and thinking what is this."[35] Emre also says that she is aware of why she is thinking this way, because she is part of a minority group, and therefore adjusts her opinions and actions:

> "I think that is the consequence of growing up as a minority, that you are very used to, in this case, looking at yourself with the white-Dutch perspective. And to determine your behaviour or whether or not to do something. (…) That you identify yourself with what someone else thinks or how a dominant group's view is of you. That you'd almost say about this prayer call from the Ulu mosque, just leave it. Forget it. You may offend too many people."[36]

In this sense, the image of 'the Other' – and the way women deal with this image – is therefore basing their identity on what others think.

Second, the boundaries of performativity are also tested by others through the frame of the 'good and the bad Muslim'. Our participants feel as if they experience some sort of pressure of being a good Muslim, either this pressure was given by others in the Muslim community or by themselves. This pressure of being a good Muslim relates to feelings of acceptance and belonging within the Muslim community (see Baumann 1999). Being accepted in the Muslim community goes hand in hand with being accepted by family, friends, and often one's own expectations of how to deal with their religion during their daily life. Both Sofija and Emre mention that they feel that they need to put more effort into praying, or more effort into their religion, as this could make them a better Muslim[37].

[34] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork and participant observation in Facebook groups
[35] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021
[36] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021
[37] Interview with Sofija 11/03/2021; 12/04/2021; interview with Emre 26/02/2021

Thus, these boundaries with regard to the instrumental performance of identity are made by others, where the redirection to individuality is again forced back into static images of a supposed ‘homogenous Muslimah. These static images result in expectations by others and by our participants’ themselves. These expectations then have an inherent effect on the formation of feelings of accountability and responsibility.

Accountability and responsibility

The aforementioned tested boundaries, both have a relation to the so-called image of ‘the homogenous Muslimah’ (see Buitelaar 2010; Moors 2009; 2014). This is again related to the experience of the reified image when it comes to Dutch Muslim women’s identities. This reified image contradicts the preferred individuality, which also leaves space for the conceptualisation of Dutch Muslim women’s identity as fluid. ‘The homogenous Muslimah’ is therefore a generalised version of a Muslim woman who has no individual identity, but is rather a static being. In an online event, with Merve and Irem as panel leaders, the notion of ‘the homogenous Muslimah’ comes afore, where Merve says that she felt that all Muslim women were categorised as non-modern and dependent. Next to this, Merve feels that the categorisation of the identity of Muslim women is exclusively focussed on Islam, as if their identity only consist of their religious identity[38]. This experience is in line with what Buitelaar (2010) and Moors (2009; 2014) argue regarding the categorisation of non-modernity and dependence in relation to Dutch Muslim women, where the only focus is on religion rather than the combination of religion with other aspects of identity. Everyone in the online event agrees when Merve says:

> “You are just so much more than people think. Not everything is done because of Islam, with Islam. I am more than just Islam. We are all different Muslims and why do people act as if this is a homogenous group?”[39].

‘The homogenous Muslimah’ is also inherently related to feelings of accountability and responsibility. Our participants feel, in order to redirect the message of generality to individuality, that they have to be mindful when voicing certain opinions, as these could potentially harm the whole of the Muslim community:

[38] Online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021

[39] Small talk with Merve during online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021

> "You are not allowed to be an individual. So if I say something wrong, then it is a Muslim who did that. That doesn't help. (…) One day, I just hope that if I say something wrong, that people will say Emre thought that, and I don't agree with her. Instead of 'the Muslim'."[40]

Carrying this responsibility is then influential for themselves, but also for the whole Muslim community, as they are framed as non-individuals or even an object. Next to this, most women experience feelings of accountability, where they continually have to justify themselves[41](see Baumann 1999). Often, this results in people asking Dutch Muslim women, such as our participants, to take responsibility and accountability on matters that is completely not related to them, for instance the beheading of a French teacher in Paris for using cartoons of Prophet Muhammed in his class[42]:

> "Often people ask like, okay what do you feel about this or how do you take responsibility for yourself for that? Yeah, I don't have to answer for that! I do martial arts but I've never beheaded anyone! That sounds very crude of course, but that doesn't mean that you can make those connections to all the Muslims out there. (…) Why do I have to justify myself as a person three thousand kilometres away?"[43]

Being categorised, and feeling like one has to justify other Muslim's actions, is something that most participants experience as frustrating and annoying. They state that it is very frustrating and extremely exhausting[44]. Our participants are always on some sort of precipice with the potential of falling over and thus being categorised as some sort of reified object, but never who they truly are.

Recognition

Despite all this, feelings of accountability and responsibility all affect feelings of belonging. This means that trying to justify, claim, adjust, and perform one's identity is all related to

[40] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021
[41] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork
[42] On the 16th of October 2020, a French professor called Samuel Paty was beheaded after showing cartoons of the Prophet. See for more information: https://edition.cnn.com/2020/10/18/europe/samuel-paty-france-protests/index.html
[43] Interview with Fadoua 13/03/2021
[44] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork

trying to fit in – to be accepted. However, there is one common denominator when it comes to actually feeling connected to others: Recognition. Participants experience this recognition as the counter to these feelings of accountability and responsibility, where they 'finally' do not have to explain and justify themselves within the frames forced upon them[45] (see Verkuyten 2005). Due to this recognition, they feel as if they are truly accepted within all facets of their identity. By being accepted within one's identity, they genuinely experience recognition through societal position, physical appearances, philosophical views, and religious beliefs (see Barth 1969; Demmers 2011; Jenkins 2014). This recognition of their individual identity lies at the core of where belonging and connectedness is created and sustained.

Conclusion

In this chapter we aimed to show, that Dutch Muslim women view their identity as fluid and where the need for individuality comes afore. In order to redirect the generality – a reified image – towards individuality, they have to perform and claim their identity. Examples of this claiming and performing, is claiming their Dutchness as well as actively trying to perform their individuality. However, despite these actions, Dutch Muslim women are still tested by others within the boundaries of these performances and claims. These boundaries are, first, being framed as 'the Other' by the non-Muslim Dutch hegemony and, second, being framed by the Muslim community with regard to the 'good and bad Muslim'. By means of this, there is a constant effort to redirect the message of generality towards individuality, where ultimately Dutch Muslim women want to feel like they belong and are accepted as individuals and not reified objects. This constant effort of wanting to be seen as an individual is related to feelings of accountability and responsibility – such as having to justify yourself for the actions of other Muslims. These feelings do not only relate to themselves, but also to the whole of the Muslim community. Carrying this responsibility is deemed normal, though frustrating, because Dutch Muslim women want to be seen as individuals with their own opinions, rather than carrying the responsibility of being a spokesperson for the whole Muslim community. Here, individuality is inexistent. Nevertheless, there is one common denominator to which individuality and fluidity is achieved which is: Recognition. Recognition with other people combats the reified image and feelings of accountability and

[45] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork and interviews with Emre 12/02/2021; 26/02/2021; Aziza 26/02/2021; 26/03/2021; Sofija 11/03/2021; 12/04/2021; Fadoua 13/03/2021; 02/04/2021; Senna 22/03/2021

responsibility, as Dutch Muslim women feel that through this recognition they do not need to justify, claim, and perform their identity.

In the following chapter, we explain how feelings of security are related to the identities of Dutch Muslim women, where this desire for individuality comes back through the concept of being oneself.

6. Nah, I don't feel insecure *Sophie*

> "If I would be the odd one out, I wouldn't feel secure and show myself to others. And if I don't feel secure, I can't be myself. That's why being myself is a requirement to feel secure. It is a vicious circle."[46]

This quote by Senna illustrates her perception of 'the vicious circle' to which she describes this circle as inherently connected to being yourself and feeling secure. This chapter delves deeper into the connections between these concepts, particularly by looking at the effect of security on the identity construction and (re)negotiation of our participants. The conceptualisation of security is discussed. This is followed by the discrepancy concerning (in)security and what it entails. Next, the effects of stigmatisation on feelings of (in)security are explained, which is also in relation to feelings of accountability and responsibility. This chapter argues that, even though Dutch Muslim women generally feel secure, they constantly have to fight for this feeling of security due to structural matters – such as discrimination and stigmatisation – that affect their ability to be themselves.

