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Teasing ‘Islam’: ‘Islam’ as the Other Side of ‘Tolerance’ in Contemporary Dutch Politics

LUCIEN VAN LIERE

ABSTRACT *This article deals with the role of ‘Islam’ in contemporary Dutch political discourses on tolerance. I will show how Islam is described as an ideology (and not as a religion) competing with liberal values. I argue that political disputes are not at all about Islam as a living religion, but about ‘Islam’ as a culturally presumed menace to, or negative projection of, dominant Dutch imaginaries, such as tolerance and free speech, that are taken as elementary conditions for a liberal democratic state. The first part of this article deals with the staging and development of ‘Islam’ in Dutch politics since the 1970s. Part two develops a theoretical understanding of the framing of ‘Islam’ as the opponent of ‘tolerance’ and argues that this position shows a typical modern stance.*

Introduction

Labelled as barbaric or civilized, misogynous or emancipatory, violent or peace-loving, since the 1990s, Islam has become a hot topic in Dutch politics that is used either to discomfit the political left, as it is held responsible for welcoming Muslim immigrants to The Netherlands and pampering them subsequently, or to blame the political right for ignorance, hate-speech, and merciless politics. In this political quarrel, often followed up in quick succession by press reviews, Islam is continually ‘translated’ into the spearheads of liberal secularism, such human rights, gay rights, and women’s rights. Indeed, one wonders what is meant by ‘Islam’ and what role can be ascribed to this meaning. In this article I will show how ‘Islam’ represents in political speeches and documents the other side of a dominant set of Dutch imaginaries (predominantly ‘tolerance’ and ‘freedom of speech’). I will focus on the period between 9/11 and the parliamentary elections of 2010 that showed an enormous victory for Geert Wilders’s Party of Freedom (PVV).

Many analysts have already illuminated the so-called shift in Dutch society from a multicultural perspective towards a perspective of integration and assimilation (Buruma; Eyerman; van Stokkom). Since the start of the 1990s, multiculturalism has been criticised by both politicians and academics, as a *laissez-faire* ideology responsible for the cultural deprivation of immigrants. Some presented ‘assimilation’ as a strong alternative for deprivation, placing the identities of immigrants into modern perspectives on social progress. Others, however, critically argued that the shift from multiculturalism to assimilation was not a shift at all, but rather another episode in a “persistent

culture of racism" (Vasta 713) or that multiculturalism has never been genuinely present (Vink, "Limits" 337).

Moving the subject from 'immigrants' to 'Muslims' in the mid-1990s, the problem was re-defined: instead of a *social-economic* problem with a focus on ethnicity, it became a *cultural-religious* problem, shifting even further after 9/11 into an *ideological* problem, which facilitated the growth of populist parties. In many liberal political speeches, the perceptions of 'Islam' shifted from it being a backward religion to it being an essentially violent ideology. After 9/11, 'Islam' was debated as the big challenge or the big threat to 'tolerance', 'free speech', and 'free choice'. In public discourses, in newspapers, in talk shows, and on the internet, a dominant view prevailed about Islam which saw it as at least potentially dangerous. This labelling was successful for a while and produced electoral victories for some liberal parties, especially in 2010, but during the build-up to the parliamentary elections of September 2012, the message of dealing with an intrinsically 'evil' ideology, to which about one million fellow citizens adhere, became too simple and the political battle between the social democrats and the liberals at a time of economic crisis depleted the electorate of the smaller parties.

Recently, the attention paid to 'Islam' has moved away from ideological-political disputes. A debate about the impact of Islam on criminal Moroccan youths in the House of Representatives, proposed by the Party of Freedom (PVV) and organised in April 2013, showed the political fatigue surrounding this theme among the other parties. However, Islam (and sometimes other religions as well) is regularly implicitly presented as a contested issue in juridical debates (regarding issues on ritual slaughter, circumcision, headscarves, conversion) and social debates (regarding Islamic schools, the schooling of imams, the position of women). These issues show a re-framing of the debate from an ideological to a more cultural-judicial discourse in which 'religion', but especially 'Islam', is intrinsically addressed from perspectives of 'free choice', tolerance, and loyalty.

The fact that Islam became so strongly politicised in The Netherlands can generally be inscribed into the global events following 9/11—the war in Afghanistan and Iraq and the bomb attacks in Kuta (2002), Casablanca (2003), Madrid (2004), and London (2005). In The Netherlands, two political murders (of Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and of Theo van Gogh in 2004) contributed to what Wasif Shadid calls the "exclusion and disloyalization" ("Public" 18) of Muslims in Dutch society by explicitly linking Islam with violence. More specifically, however, the fierce criticism of Islam in The Netherlands can be linked with changing discursive constellations between the secular and the religious. Secularism, as Kocku von Stuckrad argues, "has not led to the control of religion, but to the re-configuration of the religious fields of discourse" (10), as a result of which religion is presented, challenged, and contested in public domains such as courtrooms, parliaments, and hospitals. In the context of this re-configuration, Islam plays a specific role in the negotiation between the religious and the secular. What is meant by 'the secular' is, however, not always the same. The Dutch state is a neutral rather than a secular state. The division between state and religion is not strong and religious organisations are granted subsidies from the state, although a new political current has lately lobbied to stop this structure. The 'secular' is not so

much a description of the real situation of the Dutch state as a discourse that comes to the fore in the context of Islam (Zemni and Fadil 212).

