

“Got faith?” The Integration of Muslims in the Netherlands

“¿Tiene fe?” La integración de los musulmanes en Holanda

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Abstract

The retreat of multiculturalism in the Netherlands has been accompanied by the unwavering demand for the ‘better’ integration of Muslim citizens. In former times, the success of integration was identified in the closing of linguistic, economical and educational gaps between society and newcomers. However, in recent years, the notion of integration has become synonymous with the process of secularization. Thus, Muslims’ affiliation to the Islamic faith is largely seen as a sign of impaired integration. This article examines the integration process of Dutch Muslims by the ‘old’ socioeconomic and ‘new’ faith-related integration-criteria from a critical point of view. This study explores the differences in the socioeconomic status and religious beliefs of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands and provides a new approach to the perceived gap between the ‘believing’ Muslims and ‘secularized’ Dutchmen. It suggests that the Dutch’s intertwining of the integration process with the process of secularization overlooks the persistent ‘irrationality’ and even rising belief in the de-churched Dutch society. It finds that Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims display certain differences but also surprising similarities in their engagement with faith.

Key-words: Integration; The Netherlands; Dutch Muslims; Secularization; Belief.

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Resumen

La desaparición del multiculturalismo en Holanda ha estado acompañada de una inquebrantable demanda por una “mejor” integración de los ciudadanos musulmanes. En los primeros años, el éxito de la integración fue identificado con la escasa brecha lingüística, económica y social entre la sociedad y los recién llegados. Sin embargo, en fechas recientes, la noción de integración se ha convertido, además, en sinónimo de proceso de secularización. De este modo, la afiliación de los musulmanes a la fe islámica es vista como un signo de integración deficiente. Este artículo examina el proceso de integración de los musulmanes holandeses a través de la “vieja” economía social y los “nuevos” criterios de integración desde un punto de vista crítico. Explora además las diferencias en el estatus socioeconómico y en las creencias religiosas de los musulmanes y no musulmanes en Holanda, y proporciona un nuevo acercamiento a la brecha percibida entre los musulmanes creyentes y los holandeses secularizados. Se sugiere que el entrelazamiento del proceso de integración con el proceso de secularización de los holandeses pasa por alto la persistente “irracionalidad” y la creciente creencia en la “des-clericalizada” sociedad holandesa. Se muestra cómo los holandeses musulmanes y no musulmanes mantienen ciertas diferencias bien que en clara disminución, pero también sorprendentes y crecientes similitudes en cuanto a su acercamiento a la creencia y la fe.

Palabras-clave: integración; musulmanes holandeses; Países Bajos; secularización; creencia.

Introduction

When commentators attempt to explain why the Netherlands ended its century long affair with multiculturalism, they often turn to the dramatic events of 9/11 or the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004. However, this is not what explains the dramatic abandonment of multiculturalism and the hysterical and hawkish debates on Islam in this small nation.

The Dutch argue that what is at stake is not the issue of national security-but the secular nature of society and state. Indeed, terrorism is disturbing, but it poses little challenge to this nation. However, a new generation of assertive, conservative and democratic Muslims has the ability to advance dramatic social and political changes that will transform this secularized society beyond recognition.

Despite the trepidation from terrorism, the Dutch fierce reaction to its Muslim citizens was primarily guided by the assumption that Islam presented an ideology that challenges the understandings of the 60s and 70s that this nation treasures. The Dutch consider themselves global pioneers of secularism, athe-

ism and social liberalism, perhaps best exemplified by the advancement of equal rights to gender-groups and lenient approach to soft drugs. Dutch Muslims, although widely aligned with classic Western ideas of democratization, advance demands for cultural recognition and religious equality, which are largely perceived as colliding with the nation’s appraisal of the ‘emancipation’ of society from the authority of religion.

The Dutch uneasiness about Islam seems clear: ‘being’ Dutch means that you support the freedom of the individual to exercise the right to break away from tradition, religion and the community (i.e. freedom *from* religion). However, Dutch Muslims demand to support the right to adhere or ‘return’ to religion and community (i.e. freedom *of* religion). To put it simple, the Dutch understanding of the right to freedom is welcoming and protective of apostates of Islam, yet wary about allocating this protection to those who wish to practice or advance their faith. It is this perceived collision of religious and secular world views that explains the dramatic political developments in the Netherlands.

Indeed, the nation is traditionally aligned with the political left. However, after that it became clear that the Muslim immigrants were not fully allied with the hegemonic secular and liberal dogma (or fond of its other protégés such as the gay community), the nation sought to revive its long forgotten nationalism. Considering that the ‘failure’ of integration was attributed to the dogma of multiculturalism and its promulgation of cultural relativism, a new approach was formed. Nowadays, newcomers and settled Muslim immigrants are urged to adopt ‘Dutch values’. This is largely translated into the demand that Muslims accept the superiority of secular reason. As will be shown, this transition from the “old” model of socioeconomic integration to the “new” expectation for secularization of Muslims is the primary cause to the perceived ‘failure’ of the integration process of Muslims in the nation.

The question is whether the religious versus secular dichotomy is correct? Considering that Muslims are now expected to secularize in order to be identified as integrated, the non-normative question is whether there are indeed such fundamental differences in the manner in which Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims approach the issue of faith.

This qualitative study addresses these issues from a simple yet novel point. By comparing the socioeconomic status and the religious beliefs of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands, this study examines the commonalities and differences between the Dutch ‘secularists’ and Muslim ‘believers’. *Section a* briefly introduces the major events that have shaped the Dutch approach to the integration process to help elucidate why this study is imperative. *Section b* presents the methodological scope and the methods applied in this study. *Section c* presents the results and *section d* analyzes and discusses the findings in relation to the debates on Muslims’ ‘failed’ integration.

a) From socioeconomic integration to anticipation for secularization

For many European nations, the adoption of the multicultural dogma was accompanied with the need to rewrite the historical bonds between the nation and the ethnic community. This was not the case in the Netherlands. With great distinction to its German neighbor, the modern Dutch people never perceived themselves as an ethnic nation. Devoid of such an organic understanding of ‘the people’, the Netherlands’s decision to follow multiculturalism faced none of the challenges that accompany this depart of the ‘notion of the state’ from a particular ethnic or religious community. Furthermore, unlike French republicanism, the Dutch people also did not perceive the state as the symbol of one distinct national ideological community or culture. The Dutch historical socio-political pillar model (*verzuiling*) and its 1917 consociational arrangement approved the independency of the four ideological realms that constituted Dutch society: Catholicism, Socialism, Calvinism and Liberalism. Thusly, the Dutch traditionally perceived the nation as a cooperative entity assembled by very different, yet equally legitimate ideological constituents.² These historical and cultural developments established a natural affinity of the Netherlands to the notion of multiculturalism.