The conceptualisation of security

The feeling of security, as explained in chapter two, can be defined with the inexistence of a particular kind of danger or threat, simultaneously meaning that its antonym – insecurity – is defined as the existence of danger. However, the definition of threat and danger depends on the context and may be different for every individual (Crawford 2002). We argue that, the feeling of security for Dutch Muslim women is inherently connected to the feeling of being able to be yourself. Hamida explains this as follows:

> "Security is that I can do whatever I want to do without other people bothering me. It's the ability to walk on the street without having to be worried about people wanting to hurt me because of my origin, religion, or just because I am a woman."[47]

Senna adds to this that:

[46] Interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[47] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021

> "For me, security is to be in an environment where you're accepted for who you are. Security is that you can be who you want to be in any situation."[48]

As described by Hamida and Senna, the feeling of being secure is being able to be whoever you want to be, without getting discriminated against or judged by others. In addition, this feeling of security should be around everybody, meaning that it does not only refer to non-Muslims or Muslims[49]. It is about the overall feeling of acceptance. Simultaneously, this overall feeling of acceptance creates a feeling of belonging to certain places and people; it makes one feel a part of something (see Crawford 2002; Mackay 2014).

Furthermore, Hamida also describes that she waited with wearing a hijab because of these reasons: not being accepted by others, the fear that she immediately would be seen as a terrorist, and a fear for discrimination[50]. For these reasons, being able to be yourself also refers to being able to wear what you want to wear – such as a hijab – without having the fear of not being accepted.

The ability to feel like you can be yourself is context-sensitive, whereas you can feel more secure in some places than others (see Goldstein 2010). Specifically focussing on the feeling of security in Utrecht, Karlijn[51] explains she feels more at ease in Utrecht in comparison to the place she grew up. Utrecht gives her more freedom to dress and act how she wants. She explains that in the place she grew up, you stand out as Muslim:

> "Everybody is white, wears jeans and a basic t-shirt (…) If you are different, you are seen as 'the Other' and you are automatically strange."[52]

Hamida adds to this that she feels more accepted in Utrecht, since it is a bigger city. This means it is more multicultural and diverse. Moving towards a micro level, differences within neighbourhoods in Utrecht are described. Whereas Hamida explains she feels more at ease in the city centre due to experiences of discrimination in other neighbourhoods[53]. Karlijn experiences the opposite, since there are less Muslims in the city centre in comparison to

[48] Interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[49] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women; interview with Hamida 05/03/2021; interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[50] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021
[51] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[52] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[53] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021

other places in Utrecht, such as Kanaleneiland and Overvecht[54]. Based on these differences in feelings of security, we can also conclude that, in line with Goldstein (2010), security is socially constructive and intersubjective.

In sum, the feeling of security for our participants is strongly connected to the individual's feeling of acceptance to be whoever you want to be as an individual. This concept not only concurs with Goldstein's (2010) intersubjective description of security but is also consistent with the general definition of security mentioned above with regards to danger. This concept of security mentioned by our participants is a specific notion on whether to feel danger or not; the moment you can be yourself, is the moment when there is no danger.

The discrepancy concerning (in)security

> It is a Thursday evening and Hamida and I are in our second interview. We are talking about her meaning of security and her experiences of discrimination. Before she says anything, she looks up and thinks about her answer. She tells me the story of a man who insulted her for wearing a headscarf while she was at work. Her answer takes me off guard, I say to her: "That must've been a tough experience you've been through". "Nah", she replies calmly, "I don't know, things like that can always happen". Interested by her calmness and her answer, I ask her about her feeling of security with regards to this experience. She quickly replies with "Nah, I don't feel insecure.[55]

Not only in the interview of Hamida, but also in the interviews of Karlijn and Senna it becomes clear that they do not have feelings of insecurity[56]. Karlijn states that insecurity is not an issue, because she describes herself as a strong woman who is not afraid to stand her ground. "I feel secure, because I am not afraid that something would happen to me"[57]. Delving deeper into the experience that could affect the feeling of insecurity, discrimination is a topic that quickly comes to mind. When talking about this[58], our participants immediately state that they never experience such things, even though incidents – such as Hamida's experience – happen.

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[54] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[55] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021
[56] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021 and interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[57] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[58] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork

Both the feeling of insecurity and discrimination is not experienced when asking directly about it. However, further into the interviews and talking more about experiences of discrimination, it becomes clear that, for our participants, it is normal to experience discrimination, up to the point where it is not worth mentioning[59]. "You laugh it off with humour, what else can you do", states Karlijn[60]. Thus, while our participants indeed experience discrimination, they downplay their experiences as if it is a matter of no importance. With this in mind, Crawford (2002) stated that insecurity can be described as the lack of comfort. Structural matters, such as discrimination, affect this comfort by not letting people be whoever they want to be. Even though structural matters do in fact happen, participants do not feel as if this affects their feelings of insecurity[61]. This is why there is a discrepancy in (in)security.

All in all, our participants generally speak of no feeling of insecurity. However, there are structural matters that affect their ability to be themselves, thereby indirectly affecting the feeling of (in)security. The reason for this absence of affect towards (in)security is because these experiences are so common, participants downplay them.

Direct and indirect feeling of (in)security

> Sophie: "So, in cases where your freedom has been limited, does that affect your feeling of security?"
> Karlijn: "Yes, a worst-case example is when I wouldn't be able to walk outside, wearing a headscarf."
> Sophie: "Security is then connected to the ability to be yourself?"
> Karlijn: "Yes. At that moment, it is a matter of physical security. Right now, there are only specific noises coming from certain parts of society."
> Sophie: "Noises that don't affect you directly?"
> Karlijn: "Yes, they don't affect me directly. I'm worried about them, but they don't affect me directly."[62]

[59] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork
[60] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[61] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021; interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021; interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[62] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021

Based on the statement of Karlijn, as well as the interviews with Senna and Hamida[63], it seems that there is a distinction between an direct and indirect feeling of insecurity. A direct feeling of insecurity refers to participants' security being attacked physically. An indirect feeling of insecurity refers to the notion that one *could* have been attacked in a certain situation. This feeling can create an underlying fear or worry, hence having felt insecure even though it does not affect participants directly or has never occurred.

Hamida, Senna, and Karlijn[64] mention in their interviews that they do not experience many direct feelings of insecurity, given that direct insecurity is seen as a physical and personal attack, which – as Karlijn used as an extreme example – could be getting something thrown at you. As previously mentioned, discrimination is not directly seen as a matter that affects personally, as participants express that their perception of insecurity relies on extreme examples, such as being spat at. However, discrimination indeed affects feelings of insecurity, though it fits better to perceive this as an indirect feeling of insecurity (see Abaâziz 2019). An example that Senna[65] described was right-wing politician Geert Wilders' comment of "Minder, minder, minder" (meaning less, less, less). With this he meant, wanting to have less Moroccans in The Netherlands. Another example was the tram shooting in Kanaleneiland[66]. The attacker was Muslim, and Hamida explained that, after this attack, she was afraid to walk outside with a headscarf because others could do something to her, blaming her for something she had nothing to do with[67].

With this in mind, direct and indirect feelings of insecurity can be linked to the aforementioned theory of Galtung's (1969) triangle of violence, where three types of violence's are explained. Direct violence can be linked to the direct feeling of insecurity, whereas both are visible, expressive, and based on others' behaviours. Indirect feelings of security can be linked to structural violence – such as discrimination and stigmatisation – since a characteristic of these structural matters is an unequal treatment that affects feeling of security. As stated before, structural violence is less visible, meaning that it will not always be labelled as violence (see Galtung 1969). This could be the reason for Hamida, Senna, and Karlijn downplaying discrimination, as discrimination affects the feeling of security subconsciously. However, this is not always the case for every structural matter and

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[63] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021 and interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[64] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021; interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021; interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[65] Interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[66] On Monday, the 19th of March 2019, a man walked into the tram in Utrecht and started shooting at passengers while screaming 'Allahu Akbar'. The man killed four people and wounded three. It was later claimed as a terrorist attack. See for more information: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47615231
[67] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021

individual, since (in)security is interchangeable and fluid (Goldstein 2010). Stigmatisation can affect feelings of insecurity, as shown by the example of the tram attack in Utrecht. Thus, structural matters – such as discrimination and stigmatisation – are subconsciously unequally divided within feelings of insecurity. With this in mind, according to some, discrimination does not have a direct effect on feelings of insecurity, whereas stigmatisation does. Therefore arguing, and concurring with Goldstein (2010), that (in)security is interpretable, interchangeable, and fluid.