Much research has been carried out on the specific relationship between the secular and the religious, from a very critical (Asad; Mahmood), historical (Taylor, *Secular*), and juridical point of view (Zucca). The appearance of Islam in Dutch society reshuffles this relationship and brings in a new perspective on the negotiation of the religious and the secular. William Cavanaugh's analysis of the role of religion as a specific configuration of political power illuminates the fierce debates surrounding Islam in The Netherlands by linking political negative framings of Islam to deeper negotiations between the secular and the religious. According to Cavanaugh, religion is constructed in the modern West within a specific power frame. The role of religion within this frame is to affirm modern ideas of tolerance and civil rights as solemnly nourished and protected by the secular state. In order to fulfil this role, however, religion is often labelled as intrinsically violent and it is understood as a "transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from 'secular' features such as politics and economics [...]. Religion must therefore be tamed by restricting its access to public power." (4) The more religion can be portrayed as barbaric and violent, the more civilised and peaceful the secular state becomes. The role Cavanaugh ascribes to 'religion' can be illustrated by 'Islam' in Dutch politics. However, while Islam seems to play this role well in political and media discourses, a deeper understanding of the negotiation between the secular and the religious may also unveil certain understandings of 'the modern' as—in Zygmunt Bauman's sense—an ambiguous 'ordering activity' that dialectically creates an obsession with its 'negation' (Bauman, *Liquid* 28–9, *Modernity* 6, 15, "Re-Enchantment"). Applied to the role of Islam in Dutch politics, 'Islam' may be seen as linked with the uncontrollable chaos that modern politics challenges and should control or—in Cavanaugh's words—'tame'. As 'Islam' plays an important role in negatively affirming certain aspects of 'the modern', the question arises how this 'modern' is imagined. An important term that accompanies the 'modern' is 'tolerance'. I will use Charles Taylor's ideas on 'social imaginaries' ("Modern") to understand how discourses on Islam can be linked to social constructions of the self as 'tolerant'.

The central aim of this article is to examine the 'framing' of Islam in Dutch political discourses as an effort to 'translate' Islam into the other side of tolerance (as a prerequisite of the state). As 'the other side', Islam plays an important role in negotiating the meaning of the term 'tolerance' at the intersection of the secular and the religious in the public domain. In order to achieve this aim, I will first focus briefly on the recent political-economic context in which 'Islam' became a reified term for backwardness and barbaric violence (Part 1). I will then concentrate on 'tolerance' as a social imaginary and show how 'Islam' as an abstract political concept sustains this imaginary (Part 2). Thus I will lift the issue to a critical theoretical level and argue that 'Islam' shows a characteristic power configuration of 'modern' politics. To sustain my argument, I will use ideas from Cavanaugh's and Taylor's works as referred to above. What I will not do in this article is to provide a comparative analysis of the use of similar reifications like 'the Muslim world' or 'the West', although I am aware that 'Islam' is strongly related to these.

Part 1: 'Islam' Entering the Stage of Dutch Politics

To elucidate my argument, I will recount part of the recent Dutch history of the way Islam has been perceived. Although this history has had abundant attention by academics from different disciplinary fields (Buruma; Demmers and Mehendale; van Stokkom), most interpretations link case studies to social theories in which 'Islam' as the political construction of a liberal self-perspective remains unquestioned. I will recount the reception of the Muslim presence in Dutch political discourses, starting in the 1970s, and show that Muslims became increasingly framed by old representations of essentialised Islam (Daniel; Varisco). Thus 'Islam' became gradually more and more the other side of tolerance, as the political awareness of the proximity of Islam changed.

In the 1970s, Dutch politics still pursued an open policy towards immigrants. The economy was booming during the 1960s and early 1970s and so-called Dutch pluralism and tolerance were considered export products (Tash). As a consequence of the rapid economic progress, an enormous shortage of cheap labour occurred ('t Hart, Lucassen and Schmal; Vink, "Dutch"). People from Turkey and Morocco were encouraged to come to The Netherlands to fill the vacancies and thousands of mainly poor unskilled workers answered the call. These people were predominantly Muslims. Dutch perspectives on the new workers were naive and 'paternalistic' (van der Valk 245). Multiculturalism was favoured as a soft model for carefree integration politics throughout Western Europe, including The Netherlands. Yet when the first global oil crisis of 1973 hit The Netherlands, immigrant workers became unemployed. Although many Dutch expected the migrant workers to leave (they were generally referred to as *gastarbeiders*—'guest workers'), many decided to stay. As unemployed, under-educated immigrants, they were considered a financial 'problem' because their rights were equal to that of the Dutch unemployed workers. In this competitive context, the image of the lazy, unemployed immigrant, taking advantage of the welfare state, entered public and political discourses.