Social and cultural developments enhanced the support for multiculturalism. The increased secularization of Dutch society during the 60s, the rising identification with the liberal realm and the attrition of the religious pillars paved the way for the advancement of the multicultural dogma. Although the constitutional reform of 1983 terminated public financial support of the churches,³ the ideological and institutional relics of the pillar model and the national culture of deliberation (*Polder thinking*) sustained the ideological and institutional support for the empowerment of different religious, cultural and ideological groups. Due to a lack of organic ancestry in the nation and the historical commitment to pluralism and cooperation with different religious and cultural communities, there was also little ideological foundation for the creation of extreme right parties or for the advancement of arguments against immigration.⁴ During most of the 20th century, the nation maintained this exceptional commitment to cultural and religious equality and advanced an ambitious approach to pluralism.⁵

² Lijphart, Arend. *The Politics of Accommodation. Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1968).

³ Dekker, Paul and Ester, Peter. “Depillarization, Deconfessionalization, and De-Ideologization: Empirical Trends in Dutch Society 1959-1992”, *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 37, No.4. 1996.

⁴ Lucardie, Paul. “Right-Wing Extremism in the Netherlands: Why it is still a marginal phenomenon”. Paper presented at the Symposium Right-Wing Extremism in Europe, organized by the Academy for Politics and Current Affairs of the *Hanns Seidel Foundation*, Munich, in cooperation with the *European Centre for Research and Action on Racism and anti-Semitism (CERA)*, Paris. Conference held in Berlin, November 3-5, 2000.

⁵ Monsma, Stephen V. and Soper, Christopher J. *The Challenge of Pluralism: Church and State in Five Democracies*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997).

This pluralistic understanding of nationhood formed the Netherlands’s famed approach to immigrants and asylum seekers and catalyzed the creation of lenient policies and legislations to accommodate migrants.⁶ Across the centuries, the Netherlands had welcomed a variety of immigrants, including seasonal workers from Germany, Huguenots from France and Jews and gypsies.⁷ Since the beginning of the 19th century, the Dutch accommodated Chinese workers and thousands of Moluccans and Indonesians from its former colonies.

As in other European nations, the more modernized immigration policies of the 1960s were fashioned in accordance to the post-WW2 need for a blue-collar workforce.⁸ To attend the economical needs, the Netherlands received thousands of immigrants from Turkey and Morocco, who later brought over their kin as part of the state’s extended family reunification laws during the 1980s. Furthermore, in the early 1990s the nation welcomed thousands of refugees and asylum seekers from various war-ridden nations.⁹

In present time, the Netherlands is home to roughly one million Muslim citizens, who mainly originated from Morocco and Turkey. Dutch Muslims constitute an approximate 6 percent of the national population, making the Netherlands the country with the second largest Muslim community in Western Europe (France has the largest Muslim community).¹⁰ Similarly to other labor and post-colonial immigration trends in Western Europe, Dutch Muslim immigrants mainly settled in urban areas. Despite the lenient and accommodating approach of the Netherlands to its newcomers, the new Muslim Dutchmen encountered discrimination and marginalization in addition to their disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions.¹¹ The underprivileged position of Muslims in the field of housing, education, employment and political representation continues in present times. For example, in Amsterdam, the number of households living under 110 percent of the social minimum is persistently three times higher among households with a non-Western (and most often Muslim background), in comparison to those with a Dutch background.¹²

⁶ Phillips, Anne. *Multiculturalism without culture*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), p.4.

⁷ Sneiderman, Paul M. and Hagendoorn, Louk. *When ways of Life Collide*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

⁸ Entzinger, Han. “The Rise and fall of Multiculturalism: The Case of The Netherlands,” in: Joppke, Christian and Morawska, Ewa (eds.) *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation- States*. (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave, 2003), pp 59-86.

⁹ “Jaarrapport Integratie 2007,” SCP. The Hague. 2007.

¹⁰ Estimations on the number of Muslim in the Netherlands have varied greatly along the years, often changed either way to accommodate specific interest groups. In recent years, national agencies and NGOs have developed more reliable methods. See: Van Herten Mariekke and Otten, Ferdy. “Naar een nieuwe schatting van het aantal islamieten in Nederland” in: “Bevolkingstrends, 3e kwartaal 2007.” *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (hereafter noted as CBS)*. The Hague, 2007; “Muslims in the Netherlands 2012”, *FORUM Institute for Multicultural Affairs*. Utrecht. The Netherlands. August 2012.

¹¹ “Regionale Kerncijfers Nederland.” Dossier: Alloctonen. Grote Gemeenten. Cijfers. *CBS*. The Hague, 2013.

¹² Most of the Dutch citizens from a non-western background come from Turkey and Morocco and are

Until the late 90s, the integration process of newcomers was rather undemanding. Immigrants were mainly expected to seize the opportunity to improve their linguistic skills and socioeconomic status.

However, dramatic developments in the Netherlands advanced a new social and political discourse that reformed the approach of authorities to the process of integration of newcomers and their descendents. Public concerns about the overloaded welfare system and influx of immigration increased during the 90s. However, criticizing multiculturalism remained a stern taboo.¹³ Political figures such as Frits Bolkestein and Pim Fortuyn had tried to disparage the lenient immigration policies of the 90s' purple-labour governments, with little success. Fortuyn, a charismatic gay and Christian conservative (a peculiar political alignment that exemplifies the uniqueness of Dutch liberalism) increasingly centralized on the alleged 'threat' of Islam to the Dutch way of life.¹⁴ However, it was only after the events of 9/11 that such ideas gained legitimacy. The controversial statements about homosexuals made by the radical Dutch Imam El-Moumni and the news reports on Dutch youngsters celebrating 9/11 created growing unease about the presence of Muslims in the Netherlands, and greater support to such critics of multiculturalism.¹⁵ In the following years, newspaper headlines declared on the failure of integration and demanded the abolishment of multiculturalism.¹⁶ Public figures such as Theo van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi Ali became notable and harsh critics of Islam, while repeatedly referring to the Prophet as a pedophile, tyrant and Hitler.¹⁷ The assassination of van Gogh in 2004 by a Dutch-born Muslim changed this nation beyond recognition.

