

Political Islam According to the Dutch

By Roel Meijer

Introduction

The Dutch attitude towards Islamist movements or “political Islam” is as much determined by internal developments in the Netherlands as those in the Middle East. It is not so much political Islam itself—of which people know little—but rather the process of secularization that has swept the Netherlands during the past half century. This accounts for the Dutch distrust of religion and its imposed restrictions and dogma. As a country that prides itself on its toleration and openness as a result of its secularization, it was surprised and angered to be confronted with a new religion within its borders when Muslim migrants came to the Netherlands. Instead of withering away, Islam was very much alive and challenged the values the Dutch stood for. As a result, Islam and especially “political Islam” became the great “Other.” By some it was considered in the same role as Christianity earlier, as the opposite of “enlightenment.”

Background

Perhaps more than any country in Europe the Netherlands has secularized faster and to a far greater extent during the past fifty years.¹ Dutch who register themselves as being members of a church have become a minority. This is a spectacular development, for the Netherlands were in the forefront of the Reformation in the sixteenth century and although Amsterdam was a tolerant city due to its position as the European center of trade in the seventeenth century, the Dutch were known for their strict Calvinism. Indeed, the Netherlands today has a “bible-belt” that runs diagonally across the country from the IJsselmeer, in the middle of the country, to the Zeeland, in the southwest. In the pre-modern period, strict Calvinism was very important and played a tremendous role in society and especially politics. Half of the population belonged to the Reformed Protestant church, or were members of one of the dozen or so strict Protestant sects.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Anti-Revolutionary Party was established as a bulwark against the unholy principles of the French Revolution and liberalism. During the same period the Roman Catholic Church, representing the other half of the population, also experienced a period of rapid growth and self-confidence. Until the 1960s, Christian political parties constituted the majority in parliament. Together with the Socialist parties, they represented the dominant forces in the so-called “pillar-system” in which all three groups formed segmented communities, where their leaders made the deals at the highest level but whose members lived separately from each other, went to different schools, football clubs, etc. In some ways this system was comparable to the millet system

¹ For a recent overview of the Dutch attitude towards religion, see Sipco Vellenga, “Religieuze orthodoxie als Bedreiging,” [Religious Orthodoxy as Threat], in *Religie en Veiligheid*, Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid, no. 2, vol. 2 (2011), pp. 7-22.

in the Ottoman Empire, or later in Lebanon, where the *zu'ama* negotiated at the highest level. The major difference was that the communities in the Netherlands no longer went at each other's throat after the Thirty Years Wars (1618-1648) when religious wars had ended.

The dominance of religion changed after World War II when society rapidly secularized, the influence of the churches on its members dwindled and Christian political parties lost their fixed support base. Instead, a strong anti-clerical and anti-religious sentiment arose which condemned religiosity as backward and tried to ban all forms of religiosity in public. The political system, however, did not change. The Netherlands did not adopt a French strict separation of "church and state," as in the system of *laïcité*. For instance, the Dutch still have religiously based schools paid by tax money. The anachronism was allowed to persist, until voices were raised against it because it also allowed for Islamic schools to be established.

The rapid de-Christianization of society worked to the disadvantage of the Muslim migrant workers who came to the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s, at the peak of this process. When migrant families united in the 1970s and 1980s, enhancing Islamic/traditional family values, and it became apparent that migrants were there to stay, the Dutch realized that a new community had arrived that would not easily blend into society. Belatedly, society realized that a large group of mainly Moroccans and Turks (300,000 in the 1980s, now 800,000) lived in Holland, who did not speak the language, did not recognize its customs, and had no intention of becoming Dutch. By that time already a new generation was growing up that was regarded as "lost."

But as the 1980s and 1990s were dominated by the emergence of the Right, and the Left was accused of having "pampered" the mainly Muslim migrants, the political debate concentrated not on their lack of economic opportunities and improving the education of their children, but on integration and assimilation and the obstacles to that process. The Right argued that Islam was the main culprit in keeping Muslims from becoming Dutch. Instead of watering down their identity and allowing religion to become a private matter, Islam acted as a bulwark that kept them "imprisoned" in "outdated" beliefs and attitudes. In this sense, the critique of Christianity and the "obscurantism" of the church was re-focused and latched itself on Islam and its promotion of "medieval" values and rejection of "modernity." This was especially the case regarding the position of women.

The general belief—of especially left and non-church/secular left and liberal Dutch—was that Holland had done itself a great disservice by importing not only the Third World, but also its most backward part. If the Dutch had previously thought that their emancipation from the established church and religious doctrine was completed, it seemed that society had to start all over again by educating the newcomers on the benefits of the Enlightenment. Apart from the position of women the other test case was homosexuality. Tolerance, women's liberation and acceptance of homosexuality were regarded as the hallmarks of Dutch progressiveness. But in the eyes of the most Muslims, these ideas were blasphemous. Not they but the Dutch were uncivilized. To defend themselves, they stressed their own Islamic identity and its qualities in opposition to the Dutch. It is no accident that Muslim migrants were often defended by strict Protestants, who also felt threatened

by the new secularized, arrogant elite, the so-called “canal-ring elite” (“Grachtengordel,” because they were assumed to live in the heart of Amsterdam) and their attack on conservative family values.

Another reason why Islam became the focus of attack was the rise of the Right and populist groups which expressed a public critique of the so-called “multi-cultural society,” which had allowed Muslims to keep their own identity and neglected their integration. The attack was launched at the beginning of the 1990s by liberal politician Fritz Bolkestein, but was carried on in 2000 by left-wing journalist Paul Scheffer in his notorious article “The multi-cultural drama.”² The torch was picked up by the populist right-wing homosexual politician Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated in 2002, and popularized the term “islamization of Dutch society.”³ It was finally carried to its extreme by the journalist and filmmaker Theo van Gogh. Stretching the freedom of speech to its limits, he called Muslims “goat-fuckers.” The lowest point in this brief history of agitation against Islam is represented by Geert Wilders and his crusade against Islam.

How does political Islam fit into this debate? The Muslim Brotherhood had never put down roots worth mentioning in the Netherlands,⁴ as was the case in France,⁵ because students from the Middle East did not go to this country to study as they were unfamiliar with the language. Salafism, which operated through mosques and was much less intellectually inclined, did appeal to Moroccan youth in the Netherlands because it presented an alternative world view that rejected discrimination and offered “the total truth,” which the Brotherhood did not.⁶ Salafism only became overtly political after 9/11 when jihadi Salafism turned into the ultimate provocation in a society that abhorred religion, let alone the idea that one would sacrifice his life for it.⁷

As a result it took a long time before political Islam was debated. Traditionally, many Dutch regarded Islam as worse than Christianity because it does not accept the division between church and state. The sharia, which supposedly supports an Islamic state, is seen as the main threat. But not until the second wave of Islamic activism in the 1970s and 1980s in the Middle East that political Islam came into view. Rising at the same time that religion, let alone politicized religion, was

² For an analysis of the debate in the 1990s, see, Baukje Prins, *Past Innocence: The Debate on Integration in the Netherlands*, (Amsterdam: Van Genneep, 2000).