The stigmatisation of Dutch Muslim Women

As mentioned in the previous chapter, participants feel as if they are seen as 'the homogenous Muslimah', where this frame is stigmatised by others. Due to this stigma, our participants feel as if they are constantly being blamed for other people's doings. This relates to the aforementioned feelings of accountability and responsibility[68]. An example of how this stigma affects these feelings is explained by Karlijn:

> "I watch my behaviour and I make sure I'm not saying anything wrong to non-Muslims. If I do something wrong, the next person with a headscarf who speaks to this person I talked to, immediately did something wrong as well. Then I not only screw up for myself, but for other Muslims too."[69]

Another more invasive experience that has been pointed out multiple times by our participants, is the stigmatisation of being a terrorist (see Kong 2009). This stigmatisation affects the choices our participants make. Both Hamida and Senna gave examples of not trying to be seen as a threat by not wearing a headscarf. As well as, not leaving your bag anywhere, since others could think a bomb has been placed in there[70]. This stigmatisation, in combination with the constant blame, feelings of accountability and responsibility – as Goldstein (2010) and Kong (2009) argue – can affect feelings of security. As Hamida explains, when talking about the same tram shooting mentioned above, Muslims in general were blamed for this attack. She states:

[68] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork
[69] Interview with Karlijn 10/03/2021
[70] Interview with Hamida 25/02/2021; 05/03/2021; interview with Senna 22/03/2021

> "There are always people that see you as a target. That's what I'm really afraid of, if somebody figures out that I'm a Muslim, they could really do something to me or blame me for something I've nothing to do with. That makes me feel very insecure."[71]

Thus, it seems that our participants are constantly responsible for activities undertaken by others, besides their own. They feel as if they represent the whole Muslim community. This constant blaming forces feelings of accountability and responsibility. Without these feelings of accountability and responsibility, participants could feel more secure.

Conclusion

As showed in this chapter, feelings of security and insecurity is in close relation to the ability to be yourself and it is therefore connected to the feeling of being accepted by others. While Dutch Muslim women mostly explain the inexistence of insecurity, there is a certain discrepancy concerning (in)security. This discrepancy creates the distinction between direct and indirect feelings of insecurity, where direct feelings of insecurity are physical attacks and indirect feelings of insecurity are discrimination and stigmatisation. This discrepancy concerning (in)security, comes afore when our participants expressed that actual direct feelings of insecurity, such as physical attacks, do have an effect on feelings of insecurity, whereas some examples of indirect feelings of insecurity do not, such as discrimination. Discrimination is not described as a matter that affect feelings of (in)security, because discrimination is seen as something normal and therefore not worth-mentioning. However, other indirect feelings of security, such as stigmatisation, do matter. This affects the ability to be yourself. An example of a stigma which has an effect on the ability to be yourself is 'The homogenous Muslimah', as this stigma is based on generalisations and not individuality. To fight against this stigmatisation, as Dutch Muslim women want to be seen as individuals and thus guaranteeing feelings of security, they have to be constantly aware of their actions. With this, feelings of accountability and responsibility are harmful in feeling secure and are battling their need to be accepted within all facets of Dutch Muslim women's identity.

The next chapter explains how feelings of accountability and responsibility come afore with regard to the media and politics, as well as how this could feel as 'a magnifying glass'.

[71] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021

7. The magnifying glass

"Anti-Islam fighter Geert Wilders (PVV) wants to take fundamental rights away from Muslims" Nu.nl 11th of March 2021

The most liked comment on Facebook:

"I also do not understand what Islam is doing in the Netherlands. Most of the people who maintain that, have foreign roots. Then, I keep asking myself, is it really good for integration? If you really want to maintain that belief/culture, why don't you go to a country where that belief is normal?"[72]

This news heading was published on the eleventh of March 2021. The comment shows what Dutch Muslim women have to deal with on a daily basis. This chapter explains how Dutch Muslim women deal with these frames – such as Islam not being part of the Netherlands. Additionally, it elaborates on how these experiences regarding these frames have an influence on the perception of politics and media. This chapter argues that, the current problematic frame of Islam in the Netherlands is fuelling the categorisation of 'the homogenous Muslimah', in which media and politics both strengthen and sustain this frame.

Problematic framing of the Islam

In chapter five and six, we described the frame of 'the homogenous Muslimah'. Here, we have seen that this frame was thus constructed as Muslim women being static beings, rather than individual people. With this in mind, our participants also stated that they felt that 'the homogenous Muslimah' matured out of an already existent problematic frame regarding Islam in Western countries:

> "I think it is a complicated time. Not only regarding the Netherlands per say, because if you look at how America deals with Islamic countries, what people think about terrorism and Islam. That is quite problematic."[73]

[72] Observation in Facebook comments
[73] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021

This problematic framing of Islam is also in line with the theory of Buitelaar (2010), Kong (2009), and Moors (2009; 2014), where they state that Islam – and therefore everyone identifying themselves as a Muslim – is categorised as a supposed threat to Western society, mainly focussing on terrorism. Next to this, this problematic framing of Islam in the Netherlands also relates to theories of both Asad (1993; 2003) and Said (2003), where this supposed threat to Western society is also categorised as a threat to Western civilisation and modernity, categorising Islam as anti-modern. Due to the problematic framing of Islam, participants feel as if there is a constant focus on Muslim's behaviour and actions, where some participants specifically feel as if they will never be able to do it 'right'[74]. The constant focus on Muslim women is often negative, both in politics and media:

> "Everyone has something to say about us as Muslim women. We do it wrong. There is always something they find, but nine times out of ten it is negative."[75]

This focus – called by our participants as 'the magnifying glass'[76] – is also talked about during an online event, in which the event focussed on the stories of hijabis regarding positivity rather than negativity. Youssra said: "As women, we have to support each other. As Muslim women, this goes even further. We are already under scrutiny."[77] With this in mind, the magnifying glass creates constant feelings of scrutiny where the aforementioned feelings of accountability and responsibility are inherently related. Many participants feel as if this problematic notion of the Islam creates the framework in which they need to claim, (re)negotiate, and perform their identity[78]. Next to this, this framework also establishes many judgments of non-Muslim people regarding Muslims, which are based on generalisations. All participants state that these judgements are not new, it is normal[79]. These judgments arise from the problematic framework, whereby people who hold these judgments do not know, are aware of, or understand the difference between culture and religion.

[74] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork; interview with Emre 12/02/2021; 26/02/2021; interview with Karlijn 10/03/2021
[75] Interview with Sofija 11/03/2021
[76] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork; participant observation in Facebook groups; online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021
[77] Small talk with Youssra during online gathering regarding hijab stories 23/02/2021
[78] Conversation with Merve, Irem, and Kalil 11/02/2021
[79] Observation in Facebook groups; conversation with Merve, Irem, and Kalil 11/02/2021; interviews with Emre 12/02/2021; 26/02/2021; Hamida 25/02/2021; Aziza 26/02/2021; 26/03/2021; Karlijn 10/03/2021; 26/03/2021; Sofija 11/03/2021; 12/04/2021; Fadoua 13/03/2021; 02/04/2021; Senna 22/03/2021; 04/05/2021

Culture versus religion

The judgements arisen from the problematic framework are often based on the miscomprehension of the difference between culture and religion. In an interview, Karlijn told us that she had blogged about her difficulties dealing with her parents regarding her conversion to Islam. Karlijn said the reactions were shocking: “People literally said that I was disapproving my own cultural background”[80]. Karlijn then stated that religion is *a part* of culture, but not culture *itself*. When it comes to expressing a religion, it becomes “a cultural thing”[81] for people:

> “I just get mad because it's just so ignorant and just proves that people don't know a fuck about Islam (…) Being a Muslim doesn't make me any less Dutch, it certainly doesn't make me Turkish, Moroccan, or Jordanian.(…) . It's bullshit that it [headscarf] is a cultural thing. What's cultural about it is that different groups of people wear their headscarves differently. That's part of culture, but the headscarf itself is just religious."[82]

Being explicitly seen as a Muslim woman – by wearing a headscarf – is something that ultimately makes it easier for others to categorise Dutch Muslim women as ‘the Other’ (see Moors 2009; 2014; Nagel and Staeheli 2009; Ryan 2011). The ignorance – as Karlijn calls it – regarding the difference between culture and religion results in falsely formed judgments such as Islam being an oppressive religion and therefore unfitting in Dutch society (see Asad 1993; 2003; Said 2003). Karlijn also feels that this reaction of people towards her question on the blog is also because of some Dutch non-Muslim people’s opinion regarding Islam. “Just because it's Islam. (…) There is just pure hatred towards that religion and therefore towards me”[83]. These judgements, stemming from this frame, then have a direct influence on how Dutch Muslim are supposed to act.