In the public discourse, a new 'realist' realm emerged, mostly identified with atheist intellectuals such as Herman Philipse, Paul Cliteur and Afshin Ellian, all highly critical of religion in general, and Islam in particular.¹⁸ Herman Philipse

generally affiliated to the Islam religion. See: "Laag en langdurig laag inkomen; huishoudenskenmerken en regio." Thema: Inkomen en bestedingen. Cijfers. Huishoudens met een laag inkomen naar regio. CBS. The Hague, 2010; "Allochtonen in Nederland", Bevolkingsstatistiek. CBS. The Hague. January 1, 2012.

¹³ Rabinowitz, George., Macdonald, Stuart Elaine., and Listhaug, Ola. "New players in an old game: Party Strategy in Multiparty Systems," *Comparative Political Studies*. Vol. 24, No.2, July 1991, pp. 147–185.

¹⁴ F. Bolkestein, the former leader of the VVD had articulated concerns on the multicultural dogma in the early 90s, resulting in strong condemnations. See: Mudde, Cas and Van Holsteyn, Joop. "The Netherlands: Explaining the Limited Success of the Extreme Right," in: Hainsworth, Paul. (ed.) *The Politics of the Extreme Right: From the Margins to the Mainstream* (London and New York: Pinter, 2000), pp 144-171.

¹⁵ Prins, Baukje. "The Nerve to Break Taboos: New Realism in the Dutch Discourse on Multiculturalism". *Journal of International Migration and Integration*. Vol. 3, Issue 3-4, 2002, pp. 363-380; Meuleman, Johan. "Headscarves, Homosexuals, and Imams in the Netherlands," *ISIM Newsletter*. Leiden. September 8, 2001, p. 33; Hekma, Gert. "Imams and Homosexuality: A Post-gay Debate in the Netherlands," *Sexualities*. Vol.5. No.2. 2002, pp 237-248.

¹⁶ Fennema, Meindert. "Het Publieke Debat na 11 September", *De Gids*. Vol.165. No.3, 2002, pp. 229-244; Ephimenco, Sylvain. *Open brief aan de moslims van Nederland. Na de aanslagen van 11 september 2001*. (Utrecht: Het Spectrum, 2001); Scheffer, Paul. "Het multiculturele drama," *NRC Handelsblad*. The Netherlands. Print edition. January 29, 2000.

¹⁷ Ali, Hirshi Ayaan. "Confrontatie, geen verzoening," *De Volkskrant*. The Netherlands. Online edition. April 8, 2006.

¹⁸ Bruinessen, Martin. "After Van Gogh: Roots of Anti-Muslim Rage". Paper presented at the

stated that Islam cultivated tribal-like attributions that make it fundamentally incompatible with the renaissance of Western societies.¹⁹ Philipse argued that Muslims were unable to develop the personal accountability due to their unwavering commitment to religious and irrational doctrines. Cliteur suggested that Islam, as other religions, engenders aggression among believers which ultimately translates into the eruption of violence.²⁰ Following this rationale, it was made clear that Muslims could only become ‘true’ democratic and tolerant Dutchmen if they denounced their affiliation to Islam.²¹ By contrasting Dutch society to Islam, this discourse affirmed the pre-eminence of the atheist perspective due to its assumed unrelenting and necessary pursuit after emancipation from authority and personal freedom.

The demand to fortify the secular nature as against the threat of the irrationalism of Islam also facilitated dramatic political changes. A new right-wing form of nationalism advanced by Geert Wilders and his *Partij Voor Vrijheid* (PVV) utilized a sophisticated rhetoric that pitted liberal rights against Muslims. In the last decade the support for the PVV soared, making it one of the three largest parties in parliament. As noted in my previous work, in aim to address the public unrest about Islam and curtail the rising support for the rising popularity of the PVV, the conservative and centrist parties fashioned a new and principled-strategy. The new approach of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) and *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (CDA) fuses Dutch nationalism and secularism, reifying the supremacy of secularism in the nation while refraining from explicit racist or anti-Muslim positions. The new approach of the centrist parties is a final bulwark against the blatant anti-Muslim positions of the far-right.²² After the national elections of 2010, for the first time in history, the conservative VVD became the largest political party in the Netherlands.

The social and political developments reformed the Dutch approach to nationalism and the process of integration. Since 2002, the conservative Balkenende (CDA) and the Rutte (VVD) Cabinets require newcomers to adapt to the ‘norms’ of society. For example, in September 2003, the Minister for Immigration and Integration send a “New Style Integration Policy letter” to the lower house initiating a new policy declaring that the ‘objective of integration’ is the formation of a “shared

Seventh Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, organized by the Mediterranean Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the *European University Institute at Florence & Montecatini Terme*, March 22-26, 2006.

¹⁹ Philipse, Herman. “Stop de tribalisering van Nederland,” opinion column. *NRC Handelsblad*. The Netherlands. Online edition. September 27, 2003.

²⁰ Cliteur, Paul. “De Band tussen godsdienst en moraal moet worden doorgeknipt,” *Trouw*. The Netherlands. Online edition. January 13, 2003. Also see: De Beus, Jos., Van der Meer, Jelle., Lensink, Marlies., Huinder, Chris., Krijnen, Henk., and Pans, Larissa. “Op gespannen voet. Politieke opinies over de multiculturele samenleving,” *The Institute for Multicultural Development (FORUM)*. Utrecht, 2002, pp. 47-55.

²¹ Bruinessen, Martin. “After Van Gogh: Roots of Anti-Muslim Rage”...op.cita.

²² See: Elfersy, Daphna. “The Populist Extreme Right Party in the Netherlands: Evaluating the principled-adoption strategy”. Paper presented at the ASN World Convention at Columbia University in New York on April 18-20, 2013.

citizenship.” This letter stated that, in addition to the development of linguistic skills and closing of socio-economic gaps, newcomers are expected to “comply with Dutch norms”.²³ Nowadays, immigrants are asked to pass a language tests and prove their understanding of Dutch society and commitment to its long affair with ‘the right to dissent’ from religion and conservatism.