³ For his (superficial) views on Islam, see Pim Fortuyn, *The Islamization of Our Culture: Dutch Identity as Basis* (Rotterdam: Karakter Uitgevers, 2001).

⁴ Edwin Bakker, “The Public Image of the Muslim Brothers in the Netherlands,” *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012) p. 167-86.

⁵ Peter Frank, “Muslim ‘Double Talk’ and the Ways of the Shari‘a in France,” *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp. 123-44.

⁶ The best article in this respect is Mohamed-Ali Adraoui, “Salafism in France: Ideology, Practice and Contradictions,” in Roel Meijer (ed.) *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement* (London: Hurst & Co. 2009), pp. 364-83.

⁷ For more on Jihadi Salafism and the so-called Hofstad group, see Martijn de Koning, *In Search of the ‘Pure’ Islam: Belief and Identity Formation of Young Moroccan-Dutch Muslims*(Amsterdam, Boom, 2008); Martijn de Koning and Roel Meijer, “‘Going all the Way’: Politicization and Radicalization of the Hofstad Network in the Netherlands,” in A.E. Azzi, X. Chryssochoou, B. Klandermans & B. Simon (eds.), *Identity and Participation in Culturally Diverse Societies: A Multidisciplinary Approach*(Oxford: 2011), pp. 220-239.

declining in the Netherlands and Europe, it seemed to confirm the idea that political Islam was backward looking, anti-modern and wanted to install a caliphate and return to the Middle Ages. It was analyzed in the same terms as Christianity: it was “fundamentalist,” “extremist,” “radical,” and “ultra-orthodox.” However, little effort was made to determine what these terms meant in a Muslim context, let alone in a completely different cultural, social and political context of the Middle East. Moreover, Islam, and to the more sophisticated, political Islam, became associated with violence in a crescendo of attacks and mayhem over the next decades: the Iranian revolution in 1979, the assassination of President Anwar Sadat in 1981, the Algerian civil war in 1991-1997, the bloodbath among tourists at Luxor in 1997, and, of course, 9/11, followed by the carnage of missions in Iraq. All of this was somehow always connected to political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood. That the Brotherhood might evolve was hardly considered.

The murder of Theo van Gogh on November 2, 2004 by the young Moroccan-Dutch Mohammed Bouyeri seemed the logical outcome of the disastrous role Islam and political Islam played in the world.⁸ Few were willing to analyze it as both the ultimate failure to come to grips with the migrants and their problems in the Netherlands, but also as the failure to analyze Islam and especially political Islam. By agitating against Islam per se the Dutch had created a monster they were unable to tackle because they did not have the tools to analyze it. Although in the aftermath of van Gogh’s death, attempts were made to make distinctions between political and non-political Islam, al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the attraction of Salafism to young Moroccan-Dutch. Yet populist politicians, like Geert Wilders, had based their political careers on the condemnation of Islam. Ultimately, attempts to bring sanity into this debate were lost in the fray.

Yet, since 2005, four attitudes towards Islam and political Islam can be identified in the Netherlands. On one extreme, stands the political party of Geert Wilders of the PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*), which does not make a distinction between Islam and political Islam. His party program expresses this sentiment that “Islam is primarily a political ideology; a totalitarian doctrine that is geared to [acquiring] supremacy, violence and repression”.⁹ He is supported by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who has become internationally notorious for attacking the prophet Mohammed and confusing traditional practices as genital mutilation with Islam. This group is provided with the “scientific” ammunition by the Orientalist Hans Jansen, who has written several books condemning Islam as a violent and fundamentally anti-democratic religion.¹⁰ The second group consists of people who are more careful, making an important distinction between Islam as a religion and political Islam. The Iranian refugee Afshin Ellian, who condemns political Islam as “green fascism,” belongs to this group.¹¹ The third,

⁸ The best book on this bleak period in Dutch history written in English, Ian Buruma’s brilliant, *Murder in Amsterdam: The Death of Theo Van Gogh and the Limits of Tolerance* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006).

⁹ PVV, Election programme. *The Agenda of Hope and Optimism: Time to Decide*, PVV 2010-2015 (The Hague, 2010), p. 13

¹⁰ Hans Jansen’s latest book, which caused an uproar, is called *Islam for Pigs, Monkeys, Donkeys and Other Animals* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij van Praag, 2008).

¹¹ For a collection of the articles Afshin Ellian has written for NRC Handelsblad, see his book, *Letters of a Persian: On Dutch and Islamic Cannibalism* (Amsterdam: Meulenhof, 2005).

rather grey, group is highly suspicious of political Islam and considers it dangerous and radical but regards Islam as a religion on which they have little to comment. To this group belong most journalists but also the Dutch intelligence service, the AIVD (*Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst*) and Christian Democrats. The fourth, very small group consists of specialists who are more nuanced and recognize that organizations like the Brotherhood have evolved over the past 30 years, have become more pragmatic, and no longer strive for an Islamic state. This group argues that the Brotherhood does not pose a threat to Europe.¹² It believes it should be recognized and allowed a chance to acquire power in the Middle East if it is voted into power by the ballot box.¹³ Once the movement is in power it will have to make compromises and water down its ideological spin.¹⁴

The Image of the Muslim Brotherhood

The third group deserves the most attention here, as it represents the middle of the road in the Netherlands and has the greatest influence on public opinion.¹⁵

The intelligence reports of the AIVD written in the wake of 9/11 on political Islam and jihadism are instructive in this regard.¹⁶ The Muslim Brotherhood is mentioned in the December 2002 publication entitled *Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands from Incident to Trend*, noting that in the Netherlands the Muslim Brotherhood's set of ideas was losing ground to Salafism.¹⁷ Two years later, in December 2004, the publication *From Dawa to Jihad: The Various Threats from Radical Islam to the Democratic Legal Order* refers to the Muslim Brotherhood only twice. In an update to this report, published in October 2007, the AIVD for the first time presents a more original analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood, calling it "a radical *da'wa* movement."¹⁸ It pointed out that "the Muslim Brotherhood certainly has some support in the Netherlands," referring to the Essalaam mosque in Rotterdam.¹⁹ It underwrites two anti-Brotherhood tropes that have become wide-spread: one is that the Muslim Brotherhood is the founding father of today's radical Muslim activism,²⁰ and the other is that it is a duplicitous organization: it warns that Muslim Brothers or their sympathisers "are not recognisable as such" and that they "do not always reveal their religious loyalties and ultra-orthodox

¹² For an overview of the debate in Europe, see my introduction to *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp. 1-23.