Disproportionate treatment

The problematic frame of the Islam is inherently connected to our participants’ experiences of disproportionate treatment. In previous chapters, we stated that participants feel as if they

[80] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[81] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[82] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[83] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021

have to justify and explain themselves wherever they go. This is experienced as part of this disproportionate treatment. This disproportionate treatment is sustained by both the media and politics. For instance, when talking to Aziza[84], she explained the situation with Thierry Baudet – the political party leader of the right wing party FVD (Forum for Democracy) – on the show of Eva Jinek, a Dutch-American tv presenter. After Martijn de Koning, a Dutch comedian, confronted Thierry Baudet with a comedic roast, Thierry Baudet walked away. Which then resulted in personal apologies from Eva Jinek as well as RTL, the TV network. Aziza's reaction was:

> "He [Thierry Baudet] got apologies from Eva Jinek and RTL. I wonder if Farid Azarkan would be approached this way, it'd probably be: Yes, but this is the Netherlands and that's just how it is. Then I really think to myself guys you really don't see it or are you actually blind?"[85]

Aziza mentions that Farid Azarkan, a Moroccan-Dutch political party leader of Islamic party DENK, would have received different treatment. She states that this is part of normal life for Muslims, people of colour, or people with different cultural backgrounds[86]. This is also in line with the previous mentioned magnifying glass on Islam and Muslims: they have to constantly justify their actions and opinions. People who are seen as part of the 'dominant group' do not have to justify and claim their position or opinion. This magnifying glass, the judgments, and the disproportionate treatment all relate back to the problematic framing of Islam.

The media

The media sustains and strengthens the categorisation of 'the homogenous Muslimah', where only a one-sided image of Dutch Muslim women and the Muslim community is shown[87]. Karlijn describes this one-sided image – which mainly focuses on religious identity – by referring to an interview she saw on television, held with a non-Islamic presenter and a politician with an Islamic background[88]. The presenter only focussed on her religious identity instead of focussing on her political standpoints. Karlijn states:

[84] Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021
[85] Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021
[86] Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021
[87] Interview with Senna 22/03/2021 and 04/05/2021
[88] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021

> "That's a side of the Islam that so little people see, because the media doesn't show that side (…) *Geen Stijl*[89] even published an article about her not being a feminist, as if everything else [except Islam] is overthrown."[90]

This suggests that, according to the media, 'the homogenous Muslimah' is the only thing that comes forward, the rest does not.

This one-sided image that is maintained by the media has a negative effect on how others perceive Dutch Muslim women. Women are framed as oppressed which is, according to Senna, a perfect example of the ignorance of differences between culture and religion[91]. These examples relate to the aforementioned magnifying glass, where Dutch Muslim women feel as if they are constantly looked upon. If there is a possibility for Dutch Muslim women to raise their voice in the media, their voices are questioned. Sofija describes this questioning regarding their voices in an interview she saw with someone who converted to the Islam[92]. She explained:

> "If you see those discussions on television, you'll notice that there's always someone who has to protect or justify their religion. They have to justify Muslims and then I'm like, come on!"[93]

This questioning of Dutch Muslim voices can also be found within the media as a workplace. Senna, who works as a journalist, experienced this questioning of her voice as well. This was when one of her articles was changed by her editors without her knowing. To her, it felt as if her voice was taken away by her editors. Adding to that, Senna also explains – from an insider perspective – that Muslims do not often get a voice. For instance, one colleague stated that they did not need to hear opinions of Muslims, even though it was an article written about Muslims[94].

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[89] *Geen Stijl*: this is a Dutch actuality website, mainly using satirical messages. See for more information: www.geenstijl.nl
[90] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[91] Interview with Senna 22/03/2021 and 04/05/2021
[92] Interview with Sofija 11/03/2021
[93] Interview with Sofija 11/03/2021
[94] Interview with Senna 22/03/2021

Representation

The reified image of ‘the homogenous Muslimah’, is not an image to which our participants identify with. Simultaneously, the image they bring forward of themselves is not shown or seen in the media. This is inherently connected to feeling unrepresented in the media. Aziza says:

> “In the media, I don’t [feel represented], I already gave up on the media. Fuck it all. (…) I stopped watching the news, haven’t watched it for years. I also got rid of Facebook.”[95]

Simultaneously, Sofija explains her disappointment in the negative image of Muslims[96]. According to Karlijn, this is also due to the limited number of spokespersons that people can identify with in the media. She explains:

> “Look, there is a generalised image. As a Muslim, you don't have many role models in the media (…) And personally, as a Dutch Muslim, I don't have any role models when talking about Islamic figures in Dutch Society.”[97]

Senna experiences the same, and states that she does not feel represented because her own perspectives are not shown in the media[98]. She adds to this, that if there are any role models, they often disappear from the media as they cannot identify themselves with that specific spokesperson: “It makes sense, you can’t be a spokesperson for a whole group”[99]. It is impossible to represent a group who is not homogenous. In addition, she talks about the representation of Muslims within the media working field, where Muslims are underrepresented. Many are not able to get a job, and if they do, they leave quickly, often due to the disproportionate treatment mentioned above[100].

Nevertheless, the media is also seen as a platform to highlight the positive side of Islam[101]. This can be seen in many Facebook groups regarding Dutch Muslim women, for

[95] Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021
[96] Interview with Aziza 26/02/2021; 26/03/2021; interview Sofija 11/03/2021; 12/04/2021
[97] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[98] Interview with Senna 22/03/2021 and 04/05/2021
[99] Interview with Senna 22/03/2021
[100] Interview with Senna 22/03/2021 and 04/05/2021
[101] Fieldnotes and small talk with participants at the online gathering regarding hijab stories 23/02/2021

instance by embracing sisterhood[102]. Fadoua adds that there are more attempts to diversify the media, “That’s nice to see”[103].

Politics

The problematic frame of Islam is also experienced in politics, specifically when it comes to the notion of culture and religion. This was seen when Jesse Klaver, a left-wing politician, stood up for the first hijabi entering the house of representatives, because Geert Wilders, a right-wing politician, tweeted: “A Black day for the Netherlands #stopIslam”[104]. A comment on Klaver’s Instagram post said:

> “You don’t find progressiveness in the ideology of Muslims. I strongly disapprove of all the hate comments she gets and all the negativity because she’s Muslim, but there’s also grounded criticism for placing someone on a progressive electoral list who has strong ties to very conservative ideas.”[105]

This comment suggests that this person[106] thinks that Islam is connected to conservative ideas, where someone identifying as a Muslim – with therefore supposed conservative ideas – does not ‘fit’ in a progressive party. This is in line with the theory of Asad (1993; 2003) and Said (2003) who state that Islam is supposedly categorised as non-modern and unfitting in Western society. Many people also reacted to this comment. Somebody said “Islam isn’t a part of the Netherlands, and shouldn’t be a part of politics.”[107]

This quote, as well as Wilders’ tweet, illustrate how it is acceptable to say this, because people allow it and there are no real consequences for Wilders. At the same time, because these tweets are posted, they also get a platform to do so[108]. This is also experienced by our participants, where they stated that Wilders is always like this, and this perceived as normal. Participants feel that politics makes decisions about their personal lives. However, in contrast to the media, our participants feel as if they do have some sort of agency on the

[102] Participant observation in Facebook groups
[103] Interview with Fadoua 13/03/2021
[104] Tweet by Geert Wilders on 20/03/2021
[105] This person has not officially given informed consent, though this comment was written publicly. Therefore, due to keeping the privacy of this person, we will not be mentioning his/her/their name, as well as the specific Instagram post of Jesse Klaver, and thus the date on which this person has commented on this. See *Chapter 3*: *Methods and ethics* for more explanation regarding this ethical dilemma.
[106] See above.
[107] See above.
[108] Conversations with Merve, Irem, and Kalil 11/02/2021 and Interview with Aziza 26/03/2021

outcome of politics. They can vote themselves, which makes them want to be more involved in politics than they would in the media[109]. Participants rather vote on a party that focusses on their personal values, instead of solely focussing on Islam. Fadoua explains this as:

> "Politics doesn't only work for me as an individual. It's for everyone in society. (…) It depends a bit on which party I think generally represents the interests that I think are important, but also the interests of most people."[110]