In *Nationalizing Islam* Spektorowski and me have shown how this new approach advanced various “civic integration policies” aimed to facilitate the socio-cultural integration of Muslims into to this highly secular and liberal society.²⁴ To do so, such policies founded an unprecedented intervention into the religious institutions and lives of Muslims, including the monitoring and regulating of Imam training, mosques and Islamic schools and organizations.²⁵

However, despite these new integration policies, the public and governments remain worried about the integration of Muslims. Newspaper headlines and ministers repeatedly refer to the ‘integration crisis’ and warn about the ‘dangerous repercussions’ of the failure to integrate Muslims.²⁶ A pivotal issue is that the critic towards Dutch Muslims is not centralized on the adherence to violence or terror, which they repeatedly denounce, but on their ‘unwillingness’ to adopt the ‘Dutch values and norms’, which are increasingly defined as secular and atheist.

The question is how to define a successful integration? Unlike other European nations, which following the acts of terror searched after Muslim voices that could convey a moderate and more ‘liberal’ form of Islam, in the Netherlands even the most open forms of Islam are perceived as some form of threat to the nation. It seems that for the Dutch, the Islamic religion, in all of its forms, is necessarily an irrational, tribal and archaic entity that challenges the notion of the free and ‘emancipated’ secular society. Indeed, under the assumption that Dutch secular reason is superior due to its emancipation from the ‘irrationality’ of belief, the Dutch have intertwined the integration process of Muslims with the oxymoronic expectation for Muslims’ secularization. Unsurprisingly, under this approach, Dutch Muslims are often mere objects of the discourse rather than active partners in it, often depicted as victims of their own convictions.

The irony is that the rising concerns about the integration process of Dutch Muslims are accompanied with rather optimistic developments. Researches show that in the last 10 years the Muslim community has made considerable progress; the acceptance of democracy is irrefutable, the education levels have soared, unem-

²³ “The development of an integration monitor of first and second generation immigrants in the Netherlands,” *CBS*, The Hague. October 2004, p.13.

²⁴ Spektorowski, Alberto and Elfersy, Daphna. *Nationalizing Islam*. Forthcoming.

²⁵ Not only newcomers, but also settled immigrant citizens (*oudkomers*), are required to pass an integration test. See: Spektorowski, Alberto and Elfersy, Daphna. *ibid*. Also see: Joppke, Christian. “Transformation of Immigrant Integration. Civic Integration and Antidiscrimination in the Netherlands, France, and Germany,” *World Politics*. Vol. 59. No.2. 2007, p. 249.

²⁶ See for example: De Witt, Robert. “Slechte integratie grootste gevaar voor Nederland.” *Elsevier*. The Netherlands. Online edition. October 8, 2008; De Beaufort, Binnert. “Hoe gaat het eigenlijk met de integratie in Nederland?,” *Vrij Nederland*. The Netherlands. Online edition. November 29, 2008.

ployment levels are declining and a new Muslim middle-class has emerged. Dutch Muslims are clearly on a peaceful and productive path. However, Muslims have not abandoned their faith.

Nowadays, the Dutch authorities evaluate the integration process of Muslims by examining the socioeconomic status *and* the affiliation to the Islamic belief. To assess the integration process, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and other governmental agencies issue annual reports that evaluate the gaps between the socioeconomic status of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands. The SCP notes that it currently also monitors the “socio-cultural” aspects of integration, which include “value orientations” and “religion, with special attention for Islam.”²⁷ Interestingly, the SCP refrains from explicitly noting the acceptance of “liberal” values as a sign of integration, and centers on the examination of religious beliefs and practices.

The question is if the widely shared assumption that Dutch society is inherently ‘free’ from the ‘irrationalism of faith’ is correct. National agencies rarely compare the levels of faith and religious practices of Muslims to those of non-Muslims in the Netherlands. Thus, authorities generally assume that the affiliation to religion and belief among non-Muslims in the Netherlands is minute. Since such reports generally overlook the variety of faith, belief and religious and spiritual practices existing in general society, assessments of the integration of Muslims into society are largely based on a lopsided understanding that categorizes Muslims as ‘believers’ and society as ‘secular’.

This inattentive approach to the integration process is especially problematic if taking into consideration the extensive and increasing engagement of Dutch society with various forms of spirituality. Research reveals that the departing from the church is not necessarily translated to an abandonment of belief, but rather, the absconding of religious institutions.²⁸ In this regard, several researches have suggested that faith in the Netherlands has transformed from theism to holism (also referred to as *ietsism*, ‘somethingism’), best understood as a more individual, obscure and less ethical form of spirituality.²⁹ This new form of belief is also not void of critic of society’s mainstream norms.³⁰

²⁷ Interestingly, the SCP refrains from noting that it monitors the level of conservatism or liberalism among immigrants. “Minorities and Integration”. Under section: Topics. SCP. (website). n/d. At: www.scp.nl

²⁸ Davie, Grace. *Religion in Britain since 1945: believing without belonging*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); Halman, Joep., and Peters, Jan. *God in Nederland 1966-1996*. (Amsterdam: Anthos, 1997), p. 18; On the changing nature of the image of God in Dutch society, see: De Vos, Marjoleine. *Godsbeelden. Vierde J.H. van Oosbreelezing*. (Delft: Centraal Boekhuis, 2005). On the challenges secular society faces in establishing ethics in the absence of divine providence, see: Vuijsje, Herman. *Tot hier heeft de Heer ons geholpen*. (Amsterdam: Contact, 2007).

²⁹ Nissen, Peter J.A. “In de leer bij ervaringsdeskundigen”, in: Bluysen, Jan (ed.) *De donkere stiltte van God. Ervarendewijs op zoek*, (Veerhuis: Alphen aan de Maas, 2009), pp. 108-117; Dekker, Gerard., De Hart, Joep., and Peters, Jan. *God in Nederland 1966-1996*. (Amsterdam: Anthos, 1997), p. 18; On the changing nature of the image of God in Dutch society, see: De Vos, Marjoleine. *Godsbeelden. Vierde J.H. van Oosbreelezing*. (Delft: Centraal Boekhuis, 2005). On the challenges secular society faces in establishing ethics in the absence of divine providence, see: Vuijsje, Herman. *Tot hier heeft de Heer ons geholpen*. (Amsterdam: Contact, 2007).

³⁰ De Hart, Joep. “Zwevende Gelovigen.” SCP. The Hague. May 2013, p. 239.