¹³ Bertus Hendriks and Roel Meijer, "Utopische Broeders zijn realisten geworden," *de Volkskrant*, February 18, 2011, <http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/?id=8327>

¹⁴ Roel Meijer, *Towards a Political Islam* (Clingendael Diplomatic Papers Series, No. 22, 2009), p. 1-55.

¹⁵ The best books on the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, is Lorenzo Vidino, *The New Muslim Brotherhood in the West* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) and Brigitte Maréchal, *The Muslim Brothers in Europe: Roots and Discourse* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

¹⁶ For this section on the AIVD reports, I have relied on Edwin Bakker, "The Public Image of the Muslim Brothers in the Netherlands," *The Muslim Brotherhood in Europe*, Roel Meijer & Edwin Bakker (London: Hurst & Co, 2012), pp. 167-86.

¹⁷ AIVD, *Rekrutering in Nederland voor de jihad, van incident tot trend*, The Hague, 2002, p. 31.

¹⁸ AIVD, *The Radical Dawa in Transition: The Rise of Islamic Neo-Radicalism in the Netherlands*, The Hague, 2007, pp. 12, and. 48.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

agenda to outsiders.”²¹ In France, where these notions probably derive from, this became known as the “*le double langage*.” The Brotherhood is also considered “radical” because it actively wants to force society to reform along strict Islamic lines and rejects the Western democratic legal order.²² The next public document of the AIVD that speaks more extensively of the Muslim Brotherhood presence in the Netherlands is its annual report of 2009. This report describes the Brotherhood as a political-Islamic movement, that “seeks to re-Islamize Muslims in Europe according to their (ultra-)orthodox ideology.” The AIVD warns that the orthodox interpretation of Islam by the Muslim Brotherhood could be opposed to democratic rule of law.²³

The opinions on the Brotherhood represented in these reports are significantly less nuanced in the pages of the Dutch right-wing daily newspaper *De Telegraaf* and the weekly *Elsevier*. The Brotherhood is always brought up in relation to connections with terrorism and terrorist attacks against Israel. But it is not only linked to Hamas, but also to the Gama’at al-Islamiyya and even the Hofstad group, the group to which Bouyeri belonged.²⁴ *De Telegraaf* consistently calls the movement the “notorious Brotherhood.” As in many other European countries, its bête noire is the Qatari based preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who the newspaper warns has been photographed in the presence of members of Hamas and Hizbollah.²⁵ Not surprisingly, *De Telegraaf* supported Nicholas Sarkozy when he refused al-Qaradawi an entrance visa for France in April 2012.²⁶

In the Netherlands, *De Telegraaf* believed it had finally discovered its mole Brotherhood member when it turned on the Moroccan-Dutch politician Yahyia Bouyafa, who supposedly ran the Muslim Contact Group as part of the international network of the Muslim Brotherhood.²⁷ It quoted the above mentioned 2009 AIVD report on the Brotherhood’s attempts to “re-Islamize Europe.”²⁸ Yahyia Bouyafa was believed to be secretly promoting the establishment of an “ultra-orthodox pillar in Europe.”²⁹ *Elsevier* titled the article on the issue, “Dutch mosques under control of Muslim

²¹ Ibid. p. 51.

²² Ibid.

²³ AIVD, Annual Report 2009, The Hague, 2010, p. 18.

²⁴ “Cohen: Brotherhood not Dangerous,” *Elsevier*, April 12, 2012,

<http://www.elsevier.nl/web/10119493/Nieuws/Politiek/Cohen-Moslim-Broederschap-niet-gevaarlijk.htm>

²⁵ Rolf Bos, “Shaykh is Sheep in Wolves’ Clothes,” *de Volkskrant*, February 21, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1836788/2011/02/21/Sjeik-is-een-wolf-in-schaapskleren.dhtml>

²⁶ “Sarkozy Bans Refuses Preachers,” *De Telegraaf*, March 26, 2012,

http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11787858/___Sarkozy_wil_haatimams_weren_.html

²⁷ “Counter-part of Minister Vogelaar is Member of the Muslim Brotherhood,” *De Telegraaf*, November 28, 2007,

http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/2633016/_Gesprekspartner_Vogelaar_bij_Moslim_Broederschap_.html

²⁸ “Amsterdam Breeding Ground of Notorious Muslim Brotherhood,” *De Telegraaf*, April 21, 2010,

http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/6567340/___A_dam_broed-plaats_Moslimbroeders_.html

²⁹ “Bouyafa Member of the Muslim Brotherhood,” *De Telegraaf*, December 21, 2011,

http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/5614781/___Bouyafa_lid_Moslimbroederschap_.html

Extremists,” calling the Brotherhood “a world-wide movement that has produced several terror organizations.”³⁰

But the antipathy against political Islam is not just a Right-wing impulse; the Left-wing newspaper *de Volkskrant* is also not enthusiastic about the Brotherhood. It supported the trope that the Brotherhood offers a complete system for every aspect of life and therefore is against integration in Western societies and is out to establish a “parallel society.”³¹ Some journalists even described the Brotherhood as an organization that pursues establishing a “pure Islamic state,” without giving any explanation what they mean by it.³² More concretely, fear was related to the influence of foreign organizations on Dutch Muslims based on the assumption that “who pays determines” (*wie betaalt bepaalt*). Like *De Telegraaf*, *de Volkskrant* believed the Brotherhood had infiltrated the council of the Essalam mosque in The Hague and the Wester mosque in Amsterdam.³³ Taking up the call to do something against “political Islam,” parliament demanded further research into the matter in the fall of 2007.³⁴ At one point the minister of Integration was criticized for maintaining contact with the Contact Group Islam, whose chairman supposedly was “a spider in the web of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood.”³⁵ The mayor of Amsterdam at the time, Job Cohen, was also criticized for downplaying the threat of these connections.³⁶ Typically, the extreme right wing PVV of Geert Wilders was the first to ask a question in parliament on the issue.³⁷

Earlier, the extreme sensitivity of “political Islam” was revealed in the uproar over the publication of the report of the Scientific Council for Government Policy (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het

³⁰ “Dutch mosques under control of Muslim Extremists,” *Elsevier*, March 24, 2007, <http://www.elsevier.nl/web/10117158/Nieuws/Nederland/Nederlandse-moskeen-in-greep-van-extremisten.htm>

³¹ Martin Janssen, “Protect Muslims against Islam as Ideology,” *de Volkskrant*, October 5, 2010, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2448495/2010/10/05/Bescherm-moslims-tegen-islam-als-ideologie.dhtml>

³² Henk Müller, “Escape Creates Gaping Hole for Israel,” *de Volkskrant*, January 24, 2008, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/883959/2008/01/24/Uitbraak-creert-gapend-gat-voor-Israel.dhtml>