However, simultaneously, there is some sort of expectation of the Muslim community to vote for 'one of their own': meaning someone with an Islamic background. This expectation was seen in the online event with Merve and Irem as panel leaders, one comment said: "Vote for something that resembles us in appearance and way of thinking"[111]. This expectation is based upon fears of exclusion because of politics (see Baumann 1999). The problematic frame of Islam implemented in politics still scare some of our participants. This fear was also shown in interviews, as well as the online groups we followed on Facebook. People are afraid that the extreme right is growing, and they are afraid that some freedoms will be taken away. Freedoms such as the right to express one's religion[112]. Aziza mentions this as well:

> "I'd be worried if people started making a fuss about Muslims again. Especially when there are people in politics who will say 'We want to be secular… Islam shouldn't have a place in society… Headscarves shouldn't be seen anywhere'. And then I think hey! If I can't do my prayers at work anymore. Why would politics even debate about that, that's about my life. I mean, I'll just do my thing and live my life, but it's scary."[113]

The argument of secularisation

In the previous quote, the notion of wanting to be secular was mentioned as well. Many participants view secularism as a difficult concept. However, they do notice that there is some discrepancy between a Christian political party such as the SGP (Reformed Political Party)

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[109] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork and participant observation in Facebook groups

[110] Interview with Fadoua 13/03/2021

[111] Online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021

[112] Conversations with Merve, Irem, and Kalil and participant observation in Facebook groups

[113] Interview with Aziza 26/02/2021

and an Islamic political party such as DENK. Christian parties, even conservative parties such as the SGP, are more accepted than Islamic parties[114]. The argument of wanting to be secular is used when an Islamic party gains popularity[115]. This is another example of how this disproportionate treatment is carried out. This discrepancy is also in line with the theory of De Koning (2020), regarding 'acceptable Islam' and 'unacceptable Islam'. Islam is therefore only 'acceptable' when it is in the private spheres of society, and thusly not expressed in politics.

This form of 'acceptable and unacceptable Islam' is also experienced by our participants through prayer. Our participants feel as if they need to plan their prayers, where most find this difficult. One has to claim space for praying, whether it is physical space or time. The space is not created *for* Dutch Muslim women, they have to do this[116].

Conclusion

In this chapter we aimed to show, how the image of 'the homogenous Muslimah', both mentioned in chapter five and six, is part of the bigger problematic framework of the Islam in the Netherlands. This framework is often based on the ignorant view of non-Muslims regarding the difference between culture and religion, where this ignorant view result into falsely formed judgments such as Islam being an oppressive religion and therefore unfitting in Dutch society. This framework then creates a bigger issue where Dutch Muslim women feel as if there is a certain way they need to act compared to the supposed 'dominant group', also known as the constant feeling of being watched: the magnifying glass. The disproportionate treatment resulting from this, such as being differently treated because someone is Muslim compared to non-Muslims, is then inherently connected to both the media and politics. This connection of the disproportionate treatment with both the media and politics relate to how media and politics strengthen and sustain this image of 'the homogenous Muslimah', the problematic frame of the Islam, as well as the disproportionate treatment. Due to this sustainment and strengthening, Dutch Muslim women are portrayed as a reified being, based on generalisations. Again, individuality receives little to no attention.

[114] Online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021; conversations with Merve, Irem, and Kalil 11/02/2021; interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021

[115] Interview with Fadoua 02/04/2021

[116] Interview Emre 12/02/2021; 26/02/2021; interview with Aziza 26/02/2021; 26/03/2021; interview with Sofija 11/03/2021; 12/04/2021; interview with Fadoua 13/03/2021; 02/04/2021

The next empirical chapter delves into the interrelationship between feelings of security and belonging, and how these both affect the identity construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women.

8. Utereg me stadsie

This chapter explains how the concepts of identity, belonging, security, and the problematic frame of Islam are all intertwined. Next to this, we elaborate even more on the notion of recognition and connectedness, and show examples of how this is related to different groups such as Sisterhood and the city of Utrecht – defined as 'home' by our participants. With this in mind, the past three chapters will be used to analyse the intertwinement of these concepts. This chapter argues that, both feelings of belonging and security have an effect on each other as well as the identity construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women, in which the desired individuality and the importance of recognition for connection with others come to the fore.

Identity

Feelings of belonging, as we have seen, is the ability to be accepted within one's identity, including all facets of them. At the same time, feelings of security also relate to being oneself. Hence, both feelings of belonging and security are related in the sense of 'being oneself' and therefore being accepted as oneself.

However, as discussed, in chapter five as well as six and seven, there are certain conditional aspects to be able to be accepted as oneself: the claiming of identity, feelings of accountability and responsibility, and the disproportionate treatment of Dutch Muslim women. These conditional aspects make it more difficult for our participants to be seen as an individual person, where they constantly have to guard their individuality in order to prevent from turning into a generality: a reified human being. Thus, in order to truly feel like one belongs and is secure, being yourself – and therefore an individual human being – is of the utmost importance to our participants, where generalising frames need to be left behind.

Another important notion – where feelings of belonging and security are united – is home. Being at home, and feeling at home, is innately associated with the possibility of being yourself. For our participants, this home is the city of Utrecht.

Being an Utrechtse

The city of Utrecht and being an *Utrechtse*, is in close connection with both feelings of belonging and security. Utrecht is the place where our participants live; they know the city and they have their friends, family, and community here. It is home. This certain connection between Utrecht and our participants is something Emre describes enthusiastically:

> "I'm born and raised in Utrecht! I've lived my whole life in Ondiep. It's where I feel at home. Also one of the only places I feel at home".[117]

Being at home is therefore also the place where one could feel more accepted, such as the case of Karlijn has shown in chapter six. Here, she explains the difference between living in Utrecht and living in her previous city[118]. Feeling at home and thus being accepted as oneself could potentially create feelings of security, as our participants perceive home as feeling secure. Being yourself, accepted as oneself, and connected with others in Utrecht are also in close relation to the aforementioned notion of recognition, mentioned in chapter five. Aziza explains recognition when talking about her city:

> "Every now and then, when I meet another *Utrechter* outside Utrecht, then it's like 'Oh I feel you! I know where you come from!' (…) When I hear someone's from Utrecht, I do indeed feel a connection. You just understand how beautiful our city is, right!?" [119]

Thus, for Aziza, being an *Utrechtse* – which she is proud of – means having a certain recognition with other *Utrechters*. Recognition itself can also be linked to the aforementioned theory of locality by Lovell (1998) and Nuttall (2001), who explain that locality relates to feelings of belonging and collective identity. Such territory – in this case Utrecht – connects its citizens, simultaneously create feeling of belonging, and is place where you can be yourself. The notion of recognition and connectedness will be explained more thoroughly later in this chapter.

The intertwinement between feelings of belonging and security

As described above, feelings of belonging and security are connected to the identity construction and (re)negotiation of our participants as it refers to the possibility to be oneself. Feelings of belonging is the acceptance of others to be yourself within all facets of identity, which simultaneously creates feelings of security when this acceptance is present. As we have seen in chapter six, feelings of belonging and security can be described as a vicious

[117] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021
[118] Interview with Karlijn 26/03/2021
[119] Interview with Aziza 26/02/2021

circle, where these both affect each other[120]. In other words, if feelings of belonging change, the feelings of security could change as well, and vice versa (see Mackay 2014). This intertwinement becomes apparent in what our participants describe as: the Haram Police. The Haram[121] Police are people within the Muslim community who put the constant focus on what Muslims within the community do wrong. Senna explains these people as:

> "They're people whom I call the Haram Police, they only focus on 'Oh, but you wear short sleeves, that's not allowed' (…) They're busy judging each other and pointing fingers at each other. Like, they don't look at themselves, but they focus on what someone else is doing wrong."[122]

Having the Haram Police in the community leads towards a constant worry, for some participants, of not being good enough[123]. This constant worry of not being good enough is directly connected to the aforementioned notion of the 'good and bad Muslim', since there are certain pressures and expectations from the Muslim community. This results in whether or not someone belongs. The constant worry also affects the ability to be yourself and be accepted in a community, thus affecting feelings of belonging and security. Thereby, showing exactly how this vicious circle of feelings of belonging is carried out.