In view of such findings, this study presents a timely question and asks whether the dichotomist perspective of “believer versus secularist” is a true reflection of the differences between Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims. Thusly, it aims to provide a more complete and critical evaluation of the integration process, as defined by Dutch authorities. It assumes that even if evaluated by the “old” socioeconomic and “new” secular Dutch criteria, the integration Dutch Muslims process is successful taking into account that Muslims and non-Muslims present increasing similarities in their socioeconomic status and approach to faith and belief.

b) Methodology

The renowned sociologist Max Weber provides the most compelling explanations to questions pertaining to secular reason’s own irrationalism. Weber offers a fascinating account of the secularization process of Europe by pointing to the role of Protestant religious ethics in the development of the instrumental-rational and the capitalistic system. Weber suggests that in the Protestant European secularization process, and its subsequent definition of science as a mode of knowledge, was accompanied by its distinction from other forms of rationalities oriented in belief, ultimately rendering religion as ‘irrational’ and a ‘sacrifice of the intellect’.³¹ Nevertheless, Weber noted that any form of reason, whether secular or religious, is inherently founded on its own ‘irrationality’ due to the arbitrariness of the human rationalization process itself.³²

For Weber, the disenchantment of the world was especially disturbing in view of the intertwining of secularity with the profit driven capitalistic system. Probably best articulated by the well-known notion of the “iron cage”, Weber’s apprehension from a profit driven secular society stemmed out of its erosion of the ethical and sociological factors that cultivated the very values and notions that Western civilization’s treasures.³³

Considering that Weber was distrustful about the ultimate ‘rationality’ of secular reason, his sociology of religion provides a compelling theoretical approach to test the dichotomy between the ‘rational’ secular and ‘irrational’ religious forms of reason. Since the history of the Netherlands was heavily influenced by the Protestant reformation, and especially its branch of Calvinism, this theoretical approach presents a compelling explanation to the tensed relations between Muslims and

³¹ See: Kalberg, Stephen. “Max Weber’s types of rationality: Cornerstones for the analysis of rationalization processes in history.” *American Journal of Sociology*. 1980, pp. 1175; Weber, Max. “The Social Psychology of World’s Religions.” (1946d), in: *Essays in Sociology*. Gerth H.H. and Mills Wright C. (trans. and eds.), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978, originally 1958), pp. 350-353.

³² Turner, Bryan S. “Politics and Culture in Islamic Globalism,” in: Roland Robertson and Garrett William. R. (eds.) *Religion and Global Order, Religion and the Political Order* (New York: Paragon, 1991), p. 90.

³³ Weber, Max. “The Social Psychology of World’s Religions.” (1946d)...op.cita, pp. 331.

non-believers in the Netherlands. For Weber, Calvinism and its strong orientation to the notion of predestination was pivotal to the birth of secularization, making Dutch society more disposed to heightened tensions with religion and other 'irrational' and competing form of reason. Indeed, in present times, the Netherlands is one of the top ten atheist countries in the world.³⁴

The Netherlands is undeniably also the most epic example of the encounter between Muslims and a liberal and secularized society. In the nation that became renowned for the accommodation of drug use and the sex industry, one can now just as easily find a mosque or buy a Qur'an. Next to the ringing of Church bells and smells of bakeries and hashish, one can also enjoy from the call of the muezzin and aroma of delicacies from the middle-east. This study asks if such distinct sights, sound, cultures and people are symbolic of the underlying philosophical contrasts between secularity and belief, as commonly suggested by the Dutch governments, or different ethical world views, as implied by Weber.

To advance a better understanding of the integration process, as defined by Dutch authorities, this study examines the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, while utilizing new data on faith and religion among general Dutch society. As such, it provides a more complete and accurate review of the alleged gaps between the 'religious' Muslims and 'secular' Dutchmen and the integration process as a whole. To evaluate the differences in the socioeconomic status and level of secularity of these two groups, this study presents the latest data on the issue, as provided by academic scholars, the Netherlands' national agencies for statistics and various NGOs. This study evaluates the integration process in two phases:

1) To evaluate the classic or "old" approach to integration, this study presents updated statistics regarding the socioeconomic differences among Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands, by noting levels of unemployment, education and political participation.

2) To assess the "new" Dutch approach to integration, this study presents timely statistics about adherence to religion, belief and spirituality among Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands. It assesses the difference in the affiliation of these two groups to religious institutions, as presented by the affiliation and attendance of mosques and churches, and the adherence of these groups to the 'irrationality of faith', as presented by belief in the deities and a higher power.

c) Findings

1) Socioeconomic integration

While there are still significant differences between the socioeconomic status of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands, in the last ten years Dutch Muslims have made a remarkable progress. Figure One presents a variety of examples to the notable changes that have taking place among this religious minority.

³⁴ See: "Global index of religiosity and atheism 2012." *WIN-Gallup International*. 2012.

Figure One: Socioeconomic status of Muslims and non-Muslims³⁵

Table One: Percentage of populations (aged 18-20) attending higher education in the Netherlands in 1995 and 2007.

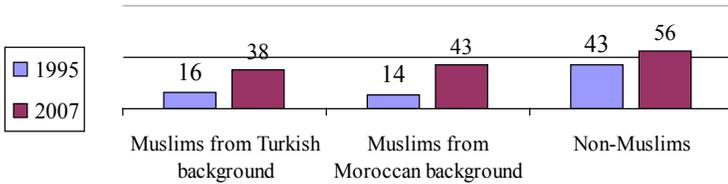


Table Two: Percentage of populations (aged 18-20) attending higher education in the Netherlands in 1995 and 2007.

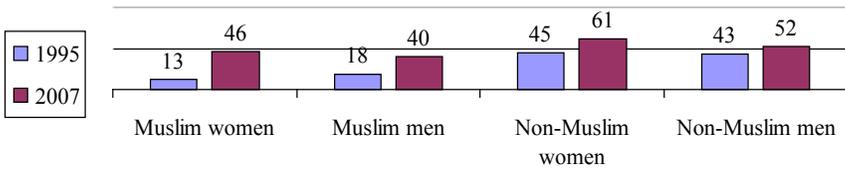


Table Three: Unemployment levels of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands in 2001, 2004 and 2009.