³³ “CDA [Christian Democratic Party] is concerned about Foreign Influence on Mosques,” *de Volkskrant*, March 24, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/836833/2007/03/24/CDA-verontrust-over-slechte-invloeden-op-moskeen.dhtml>

³⁴ “Parliament: Research Foreign Influence on Mosques,” *de Volkskrant*, November 27, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/866333/2007/11/27/Kamer-Onderzoek-buitenlandse-invloed-op-moskeen.dhtml>

³⁵ “PVV want more information on the Contact Group Islam,” *de Volkskrant*, August 4, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/871038/2007/08/04/PVV-wil-opheldering-over-Contact-Groep-Islam.dhtml>

³⁶ “Cohen: Brotherhood not Dangerous,” *Elsevier*, April 12, 2012, <http://www.elsevier.nl/web/10119493/Nieuws/Politiek/Cohen-Moslim-Broederschap-niet-gevaarlijk.htm>

³⁷ “PVV want more information on the Contact Group Islam,” *de Volkskrant*, August 4, 2007, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/871038/2007/08/04/PVV-wil-opheldering-over-Contact-Groep-Islam.dhtml>

Regeringsbeleid, WRR), *Dynamics of Islamic Activism*, when it was presented to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot on April 12, 2006. It confronted the main anti-political Islam tropes in the public opinion head-on, denying that Islam was incompatible with democracy. It recognized that there were many liberal Islamic thinkers and that the Muslim Brotherhood had changed and become more democratic.³⁸ It accused Right-wing politicians of “irresponsible rabble-rousing against Islam.” The minister immediately distanced himself from its important recommendation to enter dialogue with what the *de Volkskrant* called “radical (terrorist) organizations,” such as Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hizbollah. Its recommendation to stimulate the founding of an “Islamic inspired” political party in the Netherlands likewise drew criticism.³⁹ In a more thorough analysis of the important report, even *de Volkskrant* believed the report assigned too much credence to liberal currents in Islam, which, it stated, are marginal. The problem with movements like the Muslim Brotherhood, *de Volkskrant* argued, is that they are both political and religious movements. As the former they are pragmatic and flexible, but as the latter they are dogmatic and conservative. As a result they remain vague and are difficult to characterize.⁴⁰ The WRR report however was supported by Nasr Abu Zayd, who was living in exile in the Netherlands and was himself the victim of a *hisba* case in Egypt. Arguably more aware of what was happening in the Islamic world than *de Volkskrant*, he believed that dialogue with the Islamists should be stimulated.⁴¹ In an interview with the *de Volkskrant*, Alistair Crooke was also sympathetic to the idea of contacts with Islamist movements like Hamas, as their shunning would produce the opposite attitude that the West was trying to cultivate in the region.⁴²

The political response to the report was divided, as was the attitude towards political Islam. The liberal-right wing VVD was divided between those politicians who supported the WRR report, such as Hans Wiegel and its then leader Hans Dijkstal. They rejected the suggestion by their fellow VVD party member Ayaan Hirsi Ali to close Islamic schools. The Christian Democrats were also divided

³⁸ “Positive Attitude is Advocated by Council,” *de Volkskrant*, April 12, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/765986/2006/04/12/Positieve-bejegening-van-islam-bepleit-door-raad.dhtml>

³⁹ “Unbalanced Report,” *de Volkskrant*, April 13, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/archief/article/detail/788803/2006/04/13/Onevenwichtig-rapport.dhtml>

⁴⁰ Henk Müller, “Wishful Thinking in WRR,” *de Volkskrant*, April 13, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/archief/article/detail/789142/2006/04/13/Wens-vader-van-de-gedachte-bij-WRR.dhtml>

⁴¹ “The West Does not Notice the Process of Reform in Islam,” *de Volkskrant*, April 13, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/archief/article/detail/789146/2006/04/13/Het-Westen-ziet-proces-van-hervorming-in-islam-niet.dhtml>

⁴² “The West Must Open Dialogue with Islamists,” *de Volkskrant*, March 22, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/767588/2006/03/22/Westen-moet-in-gesprek-met-islamisten.dhtml>

between Ministers Van Ardenne and Donner on the one hand and Verhagen, who is much more critical and would later even form a coalition with the PVV, on the other.⁴³

Another issue related to “political Islam” that attracted attention was Tariq Ramadan’s sojourn in the Netherlands. Although Tariq Ramadan is not a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, his stay was another occasion on which everyone could **[missing word]** their view of political Islam. Ramadan’s opponents were influenced by the French book *Frère Tariq* by Caroline Fourès.⁴⁴ Tariq Ramadan was constantly portrayed as connected to the “radical Muslim Brotherhood” founded by his grandfather, who took advantage of the “weakness of our democratic system” in Europe; “the moderate Islam as a Trojan horse.” Those naïve Dutch, unaware of the Brotherhood’s dangers, were gullible enough to bring it inside the castle. Like the Brotherhood Tariq Ramadan speaks sweetly but in the end he will introduce the *sharia*.⁴⁵ **[Is this the portrayal or what the author thinks?]**

By the end of the decade, however, the general atmosphere toward Islam, and in some ways, political Islam, greatly improved. Most Dutch realized that the brush with “radical Islam” in the Netherlands had been quite mild. In contrast to the United States, Great Britain and Spain, where thousands had died, only one, extremely provocative individual, who had brought out the worst in an unstable person such as Mohamed Bouyeri, had died. By 2009 *de Volkskrant* dropped the sobriquet “fundamentalist” when referring to the Brotherhood.⁴⁶ Neither were claims that the Brotherhood was out to obtain “world supremacy” taken that seriously anymore.⁴⁷ Even *De Telegraaf* had toned down, quoting different experts who believed that the radical phase had ended, although they warned that we had to remain vigilant for possible homegrown radicalism.⁴⁸ With the increasing economic crisis, most people had also become fed-up with the anti-Islam rhetoric of Geert Wilders,

⁴³ “WRR touches open wound with Islam Report,” *de Volkskrant*, April 12, 2006, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/765987/2006/04/12/WRR-raakt-open-zenuw-met-islam-rapport.dhtml>

⁴⁴ “Sixteen Years Controversial,” *de Volkskrant*, August 22, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/archief/article/detail/352809/2009/08/22/Al-zestien-jaar-controversieel.dhtml>

⁴⁵ Johan Piter Verwey, “Don’t Become a Dhimmi of [Tariq] Ramadan,” *de Volkskrant*, September 9, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2454408/2009/09/02/Wordt-geen-dhimmi-van-Ramadan.dhtml>

⁴⁶ As far as I have been able to trace, the last article written by a *de Volkskrant* journalist referring to the “fundamentalistic Muslim Brotherhood” was Ferry Biederman in his article, “There is No Difference Between What Obama Says and What Bush Said,” *de Volkskrant*, June 6, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/archief/article/detail/340422/2009/06/06/Er-is-geen-verschil-tussen-wat-Bush-zei-en-wat-Obama-zegt.dhtml>

⁴⁷ Interview with Jonathan Schanzer, “Jonathan Schanzer— Fatah vs. Hamas. The Struggle for Palestine,” *de Volkskrant*, March 20, 2009, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2664/Nieuws/article/detail/322460/2009/03/20/Jonathan-Schanzer---Fatah-vs-Hamas-The-Struggle-for-Palestine.dhtml>

⁴⁸ “Vigilance is Still Required,” *De Telegraaf*, May 21, 2011, http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/9848107/_Alert_blijven_na_dood_Osama_.html

something he seemed to realize himself when he highlighted the EU as a main threat to Dutch national identity.