Another example of the intertwinement between feelings of belonging and security is veiling. Wearing a headscarf creates a certain recognition with other hijabis[124]. Therefore, they feel like they belong and feel secure within this group. This recognition – as described in chapter five – lays a foundation for both feelings of belonging as well as security. Youssra, who was a guest in an online event regarding hijab stories, describes this connection between recognition, belonging, and security as follows:

> "If someone else wears a headscarf, you know you're a part of the same group, and that ensures security."[125]

[120] Interview with Senna 04/05/2021
[121] Haram is used in Islam to indicate what is seen as a sin, and therefore not allowed. Its opposite, Halal, therefore means what is right and thus allowed
[122] Interview with Senna 22/03/2021
[123] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women
[124] Hijabis is termed as a collective group of women who wear the hijab. See *Appendix 1: Types of veiling*, for more information
[125] Small talk with Youssra during online gathering regarding hijab stories 23/02/2021

While wearing a headscarf creates the feeling of recognition, it can also affect Dutch Muslim women negatively, due to the image of 'the homogenous Muslimah'. This can be seen in the example of Hamida, which is mentioned in chapter six, where she explains she was afraid of wearing a headscarf, as other non-Muslims could blame her for something she had nothing to do with[126].

The above examples illustrate how other people and clothing can affect feelings of belonging and security. The recognition of other hijabis is an important example of recognition regarding feelings of belonging and security.

Recognition

As we have shown recognition is the common denominator of being and feeling accepted within a group. This acceptance within a group relates to the aforementioned importance of being oneself and the desire of individuality. This is also in line with Verkuyten (2005), who states that sameness is important for acceptance and inclusion. Therefore, one could argue that recognition is thus related to feelings of belonging and security. Participants feel connected with different groups, where recognition is the basis for this connectedness[127]. An example which was mentioned before was hijabis: being connected to other Muslim women or specifically hijabis relates to being able to recognise one's religious affiliations in the other[128].

Participants perceive Islam as a way of thinking. It creates structure and tranquillity[129]. This conceptualisation of Islam is then shared with other Muslims, where a certain connection of feelings of belonging and security is embedded, which is also related to the earlier mentioned notion of *Umma:* the already existent global Muslim community[130] (Kong 2009). Next to this connection, Sisterhood – the connection with other sisters, i.e. Muslim – is an important binding factor in recognising other Muslim women. In the online event regarding hijab stories, many women stated the importance of Sisterhood, and how this meant that one could recognise each other:

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[126] Interview with Hamida 05/03/2021

[127] Small talk with several Dutch Muslim women during fieldwork and participant observation in Facebook groups

[128] Online gathering regarding hijab stories 23/02/2021

[129] See *Chapter 5: An alien with tentacles*

[130] Participant observation in Facebook groups; conversation with Merve, Irem, and Kalil 11/02/2021; interviews with Emre 12/02/2021; 26/02/2021; Hamida 25/02/2021; Aziza 26/02/2021; 26/03/2021; Karlijn 10/03/2021; 26/03/2021; Sofija 11/03/2021; 12/04/2021; Fadoua 13/03/2021; 02/04/2021; Senna 22/03/2021; 04/05/2021

> "The acceptance between women acts like some kind of protection. A headscarf is allowed but not necessary with this Sisterhood. It's about live and let live, making choices, and helping each other. (…) You have a connection and it is about that recognition. You just have a connection, even with women who do not wear a hijab."[131]

Next to this, women in the online event led by Merve and Irem said that, even though one could indeed recognise themselves in other Muslims, this does not mean that they solely experience recognition with Muslims. Some even stated that it could be an overbearing thought of always being with "like-minded people"[132]: like-minded people being Muslims and people who have an Islamic background[133]. The overbearing thought relates to, what Merve said in chapter five, being more than just Islam. These feelings are also shared by other participants who also state that they felt recognition with non-Muslims. An example of this relates back to what Emre stated in chapter five, that if someone grows up in a minority group they know what is expected of them. Participants state that they also feel a connection with people who have a different cultural background than Dutch or who are also part of a minority group. According to our participants, both these examples have in common that participants share a form of recognition with someone who is also perceived as 'the Other': other than being the dominant white-Dutch person[134]. Emre states this as: "Yes, I do feel connected to several minority groups, because I can understand how it [being the Other] feels."[135] Aziza adds to this:

> "For that reason [being the Other] you definitely feel a certain connection. That's really the case when I come to a network meeting. The first thing I do is scan. I look if someone looks like me, because that gives me a sense of recognition, that I think: Oh I'm not the only one."[136]

[131] Online gathering regarding hijab stories 23/02/2021
[132] Online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021
[133] Conversation with Merve, Irem, and Kalil 11/02/2021 and online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021
[134] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021; interview with Sofija 11/03/2021; 12/04/2021; interview with Fadoua 13/03/2021; 02/04/2021
[135] Interview with Emre 26/02/2021
[136] Interview with Aziza 26/02/2021

Besides feeling connected and feelings of recognition with people who deviate from the 'norm', this feeling is also present with other *Utrechters* and with open-minded people. Sofija explains this recognition with every open-minded person as:

> "It's more the feeling that I don't have to explain myself. I don't need to be like okay I'm doing this. And I have to explain why I'm doing this. It's just really, yeah.. I am accepted for who I am, and that makes me feel secure and heard."[137]

Recognition is therefore much more than just being able to recognise someone who looks like you or thinks like you. Recognition is related to both feelings of belonging *and* security, as it relates to not having to explain or justify who you are. Dutch Muslim women are accepted for being themselves, with all facets of their identity being accepted and seen.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to show the connection between the different concepts such as identity, feelings of belonging and security, the problematic frame of Islam, and recognition. It showed that both feelings of belonging and security have an effect on the identity construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women, where these feelings relate to the desire for individuality within their identity. Participants experience this interrelationship between feelings of belonging and security as: being yourself. Here, individuality and acceptance because of one's identity are implemented. Therefore, being oneself is crucial as it has direct effects on feelings of belonging and security. However, some conditional aspects make the cruciality of being yourself difficult to achieve, such as the claiming of identity, feelings of accountability and responsibility, and the disproportionate treatment. All these aspects hinder Dutch Muslim women from being seen as an individual, taking the fluidity of identity into account. By means of this, participants do not feel heard and cannot be themselves. Next to these conditional aspects, there seems to be a vicious circle when it comes to feelings of belonging and security. This vicious circle means that when feelings of belonging change, feelings of security will change, and vice versa. An example of this is the Haram police, where these create certain expectations and pressures of being a good Muslim. This has a direct influence on feelings of belonging and security, as the pressure of doing good has an effect on whether or not someone belongs and can be themselves. This vicious

[137] Interview with Sofija 11/03/2021

circle can then only be broken by feelings of recognition and connectedness with different groups, as this breakage means that constant claiming of identity, feelings of accountability and responsibility, and the disproportionate treatment are not necessary. Recognition is found with other Muslims, such as hijabis and within Sisterhood, other minorities, and open-minded people, as well as other *Utrechters* because Utrecht is home and therefore seen as secure. Recognition makes it possible for Dutch Muslim women to not have to justify themselves. Therefore, have the ability to be oneself, and thus belong and feel secure.

Conclusion

This research has focussed on the construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women's identities with regards to feelings of belonging and security, in the context of the current multiculturalism discourse in the Netherlands. With the use of an ethnographic perspective, we aimed to voice this identity construction by expressing the experiences of our participants regarding meaning making and sense-making. This has been done by using in-depth interviews and participant observation over the course of a three-month fieldwork. The data gathered during our ethnographic research, together with our literature study, help us to answer our research question: *How do Dutch Muslim women construct and (re)negotiate their (religious and national) identity in Utrecht in relation to feelings of belonging and security in the context of the current multiculturalism discourse?*

Concepts such as individuality, fluidity of identity, the problematic framing of Islam, being yourself, the intertwinement of feelings of belonging and security, turned out to be important in answering our research question. These concepts have an effect on the construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women's identities. The main conclusions will be explained in trifold below. Then the thesis ends with a discussion and some recommendations for further studies.

First, what has become clear in the first empirical chapter, is the desire for individuality regarding Dutch Muslim women's identity: they are more than just... a Muslim (see Barth 1998). This chapter shows that, currently, the focus on the individuality of the identities of Dutch Muslim women from others – such as non-Muslim Dutch people – is not present. Hence, we argue, that in order for the message of Dutch Muslim women's identity to change to individuality rather than generality, there needs to be a change in the way in which Dutch Muslim women are framed in the Netherlands – may it be via politics, media, or on societal level. With this we mean, specifically changing the problematic frame of the Islam in the Netherlands which has a corresponding effect on the image of 'the homogenous Muslimah', as is also explained by Buitelaar (2010) and Moors (2009; 2014). This image namely creates the categorisation of Dutch Muslim women as a reified image to which individuality has little to no attention.