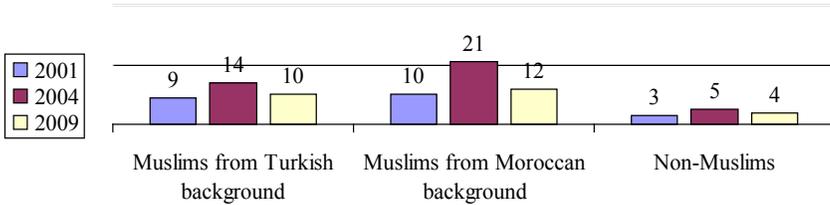
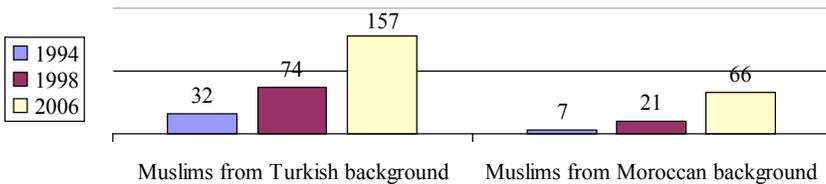


Table Four: Number of Dutch Muslims (from Turkish or Moroccan background) elected to city councils in the 1994, 1998 and 2006.



³⁵ Dutch minorities from a Turkish or Moroccan background are almost exclusively affiliated to the Islamic religion. As such, figures pertaining to such groups are considered as reliable approximations. Tables constructed by the use of statistics presented in: “Jaarrapport integratie 2008”. SCP. The Hague, 2008; “Statline”. CBS. n/d. At: www.statline.cbs.nl; “De positie van moslims in Nederland. Feiten en cijfers.” Factbook editie 2010. Institute for Multicultural Affairs. FORUM. Utrecht. The Netherlands. 2010

Although that there are differences between the socioeconomic status of Muslims from a Moroccan and Turkish background, often explained by the familiarity Turkish immigrants had with modern markets and civic life, both Muslim groups present a notable advancement in the field of education, employment and political representation.

The advancement of Dutch Muslims is arguably best exemplified by the dramatic rise in the percentage of Dutch Muslims that attend higher education. As presented in Table One, the percentage of Dutch Muslims that continue to higher education has almost tripled since 1998, coming much closer to the national average. As presented in Table Two, the rise in the educational levels was considerable in both Muslim men and women, but interestingly, even more prominent among women.

As noted in Table Three, Dutch Muslims still suffer from higher levels of unemployment in comparison to non-Muslims. The sharp rise in the unemployment levels of Muslims in 2004 are best explained by the aforementioned dramatic political events that occurred in the nation in this year. Nevertheless, despite the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, Muslims' unemployment levels declined significantly. However, Dutch Muslims are still three to four times more likely to be unemployed in comparison to non-Muslims.

Table Four presents the significant developments that have taken place in the political representation of Muslims in Dutch city councils. For example, in 1994, there were only 34 Muslims from a Turkish background in Dutch city councils. By 2006, there were 157 Turkish Muslim members in such councils.

2) The secular approach to integration

Although that it is widely assumed that Muslims in the Netherlands are surrounded by an overwhelming atheist and secular society, there are many overlooked similarities in the manner in which these groups approach the subject of religion and belief. Figures Two and Three present various examples to the important similarities in the approach of Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims to religious institutions, religion and belief in general.

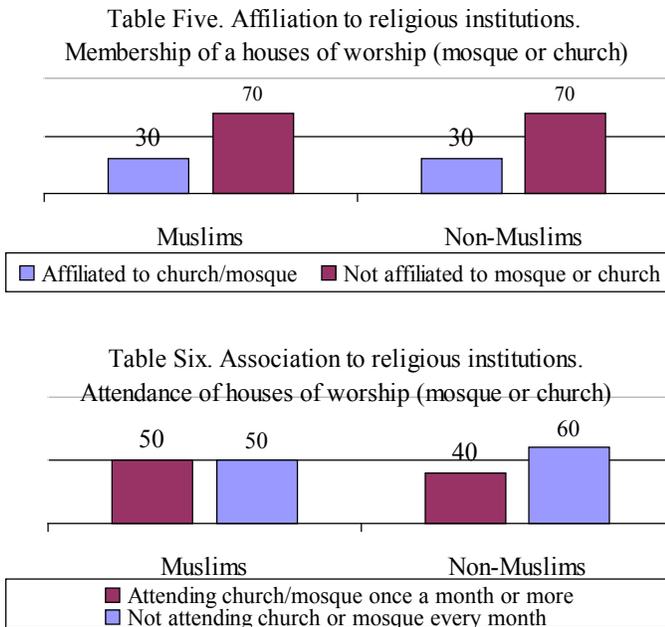
* The affiliation to religious institutions:

For the Dutch, religious institutions are undeniably a thing of the past. The Dutch society has incontestably departed from its church. According to longitudinal studies performed by the Dutch bureau for cultural and social planning (SCP), the share of people that stated that they are unaffiliated to a church rose from 24 percent in 1958 to 64 percent in 2004.³⁶ The percentage of people associated to the Roman Catholic Church dropped from 42 percent in 1958 to 17

³⁶ Becker, Jos and De Hart, Joep. "Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland," *Sociaal and Cultureel Planbureau (SCP)*. The Hague. September 2006.

percent in 2004. In these years the percentage of people associated to the Dutch Reformed Church dropped from 23 to 6 percent. However, in the last decade, the departing from the church has halted as figures remain fairly steady. In present times, about one out of three Dutchmen is associated to some kind of church. Even in these ‘secularized’ times, about 40 percent of Dutch society attends a church at least once a month.³⁷

Figure Two: Association to religious institutions among Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands³⁸



However, in this respect, Dutch Muslims are not that different in their relation to the mosque. In 2004 only one quarter of all Turks and one fifth of Moroccans in the Netherlands were affiliated to an organization or mosque.³⁹ Thus, almost equally to the ‘native’

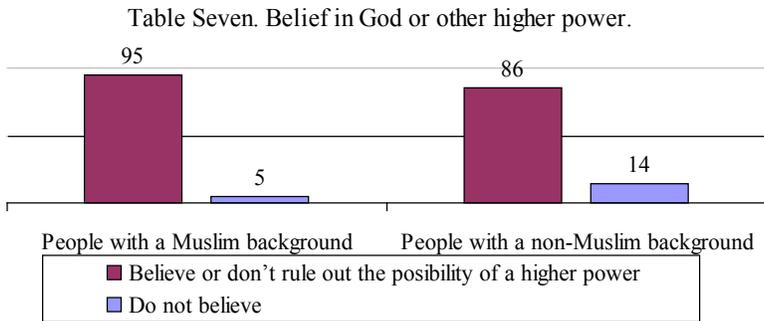
³⁷ Becker, Jos and De Hart, Joep. ...ibid.