The Arab Spring

Tahrir

The Arab Spring broadened the Dutch vision, showing that people in the Middle East were not Muslims caught up in some permanent struggle to return to the Middle Ages and establish the caliphate. They appeared to be rational, their demands were by all standards reasonable and the Dutch public could easily relate to them. Certainly the tremendous courage of demonstrators on Tahrir Square was admired. People remained glued to their TV sets not to miss the ongoing story. They identified with the demonstrators on Tahrir, who were perceived to uphold the same ideals, “freedom and liberty,” respect for “individual dignity” and “civil rights,” “as we enjoy them in the West.” These ideals supposedly had an “irresistible attraction” and proved to be “universal values.”⁴⁹ Sometimes their story was analyzed in the usual stereotypes: Egyptians had, for instance, shrugged off thousands of years of submission to pharaohs. Even a suicide, like that of Mohamed Bouzazizi, often regarded as a sacrifice for a political goal, was applauded. It seemed as if the Middle East, that black hole of misery, had rejoined history; as if the Mediterranean, formerly regarded as healthy barrier to barbarism on the other side of the shore, had shrunk and people could shake hands across its waters. Although much of this was euro-centric and the assumption was that Europe was superior, the positive side was that Arabs were perceived as humans and not just Muslims.

Muslim Brotherhood and Ennahda

The response of newspapers overall was also positive. Newspapers like *de Volkskrant* were aware of the complexity of the political situation. They rejected the idea that Islam and democracy were incompatible and that there is only room for authoritarian regimes in the Middle East.⁵⁰ On the other hand, many newspapers underscored the tremendous obstacle in lacking existing institutions.⁵¹

Political parties were divided. Neglecting the fact that Muslims had arisen against the dictators, the right wing PVV of Wilders immediately warned that the Brotherhood would take advantage of the situation and revoke the peace treaty with Israel.⁵² Also the prime minister’s first reaction was to

⁴⁹ “Hope for Freedom and nostalgia for the Caliphate,” *de Volkskrant*, February 5, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831689/2011/02/05/Hoop-op-vrijheid-en-heimwee-naar-kalifaat.dhtml>

⁵⁰ Pieter Hillhorst, “The Arabic Spring,” *de Volkskrant*, February 2, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/6214/Pieter-Hilhorst/article/detail/2448074/2011/02/01/Arabische-lente.dhtml>

⁵¹ “Why Now?” *de Volkskrant*, February 5, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831718/2011/02/05/Maar-waarom-pas-nu.dhtml>

⁵² “Parliament: EU Reacts too Weak to Egypt,” *De Telegraaf*, February 3, 2012, http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/8921109/___Kamer___slappe_reactie_EU_op_Egypte_.html

warn against the Brotherhood's rise. However, the left's response was more balanced. The Green Party (GroenLinks) MP Mariko Peters, after a trip to Egypt, warned right-wing politicians that it was "far too early to judge the Brotherhood." An assessment was only possible as it started to take part in the political process after the elections, he reasoned.⁵³

Over all, the Muslim Brotherhood's image in the media had improved considerably. *De Volkskrant* regarded the Brotherhood as "moderate," although "ambivalent."⁵⁴ The newspaper has covered most of the events marking of the Muslim Brotherhood during the past one and half years, such as its intention to establish a political party,⁵⁵ and its support of the March 19th referendum. The paper noted that the chances for winning the elections were good, for the Brotherhood is "the best organized political force in Egypt,"⁵⁶ and the actual foundation of the political party.⁵⁷ It mentioned that 50,000 Muslim Brotherhood members had participated in the Tahrir demonstrations on November 19, against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the principles of the constitution that would give the military privileges and restrict parliamentary overview. It noticed the election of Mohammed Sa'd al-Katatni as speaker of parliament.⁵⁸ It published only a small notification when the MB presented a candidate for the presidency.⁵⁹ What appeals to the *de Volkskrant* is that the Brotherhood stands up to SCAF and speaks in the name of the "people" against the authority of the military.⁶⁰ When the election results became known, it wrote that the Brotherhood has "softened its tone" and became "moderate" and "pragmatic" and that its program has been increasingly directed toward social justice and equality rather than establishing an Islamic state. Whenever it raises doubts about the Brotherhood's "intentions," it quotes critics and

⁵³ "Critic of the Muslim Brotherhood Is too Early," www.nu.nl, May 23, 2011, <http://www.nu.nl/egypte/2519783/kritiek-moslimbroederschap-komt-veel-vroeg.html>

⁵⁴ *De Volkskrant*, May 12, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3261044/2012/05/25/Eindrace-Egypte-tussen-Moslimbroeders-en-Mubarak-kloon-Shafiq.dhtml>

⁵⁵ *De Volkskrant*, February 15, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/1834981/2011/02/15/Moslimbroeders-richten-politieke-partij-op.dhtml>

⁵⁶ *De Volkskrant*, March 20, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/1862686/2011/03/20/Egypte-stemt-in-met-grondwetswijzigingen.dhtml>

⁵⁷ *De Volkskrant*, April 30, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/1882942/2011/04/30/Egypte-Moslimbroederschap-richt-politieke-partij-op-mogelijk-doodstraf-Mubarak.dhtml>

⁵⁸ *De Volkskrant*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3134664/2012/01/23/Islamist-als-parlementsvoorzitter-Egypte-aangesteld.dhtml>

⁵⁹ *De Volkskrant*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3234239/2012/03/31/Toch-presidentskandidaat-Moslim-Broederschap.dhtml>

⁶⁰ *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

opponents who “still regard the Brotherhood as a wolf in sheep’s clothes.”⁶¹ The Brotherhood’s ambivalent character is expressed in its desire for freedom and a “nostalgia” (*heimwee*) for the caliphate and an Islamic “utopia” (*heilstaat*).⁶²

Much the same goes for Ennahda, the Tunisian equivalent, which is also called moderate. But here, again, suspicions are evident. *De Volkskrant* even has translated the French “*le double langage*” into an awkward Dutch (“*dubbele taal*”), fearing that the position of women will be undermined gradually over the years.⁶³

On the other hand, *de Volkskrant* does make some good points. It points out that the Muslim Brotherhood embraces democracy but that if democracy is introduced in an environment that does not have a rule of law “minorities will be crushed by majorities.”⁶⁴ It also is aware that the Brotherhood contains contradictions. It noticed, for instance, that it supported ElBaradei during the uprising in January-February.⁶⁵ In short, it seems to accept that the Brotherhood’s “duplicity” derives more from its political than its religious character.