The chapters have illustrated that the framing of the Islam in the Netherlands has a direct effect on the identity construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women, as this

framework creates the opportunity for other stigmas to be made such as the stigma of 'the Other', as well as the stigma of 'the homogenous Muslimah'. These stigmas then result into Dutch Muslim women being marginalised and excluded, which is in line with what Baumann (1999), De Lint (2009), and Goffman (1961; 1963) argue regarding exclusion and stigmatisation. These stigmas, as well as the problematic framework, are both based on others' ignorance regarding the difference between culture and religion. That said, the image of 'the homogenous Muslimah' leads directly into this reified image of the Dutch Muslim women, where they are perceived as static beings and objects. By means of this, Dutch Muslim women are falsely categorised into certain groups where feelings of accountability and responsibility come to the fore. Examples of this are, the feeling Dutch Muslim women have when they are blamed for other people's actions such as a tram attack by a man with an Islamic background or that Dutch Muslim women have to be aware of what to say and what not to say (see Baumann 1999; Kong 2009).

Next to this, both the media and politics sustain and strengthen this problematic frame of the Islam, as well as the reified image of the 'the homogenous Muslimah'. Thusly, the focus on individuality regarding the identities of Dutch Muslim women is further reduced. The constant focus, both in the media, politics, as well as on societal level, creates feelings of constant alertness: like a magnifying glass looking at you all the time (see Moors 2009; 2014; Nagel and Staeheli 2009). In order to change the feeling of having to justify and position yourself as a Dutch Muslim woman, we suggest that the focus should be on individuality, where everyone has the responsibility to do so and not solely giving the responsibility to Dutch Muslim women.

Second, besides that individuality needs more attention when it comes to the identities of Dutch Muslim women, this individual identity should also be conceptualised as fluid. This is in line with Barth (1998), Demmers (2012), and Jenkins (2014), who state that identity is socially constructed and fluid. In doing this, we argue that the frame of 'the homogenous Muslimah' and the reified image of identity, which were explained in empirical chapters five, six, and seven, will cease to exist. Often, this frame of 'the homogenous Muslimah' is solely based on religious identity, therefore not including other parts of someone's identity such as a plant lover, cat lover, Dutch, woman, etcetera. So, in order to see identity as a fluid concept, one should look at all facets of identity. Currently, this is not the case, which results in the sustainment of this homogenous and reified image. As a consequence, Dutch Muslim women are categorised as 'the Other', and will therefore – if this will not change – never be included

in the ‘Us’ but always excluded as ‘Them’ (see Abu-Lughod 2013; Baumann 1999; De Lint 2009)

Furthermore, Dutch Muslim women need to constantly adjust, claim, and perform their identity in order to redirect the message to fluidity and individuality when it comes to their identities, this is also in line with Butler (2002), Demmers (2012), and Guadeloupe (2009). However, this adjustment, claiming, and performativity is constantly interrupted by others who forcefully redirect the message of identity back to generality. Such as the example of the disproportionate treatment in the media and politics, where Dutch Muslim women feel they are being treated differently than other Dutch non-Muslim people would (see Abaâziz 2019; Kymlicka 1995; 1999; Okin 1999). Or another example of the discrepancy concerning secularisation, where practicing Islam is supposedly only ‘acceptable’ when performed in private spheres. This is also in line with De Koning (2020) who explains the notion of ‘acceptable and unacceptable Islam’. An example of this discrepancy is when the argument of secularisation is used regarding Islamic political parties. Here, Islam is categorised as ‘unacceptable’, since it is not ‘practiced’ in private spheres, but in public spheres such as politics. Whereas, conservative Christian political parties, such as the SGP, are accepted and the argument of secularisation is hardly mentioned (See Asad 1993; 2003; De Koning 2020; Maclure and Taylor 2011; Taylor 2009). Next to this, Dutch Muslim women feel that they are not correctly represented in both the media and politics, where the focus is still on this religious identity as their sole identity, and the image of ‘the homogenous Muslimah’ still prevails, this is also in line with Abu-Lughod (2013), Buitelaar (2010), Mahmood (2009), and Moors (2009; 2014). All these structures within society, create the opportunity for others to categorise Dutch Muslim women into the categorisation of ‘the Other’(see Said 2003), where the notion of identity as fluid is not even considered.

Third, all these arguments – (1) that the focus of Dutch Muslim women should be on individuality, (2) and the identity of Dutch Muslim women as fluid, – come together with regards to the argument that Dutch Muslim women should be able to be themselves, and that this is inherently related to feelings of belonging and security. Herewith, the vicious circle regarding feelings of belonging and security should be kept in mind. This means that if feelings of belonging change, feelings of security will change, and vice versa (see Mackay 2014). Hence, if one feels like oneself, with individuality as the focus as well as identity being fluid, it ensures that one feels like they belong in a group and simultaneously creates feelings of security. Being oneself is therefore extremely important to break that vicious

circle, as well as sameness and recognition (see Demmers 2012; Jenkins 2014). Recognition of finally not having to explain oneself is an example of how this individuality and fluidity with regards to identity are implemented. This then results in truly being accepted as well as feeling secure, and thus Dutch Muslim women can be themselves. However, it is important that the discrepancy concerning (in)security is still acknowledged when it comes to breaking this vicious circle. Dutch Muslim women explain that direct feelings of insecurity, such as being spat at, have more effect on feelings of insecurity. Whereas, indirect feelings of insecurity, such as discrimination and stigmatisation, have less of an effect on feelings of security. By means of this, Dutch Muslim state that they do feel secure, but they are still being stigmatised and discriminated. Hence, not being accepted (see Crawford 2002; Goffman 1961; 1963; Goldstein 2010). Structural violence (e.g. discrimination) is therefore not necessarily calculated within this feeling of security. This is also in line with Galtung (1969) who states that structural violence is often experienced subconsciously. Thus, to safeguard feelings of belonging and security, the vicious circle must be broken. Ultimately, if Dutch Muslim women are truly able to be themselves, all forms of insecurity will reduce or cease to exist, and feel like they belong.

Having said all this, Dutch Muslim women should be considered as individual people, where their identities are regarded as fluid. This will then have a direct effect on feelings of belonging and security because being oneself with regards to sameness and recognition is inherently connected to these feelings. With this, Dutch Muslim women have a voice, are seen as individuals, and get a more correctly presented position in society. Only then, will they be perceived as more than just… a Muslim.

Discussion

When conducting anthropological research related to the concept of Othering, it is important to realise that the researchers are participating in this supposed framework of Othering themselves. This is because the researcher separates the research population from the ‘Us’, and focusses on certain aspects that underline their Otherness: ‘Them’. In doing so, the researchers bear the potential pitfall of amplifying the differences between 'Us' and 'Them' – at least participants might experience it that way.

This experience of contributing to the Othering of our participants, is what we experienced as well[138]. During an online event[139], a participant expressed that she experienced this research to be painful. To her, our focus on Dutch Muslim women confirmed that she was different, because her identity as a Muslim woman was the focus of this research. To her, it felt as if there was some sort of categorisation made regarding Dutch Muslim women as a separate and homogenous group in society. On the other hand, in the same gathering, some women expressed that because it was painful, it did not mean that studies like this should not be conducted. Otherwise, it meant that nothing would change in this Othering. They stated that these studies create awareness of Othering, and hopefully change this perceived Othering into individuality and fluidity when it comes to Dutch Muslim women's identities.

That said, this discussion point also comes back to the ethical side of conducting ethnographic research. If one is conducting a research underlining the Otherness of a certain research population, the question arises whether or not the researcher is harming their participants. If so, this is against the first anthropological ethical rule: Do no harm. One could argue that conducting a research on Othering is harming one's participants indirectly, such as the example of the participant who experienced the research as painful.

With this in mind, an anthropologist, or any person who conducts ethnographic research for that matter, should be aware of these questions and dilemmas: Am I right in doing this research so and so, or am I not? Could I better frame my research in another, more inclusive, way? It is therefore very important for researchers to keep these questions, and supposed inner conflict, in mind. The right intentions when doing ethnographic fieldwork on Othering, according to us, are therefore focussing on the participants' experiences, their truths and sense-making, and actively listen to these experiences. It is essential to be wary of one's position, intentions, and epistemology, when conducting an ethnographic research on the notion of Othering.