³⁸ Tables constructed by the use of statistics presented in: Becker, Jos and De Hart, Joep. “Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland,” ...op.cita; Phalet, Karen and Van Praag, Carlo. “Moslims in Nederland.” ...op.cita; Maliepaard, Mieke and Gijsberts, Merove. “Moslims in Nederland 2012.” ...op.cita, p.16.

³⁹ Phalet, Karen and Van Praag, Carlo. “Moslims in Nederland.” werkdocument 106a and 106b.

society, only an approximate one out of three Dutch Muslims is affiliated to a specific religious institution (see Table Five). Furthermore, according to polls conducted by the SCP in 2012, almost half of the Dutch Muslims from a Moroccan, Turkish and Somali background visit the mosque once a month, also similar to the practices of the general society (see Table Six).⁴⁰

Figure Three: Belief in God or a higher power among Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands ⁴¹



* The belief in God or a higher power:

In present times, exploring faith by the affiliation to religious institutions might overlook the more fundamental issue at hand. Indeed, faith is not merely expressed by the attendance of churches or mosques, but also the belief in a deity or higher power.

There has been a sharp decline in the belief in certain biblical notions in Dutch society. The percentage of people that stated that they believe that the Old Testament is ‘the word of God’ has declined from 77 percent in 1966 to 31 percent. Only 24 percent believe that Adam and Eve really existed, compared to 75 percent in 1966, and even less believes in the existence of ‘hell’.⁴²

However, the percentage of ‘native’ Dutch people that stated that they believe in miracles rose from 31 percent in 1991 to 43 percent in 2004. More importantly, half of the Dutch believe in a ‘life after death’, and about 40 percent believe in a ‘heaven’. A similar number of people stated that praying is useful.

SCP. The Hague, June 2004.

⁴⁰ Maliepaard, Mieke and Gijsberts, Merove. “Moslims in Nederland 2012.” SCP. The Hague, 2012, p.16.

⁴¹ Tables constructed by the use of statistics presented in: “Global index of religiosity and atheism 2012.”...op.cita; Maliepaard, Mieke... op.cita, p. 16,182.

⁴² “God in Nederland 1966; Progressiviteit en Conservatisme 1970.” SCP. The Hague, 1975.

What might be surprising to some is that the belief in the afterlife and a heaven has actually risen among those that are not affiliated to a church.⁴³ As revealed by De Hart, as much as 76 percent report to have had at least one ‘mystic experience’ in their lives.⁴⁴ The emergence of this new non-institutional spirituality in Dutch society has even been titled as the ‘religion of the self’.

The Netherlands is indeed in the top ten atheist countries in the world. However, even in this high ranked position, the share of Dutchmen that define themselves as atheists is only 14 percent, revealing that the large majority of this society still believes in, or the possibility of, the existence of some form of supernatural higher power. According to the polls performed by Win-Gallup in 2013, as much as 42 percent of Dutch society even defined itself as “religious”.⁴⁵

Among the immigrants that came to the Netherlands from a Muslim background, the affiliation to Islam was always strong. The identification of Dutch Muslims with the Islamic religion was high and stable even in its earliest recordings in the early 90s, at no time falling below 90 percent.⁴⁶ Almost all Dutch Muslims, regardless of their ethnic or national background, see great significance in their faith and adhere to certain basic religious provisions, such as the eating of *halal* foods. About half of the Dutch Muslim women wear the *hijab*. The ‘second’ and ‘third’ generations of Muslims are more flexible about the performance of the daily prayers and the wearing of the *hijab*.⁴⁷

Since 95 percent of the Dutch Muslims belief in god, and about 86 percent of the ‘native’ society beliefs in some form of notion of deity, there are clear similarities between the manner in which these groups approach the issue of belief and the possible existence of a higher power (see Table Seven in Figure Three).

d) “Closing the gap”: Bourgeoisized Muslims and spiritualized secularists

This brief review of the integration process of Muslims into Dutch society revealed a compelling reality. Despite the common perception in the public discourse on the ‘failure’ of Muslims’ integration, the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands are generally minute.

The “old” Dutch integration model centralized on the socioeconomic status of immigrants as the primary indicator of the success of the integration process of newcomers. As presented in section c, the levels of education, employment and political representation of Dutch Muslims have risen dramatically and are catching up with the levels of the general society. These findings suggest that,

⁴³ Becker, Jos and De Hart, Joep. “Godsdienstige veranderingen in Nederland,” ...op.cita.

⁴⁴ De Hart, Joep. “Zwevende Gelovigen”...op.cita, p.167, 224.

⁴⁵ “Global index of religiosity and atheism 2012.” ...op.cita.

⁴⁶ Maliepaard, Mieke and Gijsberts, Merove. “Moslims in Nederland 2012.” ...op.cita, p.16, 182.

⁴⁷ Maliepaard, Mieke... ibid, p. 14.

in accordance to such “old” indicators, the integration of Muslims into the Netherlands has been successful.

The “new” approach of the Netherlands to the integration process perceives the affiliation of Muslims to the Islamic religion as a sign of impaired integration in view of the ‘secularized’ state of general society. Thusly, the new approach to the integration process implies that affiliation to religion or faith is incompatible to the secularized society of the nation. After comparing the affiliation to religious institutions and beliefs of Muslims and non-Muslims, an interesting picture emerges. Muslims and non-Muslims have similar levels of affiliation to religious institutions and a degree of resemblance in the levels of the belief in the existence of a God or the supernatural.

These findings suggest that, even if measured by the new and old criteria, claims on the ‘failure of the integration of Muslims’ may be refuted. The gap between the newcomers and general society is indeed closing and both sides are contributing to the thinning of differences. One the hand, Muslims became more bourgeois. On the other hand, the Dutch ‘secularized’ society is still and arguably also increasingly affiliating to other types of belief in higher powers.