The Dutch “quality newspaper,” the *NRC Handelsblad*, offers essentially the same view of the Muslim Brotherhood as *de Volkskrant*. There is only one difference. Its main journalist, who is a specialist in the Middle East, always adds the sobriquet “fundamentalist” when she mentions the Brotherhood.⁶⁶ Even the Tunisian Ennahda party is called “Muslim fundamentalist.”⁶⁷ *NRC Handelsblad* follows the Brotherhood very closely and has toned down its anti-Brotherhood terminology during the past year and a half. It also recognizes that the movement has become more moderate and that the party will be preoccupied with socio-economic problems rather than with

⁶¹ *De Volkskrant*, December 15, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3064179/2011/12/05/Islamitisch-blok-in-Egypte-nog-lang-niet-zeker.dhtml>

⁶² “Hope for Freedom and nostalgia for the Caliphate,” *de Volkskrant*, February 5, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831689/2011/02/05/Hoop-op-vrijheid-en-heimwee-naar-kalifaat.dhtml>

⁶³ *De Volkskrant*, October 25, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/2988400/2011/10/25/Ondanks-vrije-en-open-verkiezingen-vrees-voor-uitslag-Tunesie.dhtml>

⁶⁴ “Hope for Freedom and nostalgia for the Caliphate,” *de Volkskrant*, February 1, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1831689/2011/02/05/Hoop-op-vrijheid-en-heimwee-naar-kalifaat.dhtml>

⁶⁵ Pieter Hillhorst, “The Arabic Spring,” *de Volkskrant*, February 2, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/6214/Pieter-Hilhorst/article/detail/2448074/2011/02/01/Arabische-lente.dhtml>

⁶⁶ “Brotherhood Wants a Coalition with Candidates to ‘Save’ the Revolution,” *NRC Handelsblad*, May 26, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/05/26/moslimbroeders-willen-verbond-met-kandidaten-om-revolutie-te-redden/>

⁶⁷ “Tunisian Fundamentalists: Another Revolution when Elections are Fraudulent,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 19, 2011, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/19/tunesische-fundamentalisten-nieuwe-revolutie-bij-verkiezingsfraude/>

ideology.⁶⁸ Like *de Volkskrant*, it always offers warnings, for example, that “[Arab] progressives” are afraid that the organization at a certain point will pursue a “radical Islamic policy.”⁶⁹ *NRC Handelsblad* recognizes differences within the Muslim Brotherhood. The dissident, former Brotherhood leader Abd al-Mun‘aym Abu al-Futouh is regarded as a liberal who “intends to increase freedom” and is in favor of “social justice.” But even in his case, the newspaper refers to his past as founder of the Gama‘at al-Islamiyya which exercised “armed jihad” in the 1990s. The journalist forgets that the Gama‘at al-Islamiyya, at the time, was a highly diverse and decentralized student movement. Only a specific branch of the movement in Upper-Egypt that did not join the Brotherhood at the end of the 1970s accepted jihad. By that time Abd al-Mun‘aym had joined the Brotherhood.⁷⁰

Oddly enough, the Right-wing newspaper *De Telegraaf* is one of the best informed Dutch newspapers on developments in Egypt and on the Brotherhood. It seldom adds the word “radical” to the Brotherhood. On some occasions it calls it “conservative-Islamist,” which is a great improvement compared to the other newspapers.⁷¹ Abd al-Mun‘aym Abu al-Futouh is called “moderate.”⁷² It covers the struggle between the Brotherhood and SCAF objectively, reporting on its participation in the Tahrir demonstrations against the military in July 2011.⁷³ It even frequently mentions moderate Brotherhood leaders as Mohammed al-Beltagi,⁷⁴ and major events such as the interference of the court in the Constituent Assembly.⁷⁵

Although it is impossible to make a full overview of the different news sources in the Netherlands, websites which provide news about developments in the Middle East seem to follow the main

⁶⁸ “Member Muslim Brother Chosen as Speaker of Parliament,” *NRC Handelsblad*, January 23, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/01/23/moslimbroeder-saad-al-katatni-verkozen-tot-voorzitter-parlement-egypte/>

⁶⁹ “The Brotherhood Has Come Up with Own Presidential Candidate After All,” *NRC-Handelsblad*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/03/31/moslim-broederschap-komt-toch-met-kandidaat-voor-presidentsverkiezingen/>

⁷⁰ “Who Will Become the Next President of Egypt? The Four Hopefuls,” *NRC Handelsblad*, May 22, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/05/22/wie-wordt-de-nieuwe-president-van-egypte-de-vier-kanshebbers/>

⁷¹ “Islamist Hope for New Success in Egypt,” *De Telegraaf*, December 14, 2011, http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11121399/__Islamisten_hopen_op_succes__.html

⁷² “Presidential Candidate Temporarily Halts his Campaign,” *De Telegraaf*, May 2, 2012, http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/12046773/__Kandidaat_Egypte_staakt__.html

⁷³ “Brotherhood Supports Demonstrators,” *De Telegraaf*, July 6, 2012, http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/10153524/__Broederschap_achter_betogers__.html

⁷⁴ “Brotherhood Denies Taking Part in Presidential Elections,” *De Telegraaf*, February 4, 2011, http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/8926330/__Broederschap_geen_president__.html

⁷⁵ “Court Blocks Constituent Assembly,” *De Telegraaf*, April 10, 2012, http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11880747/__Grondwet_Egypte_vertraagd__.html

newspapers' characterizations of the Brotherhood For instance, the news website www.nu.nl uses the more neutral terms “conservative” to describe the Muslim Brotherhood.⁷⁶

Salafis

As with so many other sources in the West, for many commentators the rise and prominent position of Salafism came as a surprise. The demonstrations on Tahrir on July 29, in which the Salafis and Muslim Brotherhood dominated, were seen as a milestone event in the coverage of Salafism.⁷⁷