[138] Due to the setting in which this research was conducted (e.g. mainly online due to the lockdown in the Netherlands because of Covid-19), this contributed to the feelings of Othering our participating. As we explained in *Chapter 4: Access*, we were not really entering the field, and in a sense helicoptering' above the field. In changing our epistemological stance to a more empathic and reflexive stance, this feeling of Othering was decreased (see *Chapter 4: Access* for more information). However, this does not mean that feelings of Othering amongst our participants was solely because of doing online ethnographic fieldwork. These feelings were also present regarding the reason described in this discussion point

[139] Online gathering lead by Merve and Irem 11/02/2021

Recommendations

When it comes to recommendations concerning follow-up research related to the topic discussed in this thesis regarding the construction and (re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women's identities in relation to feelings of belonging and security, we have realised there are many different focus points, which all deserve equal attention. However, we have only chosen two specific recommendations which are discussed below.

First, we would like to suggest the notion of Sisterhood to be of relevance for further studies. Although only briefly touched upon in this thesis, we have seen that Sisterhood is a strong connection between women based on trust, where the gender aspect is clearly visible. Sisterhood is a form of women empowerment, a continuous support, and likeness with other women, both Muslim and non-Muslim. Women help each other, and the importance of Sisterhood among our participants is great. Hence, a study on Sisterhood and recognition, laying bare feelings of belonging and security, could have an added value to the field of Anthropology, as well as Gender Studies, and Religious Studies. Therefore, we believe that it is interesting to conduct further research on the notion of Sisterhood, whereby the full focus can be on Sisterhood, gender, and women empowerment within Islam.

Second, and last, we recommend doing further research into the performativity of clothing of Dutch Muslim women. In the introduction, we explained the burqa ban in the Netherlands, which showed that the clothing choices of Dutch Muslim women were made a public debate. These debates, mostly liberalist debates, are often based on the notion of 'the Oppressed Muslim woman' (see Abu-Lughod 2013). Here, laws are made – such as the burqa ban in the Netherlands or the vote by the French senate to ban the hijab[140] – on the basis that Muslim women are 'oppressed' and that bans such as these will supposedly 'liberate' women from this 'oppression'. However, something that is often forgotten in these liberalist notions, is the fact that bans on veiling suppresses the agency of Muslim women to choose whether or not to veil. Thus, the liberalists are essentially contradicting themselves. In a sense, they are doing the same what – in their eyes – the Islam does: oppress women and take away agency by banning women from wearing a veil.

With that said, in further studies, it is therefore interesting to research the performative role of clothing: How is clothing related to the identity construction and

[140] On the 30th of March, the French senate voted to ban the hijab for girls under the age of eighteen in public, as well as mothers who accompany their children on school trips. This vote ultimately created a lot of commotion and protests, mainly using the hashtag #HandsOffMyHijab. For more information see: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/4/9/a-law-against-islam

(re)negotiation of Dutch Muslim women in the Netherlands? Furthermore, questions such as: What emotions are behind these choices of clothing and how are they constructed, are also very important. The same applies for the question: How do Dutch Muslim women view these prohibitions and the interference on their agency – is this even experienced as an interference on their agency? However, a disclaimer should be made here: it is important to note that clothing is not the sole focus of Dutch Muslim women's identity as Dutch Muslim women are more than just the piece of cloth they wear on their head or body. The role of clothing can be different for everyone and some women do not necessarily feel the need to further elaborate on their clothing choices. What we aim to claim here is that Dutch Muslim women are more than their religious identity, considering that veiling is a (significant) part of that identity at all.

Finally, in this thesis we aimed to give our participants their voices on their identity construction and (re)negotiation in relation to feelings of belonging and security and thereby to clarify the current framing regarding Dutch Muslim women in the Netherlands. We are aware of the fact that ethnographic research regarding Othering has the tendency to underline the Otherness of participants and that this could potentially contribute to the notion of Othering as one is separating their participants from the 'Us' into 'Them'. However, we hope we have done justice to the voices of our participants as well as possible; as our participants and their stories are of paramount importance to us. Therefore, we hope that with this research, we will continue the conversation about how Dutch Muslim women are being Othered, about the problematic framing of Islam and Muslim women in the Netherlands, and to view the life and identities of Dutch Muslim women in all its facets instead of an reified image. A Dutch Muslim woman from Utrecht is more than just that!

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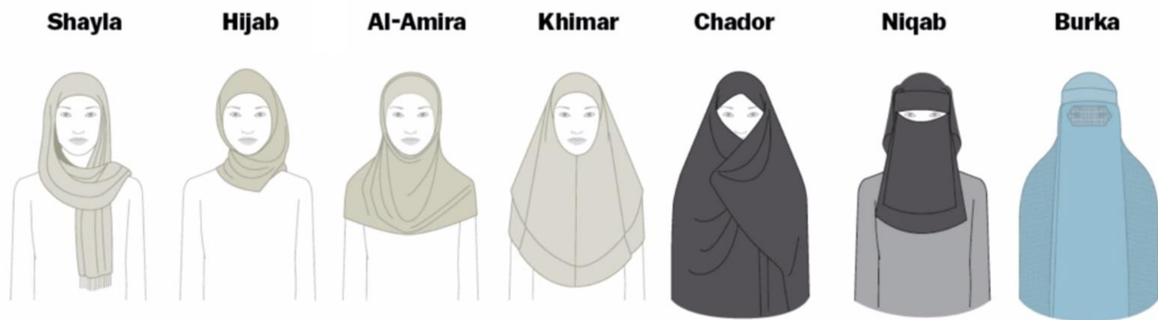
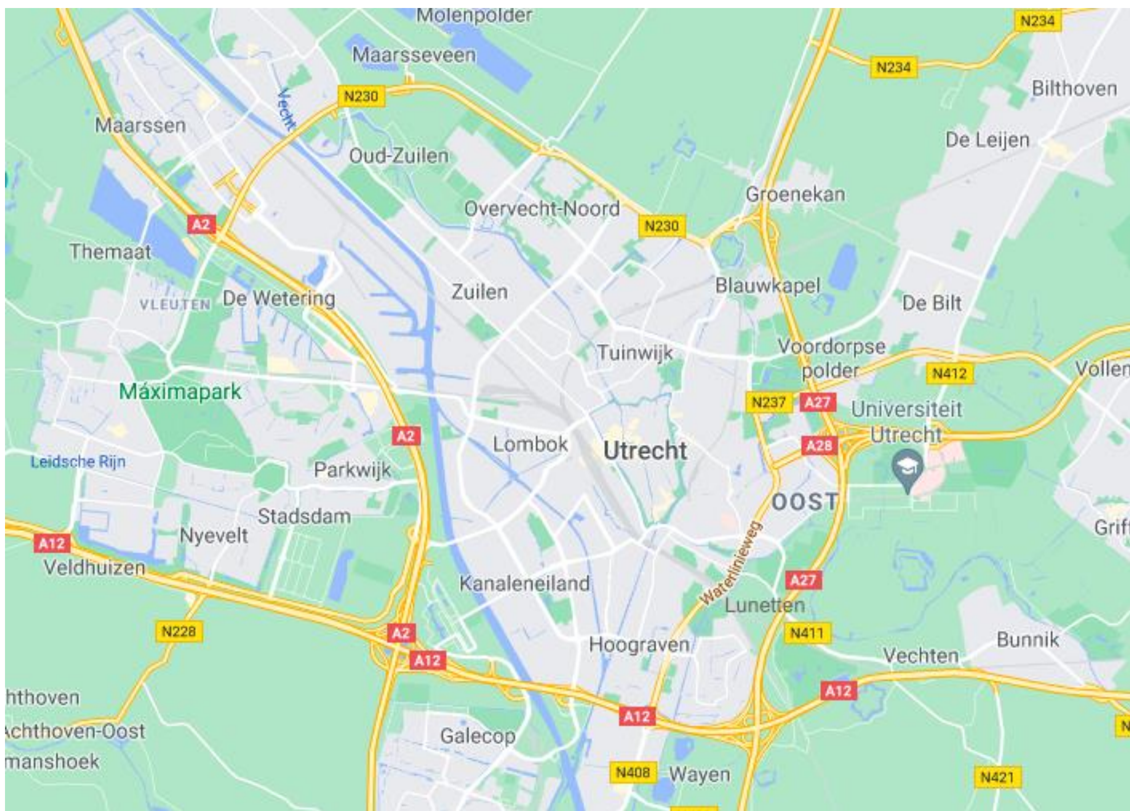
Appendix 1: Types of veiling



Source: https://barringtonstageco.org/types-of-islamic-veils/

Appendix 2: Map of the Netherlands and Utrecht

Source: https://www.britannica.com/place/Netherlands



Source: Google Maps screenshot taken on 11/06/2021