These findings help to reveal the absurdity of the debates surrounding the integration of Muslims in the Netherlands. As noted, the affiliation of Muslims to religion is largely seen as incompatible to the scientific rationalism of general society. However, this study has shown that claims in support of the superiority of the ‘objective’ and ‘scientific’ reason often overlook the irrational inclinations embedded in this secularized society. As Peter Berger has noted, “The assumption that we live in a secularized world is false. The world today... is as furiously religious as it ever was...”⁴⁸

Needless to say, there are more substantial differences between the adherence to liberal values between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands, not examined in this research. Research reveals that homosexuality is severely frowned upon by an approximate 45 percent of Dutch Muslims, compared to merely 8 percent in the general population, and similar differences can be found when examining the positions on euthanasia, abortions and premarital sex.⁴⁹ However, Dutch authorities generally center on religious practices to assess the integration process, rather than the underlying ethical and moral questions these different systems of belief present.

As this study has shown, an integration policy is more than the demand of a nation to its newcomers. More than anything, it is a reflection of how society

⁴⁸ Berger, Peter L. (ed.) *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), p. 2.

⁴⁹ De Graaf, Paul M., Kalmijn, Matthijs., Kraaykamp, Gerbert., and Monden, Christiaan W.S. “Sociaal-culturele verschillen tussen Turken, Marokkanen en autochtonen: eerste resultaten van de Nederlandse LevensLoop Studie (NELLS).” *Bevolkingstrends*, 4e kwartaal 2011. Study conducted by the Tilburg, Nijmegen and Amsterdam Universities and funded by the Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (NWO). CBS. The Hague, 2011, pp. 64-69.

perceives its 'ideal' self. In the case of the Netherlands, the historical commitment to the multicultural policies of the 80s and 90s reflected the Dutch self-appraisal on the successful cooperation of its four ideological pillars. In present times, the Netherlands primarily cherishes its secularization over its former adherence to tolerance. The contemporary demand posed to Muslims to secularize reflects the supremacy of rationalism that Dutch society believes it embodies.

Depicting Muslims' affiliation to the Islamic religion as irrational and incompatible to the 'objectivity' of secular reason has undeniably helped to obscure the public debates on integration. Putting to rest the religious versus secular debates presents new questions on the persistence of the public unrest about the presence of Muslims in the Netherlands. If the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims are not explainable by pertaining to the issues of belief, what can serve to explain the underlying apprehension about Muslims? At this point, two plausible explanations come to mind. It is either that Islam is perceived as an alien entity that is irreconcilable to the liberal and permissive values of the Netherlands, or that society utilizes the affiliation to Islam as a pretext to advance racist ideologies that aim to exclude certain ethnic groups from society. At this point, there is evidence in support of both of these points.

In present times, it can not be overlooked that the rejection of Muslims has helped to facilitate apprehension and antagonism to other foreigners as well. While the PVV has centralized on the ousting of Muslims, it is increasingly targeting other groups, including EU-immigrants.⁵⁰ During 2012, the PVV rampaged on failure of the Rutte Cabinet to tighten the immigration criteria of the green-book.⁵¹ The PVV has been attacking immigrants from Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria due to their alleged "nuisance, pollution or overcrowding of the Dutch labor market, integration process or residency", resulting in the filing of an official complaint on discrimination by the Polish Ambassador.⁵² Such developments suggest that the PVV, despite its attempt to distant itself from fascist or racist movements, is essentially drawing its support from citizens that aim to shun the integration of any foreigners or 'non-natives'.

However, as noted by Meindert Fennema, a prominent scholar at the University of Amsterdam, the radicalization of the PVV has also contributed to its diminishing electoral appeal.⁵³ In the 2012 elections the PVV had lost over a third of its voters, mostly to the conservative and labor parties, the VVD and PvdA. Although that the VVD is also largely supportive of the restriction of immigration, it condemns the PVV's offence remarks against Muslims and other immigrants

⁵⁰ Elfersy, Daphna. "The Populist Extreme ..."...op.cita.

⁵¹ "Wilders: Nederland moet Denemarken achterna." *De Telegraaf*. Online edition. November 26, 2011, in: Elfersy, Daphna. "The Populist Extreme..."...op. cita.

⁵² "PVV verzamelt klachten over Oost-Europese arbeiders." *Volkskrant*. Online edition. February 8, 2012. Also see: www.meldpuntmiddenenooosteuropaanen.nl (entered June 3, 2012), in: Elfersy, Daphna. "The Populist Extreme..."...op.cita.

⁵³ Visser, Jeroen. "Waarom heeft Wilders voor het Eerst sinds 2006 Verloren?" *Volkskrant*. Online edition. September 14, 2012, in: Elfersy, Daphna. "The Populist Extreme..."...op.cita.

and prefers to emphasize the need for inclusion under conditioned terms, rather than ask for exclusion. The Rutte Cabinet argues that the Dutch society is constantly changing under the influence of different cultures, but that ultimately, “it has its own distinctive character that is not replaceable.”⁵⁴ By putting to rest the secular versus religious dichotomy, and the de-legitimization of believers under it, it might be possible to attend the different ethics, morals and values social and cultural groups wish to preserve in society.

c) Conclusions

This study set out to evaluate the integration process of Muslims into the Netherlands. In former times, the success of the integration process was generally evaluated by the socioeconomic differences between newcomers and general society. In the post 9/11 era, new criteria were added to evaluate the integration process of Muslims. Considering that the newly introduced standards define secularization as an indicator of a successful integration process, this study set out to evaluate the integration process of Muslims by comparing their socioeconomic status and affiliation to faith to those of general Dutch society.

This study revealed that by these two criteria, the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands are diminishing and by no means, absolute. The Muslim community in the Netherlands has made an astonishing progress by various socioeconomic measures, coming increasingly closer to those of general society. More importantly, the affiliation of non-Muslims in the Netherlands to faith and belief is generally not that different of Muslims’ affiliation to the Islamic faith. Dutch society, similarly to Dutch Muslims, adheres to a variety of religious beliefs and practices.

In view of these findings, this study concludes that socioeconomic factors or differences between secularists and religious people can not serve to explain the perceived ‘failure’ of the integration process of Muslims in the Netherlands. This suggests that the public apprehension of Dutch society from its Muslim citizens is induced by other factors such as racism and the deeper ideological and ontological tensions that exist between what Weber referred to as different religious world views.

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⁵⁴ “Integratienota Integratie, binding, burgerschap.” Beleidsnota. *Rijksoverheid*. Den Haag. June 16, 2011. At: www.rijksoverheid.nl, in: Elfersy, Daphna. “The Populist Extreme...”...op.cita.

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