In general it seems that Salafism has replaced the Muslim Brotherhood as the fundamentalists and the sobriquets used for the Brotherhood have been transferred to the Salafis. They have become the “ultra-orthodox,”⁷⁸ “guardians of the sharia,”⁷⁹ “puritans”⁸⁰ and “hardliners.”⁸¹ In one case, they are regarded as “more radical” than the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸² Even *De Telegraaf* has begun to consider the Brotherhood moderate compared to the Salafist Nour Party which is viewed as “extreme Islamist.”⁸³ Even the traditionally far from nuanced news site www.nu.nl makes a difference between the “conservative” Muslim Brotherhood and the “fundamentalist” Nour Party.⁸⁴

Sometimes, though, both the Brotherhood and the Salafis are called “fundamentalists,”⁸⁵ which is confusing. The NRC Handelsblad editor for the Middle East, Carolien Roelants, tries to define this term in one of her articles. She calls all Islamist movements fundamentalist but Ennahda is regarded

⁷⁶ “Muslim Brotherhood Claims Victory,” www.nu.nl, May 24, 2012, <http://www.nu.nl/buitenland/2818995/moslimbroederschap-claimt-overwinning.html>

⁷⁷ *De Volkskrant*, July 30, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/2823236/2011/07/30/Baarden-zijn-dominant-bij-betoging-op-Tahrirplein.dhtml>

⁷⁸ “Muslim Fundamentalist Storm University in Tunisia,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 9, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/09/moslimfundamentalisten-bestormen-universiteit-in-tunesie/>

⁷⁹ *De Volkskrant* March 3, 2012, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3216102/2012/03/03/Parlement-Egypte-twist-over-invloed-islamisten-op-de-nieuwe-grondwet.dhtml>

⁸⁰ *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

⁸¹ “The Brotherhood Has Come Up with Own Presidential Candidate After All,” *NRC-Handelsblad*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/03/31/moslim-broederschap-komt-toch-met-kandidaat-voor-presidentsverkiezingen/>

⁸² Gert van Langendonck, “Egyptians Go to Vote for First Free Presidential Elections after Fall of Mubarak,” *NRC Next*, May 23, 2012, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2012/05/23/egypte-naar-stembus-voor-eerste-president-sinds-mubarak/>

⁸³ “Voorsprong Muslim Brotherhood Enormous,” *De Telegraaf*, January 11, 2012, http://www.telegraaf.nl/buitenland/11285805/___Voorsprong_Moslim_Broederschap_enorm___.html

⁸⁴ “No Majority Yet for Brotherhood,” www.nu.nl, January 21, 2012, <http://www.nu.nl/buitenland/2720690/net-geen-meerderheid-broederschap-egypte.html>

⁸⁵ “Police Intervenes during Attack Tunisian Fundamentalists on TV Station,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 9, 2011, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/09/politie-grijpt-in-bij-aanval-tunesische-fundamentalisten-op-tv-station/>

“from a fundamentalist perspective as the most progressive [movement].” The criterion is whether the movement intends to implement the sharia and Ennahda, she believes it does not.⁸⁶ But one wonders why Ennahda is still fundamentalist if it no longer intends to implement the sharia? What meaning does the term fundamentalism have when it is brought in connection with moderate, as fundamentalist always has the connotation of “radical” in liberal newspapers.

Most newspapers try to discredit Salafism by quoting the most controversial opinions uttered by its members. Unlike the Brotherhood, for instance, Salafis are not interested in protecting the rights of minorities and individual freedom.⁸⁷ Women candidates in the elections were placed at the end of the lists and their pictures were replaced by flowers. They threatened to impose Islamic law on issues such as clothing, films, alcohol, and banking. But for a long time, *de Volkskrant* did not see the Salafis as a threat to Egypt because it regarded them as too far apart from the Brotherhood to make a coalition.⁸⁸

In many newspapers, Salafism is also associated with violence.⁸⁹ Much attention was given to the Salafi attack on the University of Sousse in Tunisia on October 8, 2011 because the university had refused the entrance of the women dressed in *niqab*,⁹⁰ or the attack on the TV station that broadcast the film *Persepolis*.⁹¹

Op-eds and interviews

The Muslim Brotherhood receives vigorous debates in the opinion pages of the newspapers. These are almost always negative and clichés are endlessly repeated. Many op-ed writers do not associate the Muslim Brotherhood with democracy. One commentator stated that voting in a rich suburb of Amsterdam is quite different than voting in Egypt. For Islamist freedom and democracy are the means to bring “down the last barriers between religion and state.”⁹²

⁸⁶ “The Year of the Arabic Spring, Part I: Tunisia,” *NRC Handelsblad*, December 26, 2011, <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/12/26/het-jaar-van-de-arabische-lente-tunesie/>

⁸⁷ *De Volkskrant*, March 3, 2012,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3216102/2012/03/03/Parlement-Egypte-twist-over-invloed-islamisten-op-de-nieuwe-grondwet.dhtml>

⁸⁸ Remco Anderson, *de Volkskrant*, December 5, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3064179/2011/12/05/Islamitisch-blok-in-Egypte-nog-lang-niet-zeker.dhtml>

⁸⁹ *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

⁹⁰ “Muslim Fundamentalist Storm University in Tunisia,” *NRC Handelsblad*, October 9, 2012,

<http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2011/10/09/moslimfundamentalisten-bestormen-universiteit-in-tunesie/>

⁹¹ *De Volkskrant*, December 31, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/3100244/2011/12/31/Arabische-Lente.dhtml>

⁹² Willem Melching, “Democracy and Freedom mean Something Else in the Middle East than in Buitenveldert,” *de Volkskrant*, October 25, 2011,

The political scientist Hala Naoum Nehmé is perhaps the most negative in stating opinions. After Mubarak's fall, she warned against the Muslim Brotherhood taking over power, and their chance of establishing an Islamic state. She regards all the researchers, such as the well-known Dutch *sharia* expert Ruud Peters, as “academically irresponsible” for not realizing the dangers of the Brotherhood. She refers, for instance, to the editor of this book, Dr. Lorenzo Vidino, for a more critical view of the Brotherhood, warning of its long-term strategy to gain world supremacy. She quotes French experts who support the double language theory, and believe that the Brotherhood upholds a “very violent discourse” and that “its program differs from what it really thinks.” It does not recognize the equality of men and women, the rights of minorities, or a peace treaty with Israel. She believes the Brotherhood, although it contains radical, moderates and pragmatists, the first dominate the movement, referring to Muhammad Badie's support of Sayyid Qutb. She ends her article with the more familiar idea that researchers can never be sure whether the Muslim Brotherhood is not a wolf in sheep's clothes.⁹³

In a later article, written just before the parliamentary elections, she compared the Muslim Brotherhood's chances of winning with fascists, racists and separatists gaining power by democratic means. As only Islamists will be in the race, it will be a competition about who is the best Muslim. Democracy can lead to “illiberal democrats,” as happened with Hamas. It is not important whether the system is democratic but whether it is liberal-democratic. Only in the latter case, can a real democracy with guarantees for individual freedoms be assured. The presupposed aim is that the Muslim Brotherhood will implement the policy it has been striving for during the past 83 years. She is stridently against the acceptance of a Brotherhood government, because “it will not meet the minimum democratic demands.”⁹⁴

The most famous Dutch critic of political Islam, or even Islam, is Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She has repeatedly commented on the aspirations of the Muslim Brotherhood. Not surprisingly, she accused the Brotherhood of being both power hungry and extremely efficient in “embedding itself in society,” while trading in “dreams.” She used the usual clichés that the Brotherhood is supported by Saudi Arabia and oil money and that it will implement the *sharia*—without explaining what that might mean. Although she also subscribes to the view that the Brotherhood is not trustworthy, she uses the word *taqiya* (dissimulation) in referring to the Brotherhood. Although this word is only used in relation to Shi'ism and never to Sunnism, adding another source of confusion to the already

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2989524/2011/10/25/Vrijheid-en-democratie-betekenen-iets-anders-in-het-Midden-Oosten-dan-in-Buitenveldert.dhtml>

⁹³ Hala Naoum Nehmé, “Brothers Want Sharia Not Freedom,” *de Volkskrant*,

⁹⁴ Hala Naoum Nehmé, “What Will (Rosenthal Dutch foreign minister, RM) Do When the Muslim Brotherhood Wins?,” *de Volkskrant*, October 13, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2966220/2011/10/13/Wat-doet-Rosenthal-als-de-Moslim-Broederschap-de-verkiezingen-in-Egypte-wint.dhtml>

confused idea of what political Islam is. She repeats the slogan that the Brotherhood claims that a vote for it, is a vote for Islam.⁹⁵

Not everyone is against the Muslim Brotherhood, however. Petra Stienen, a former diplomat, has promoted the idea that Arabs should find their own way and be allowed to choose whoever they want.⁹⁶ But she is often portrayed as naive. The only other article I have been able to find that was positive—in the sense that the Muslim Brotherhood must be given a chance—was written by the author of this article and his colleague, Bertus Hendriks.⁹⁷

It would seem that Islamism is the only topic discussed in the Arab Spring. But this is not the case. Opinion polls showed that the Dutch were afraid of the rising tide of refugees, rising oil prices and terror. One poll showed that general opinion had improved towards the Tunisians and Egyptian but that the image of the Middle East as a whole had not improved.⁹⁸

Conclusion

This article has tried to show that the attitudes toward the Muslim Brotherhood, or political Islam, are closely tied to, first and foremost, domestic affairs, such as secularization and emancipation from the church; a distaste of mixing politics and religion; the migration of Muslim migrants to the Netherlands at a time when religion was in decline and the rise of Islamism in the Middle East when the Netherlands was going in an opposite direction; simple ignorance of Islam and especially of “political Islam”; and finally, the rise of populist parties and their use of Islam for their political purposes. The Dutch response to political Islam has, therefore, less to do with the Muslim Brotherhood, which hardly exists in the Netherlands, despite the brief “scare” about the two mosques that were supposedly in the “grip of extremists,” than with the long term trends in Dutch society.

The result has been that Islam and political Islam increasingly attracted attention. The major reason is that the Right was unable to analyze the situation of Muslim migrants separately from Islam and ascribed their deplorable condition to religious factors instead of economic and social factors. This led to a vicious spiral of radicalization on both sides, each one adopting a more extreme position, leading to the “insult as art” of Theo van Gogh, and the populism of Geert Wilders and increasing interest in Islam and finally the Hofstad group on the other side.

⁹⁵ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, “Yes to Islam, No to Sharia,” *de Volkskrant*, February 7, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/2448117/2011/02/07/Ja-tegen-islam-nee-tegen-sharia.dhtml>

⁹⁶ De Volkskrant, February 19, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1836332/2011/02/19/Veel-Egyptenaren-zijn-net-zoals-ik.dhtml>

⁹⁷ Bertus Hendriks and Roel Meijer, “Utopische Broeders zijn realisten geworden,” *de Volkskrant*, February 18, 2011, <http://www.clingendael.nl/publications/?id=8327>

⁹⁸ Janny Groen, “Gegrepen’ door de Arabische lente,” *de Volkskrant*, April 16, 2011, <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2844/Archief/archief/article/detail/1876056/2011/04/16/Gegrepen-door-Arabische-lente.dhtml>

The analysis of the Muslim Brotherhood in Dutch newspapers in this period reflected this crisis and was heavily biased, based on hearsay and scare mongering. The Brotherhood was always described as “fundamentalist,” “radical,” “ultra-orthodox,” bent on world domination. Articles seldom made an in-depth analysis of the group. None of the more recent articles makes a serious analysis of the Brotherhood, although they have greatly improved, especially after the Arab Spring.

By the time the Dutch realized that Islamic terrorism was an isolated and limited affair and Islam as an issue seemed to have declined in importance in the public debate, the Arab Spring occurred.

The positive result of the Arab Spring is that it showed that Islam was not an issue in the protests and that the Dutch could relate to what was happening. The coverage of the Muslim Brotherhood improved. The prejudicial sobriquets declined and events were analyzed more in depth. Some newspapers now made distinctions between the different factions within the movement. An awareness seemed to grow that it is primarily a political movement. Despite the greater insight, mistakes were still made and always in relation to connecting different movements and persons with violence and extremism.

It seems also that the improved image of the Brotherhood is linked to the greater notoriety of Salafism. Salafism has taken over the role of the Brotherhood as the religious bogeyman. But here as well, newspapers do not always understand what Salafism means. Sometimes it is associated with the nineteenth form of Salafism of Muhammad Abduh that had “radicalized” afterwards.⁹⁹

To what extent this situation will continue in the future remains to be seen. At the moment most newspapers seem to support the Brotherhood because it has won the general and presidential elections and, therefore, has a legitimate claim to power. Although a newspaper such as *NRC Handelsblad* is not enthusiastic about the Brotherhood, it cannot openly root for the military.¹⁰⁰ But this could change if the Brotherhood would promote implementing sharia. But the reaction of Minister of Foreign Affairs Ben Bot, at the time the WRR report was published,—to refuse any contacts with the Brotherhood—seems to be past. If the Brotherhood leads a government, the Dutch government can no longer boycott the Brotherhood. This in itself will lead to more study of the movement. It cannot refuse to deal with a legitimately elected government.

⁹⁹ *De Volkskrant*, December 1, 2011,

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2668/Buitenland/article/detail/3059943/2011/12/01/Moslim-Broederschap-wil-in-Egypte-nieuwe-regering-vormen.dhtml>

¹⁰⁰ See for instance the commentary of the newspaper, “The ‘Counter-coup’ of Morsi,” *NRC Handelsblad*, July 9, 2012, p. 2.