From Socio-economic to Cultural Problem

In 1982, the first anti-immigrant party won seats in the House of Representatives. The rhetoric of Hans Janmaat's Centre Party was not yet solemnly focused on Islam, but on immigration in general. Slogans like 'full means full' were infused into the debate in the public space. However, Janmaat was considered a pariah by some and a joke by other members of parliament (van Hasselt and Evrengün). He was viewed as a figure lacking charismatic and, while other European countries saw the emergence of right-wing populism (the *Front National* in France, established in 1972, the *Vlaams Blok* in Belgium, created in 1978, and Italian parties preceding the establishment of the *Legha Nord* in 1991 all gained popularity during the 1980s), Janmaat's anti-immigrant slogans were generally ignored. The press blamed him for being a fascist, a Nazi, a national-socialist and, above all, for being 'intolerant'. The fascism frame was widely used to silence Janmaat and to warn against 'intolerance' towards Muslim immigrants or to warn against the 'intolerance' of 'Islam'. Twice, in 1994 and in 1997, Janmaat was summoned

before the law and convicted for ‘offending foreigners’ and for ‘instigating hate against minorities’. These verdicts were based on slogans like ‘full means full’ and ‘we will abolish the multicultural society’ (Hoetink). Janmaat unsuccessfully contested the imaginary of tolerance, arguing along the lines of ‘we have always been hospitable, but...’ (van Hasselt and Evrengün). During the parliamentary elections of 1998, Janmaat party, by then ‘Central Democrats’, did not win any seats in the House of Representatives and faded away. The Netherlands could continue considering itself a model country for tolerance and human rights, an imaginary that was still too strong to be challenged at that time.

However, only a few years later, Meindert Fennema, a political analyst and professor of ethnic relations at the University of Amsterdam, wrote in *De Volkskrant*, a leading Dutch newspaper, that fierce criticism of multiculturalism had ‘now’ become *salonfähig*—socially acceptable (Fennema, “Pim”). Later, in 2007, Fennema argued that Janmaat had been convicted for accusations against immigrants (hate speech) that had ‘now’ become commonplace (Fennema, *Tovenaarsleerling* 193–4).

While, in 1998, Janmaat’s discourse on so-called ‘immigrants’ and ‘foreigners’ had been an exception, in 2007, after the events of 9/11 in the US, the terrorist attacks in Kuta, Casablanca, Madrid, and London and after two political murders in The Netherlands (of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh), hate speech—the vilification of immigrants—had become more socially accepted. However, this discourse now had a more concentrated focus: Islam.

It is important to take one step back in time in order to understand this remarkable shift. Some international intellectual events highlight the Dutch U-turn—moments in time when the borders of what is tolerable and what can be accepted shifted: Francis Fukuyama’s euphoric analysis of the post-Cold War world and Samuel Huntington’s articles and book on the clash of civilizations (“Clash”, *Clash*). Both Fukuyama and Huntington considered Islam to be a serious threat to the social liberties defended by ‘the West’. Islam was portrayed as an ideology which competed with Western values (Fukuyama 45–6), which meant understanding Islam within a classic European power frame, as alien to ‘Europe’. By strongly opposing Islam to liberal values, Islam was not so much evaluated as a religion as an ideology. This idea had a strong influence on Dutch liberals (Maly 76).

One of the critical defenders of Fukuyama’s and, later, Huntington’s perspective on history was a prominent and influential liberal Dutch politician: Frits Bolkestein. In the 1990s, Bolkestein wrote several books and articles on the shadow side of immigration and the multicultural society (“Integratie”), building his central thesis with insights from Fukuyama and Huntington. Although Bolkestein was struggling with his ideas about liberal values and weak government interference, he affirmed the image of the ‘barbaric’ Muslim immigrant, quoting reports on criminality and thus projecting images of barbaric otherness on Muslims (*Moslim*). Implicitly, this projection disclosed a Dutch liberal stance on what ‘we’ are not. With Bolkestein, Janmaat’s ideas about the dangers of mass immigration moved from the extreme right to the liberal right. It then moved even further to the left, when Paul Scheffer published an article in 2000 about the so-called ‘multicultural drama’. Although Scheffer gave a sober and pessimistic analysis of the way Dutch

immigrants lagged behind economic development, he pointed to Islam as an essential element which prevented social-economic progress due to its a-modern view. Scheffer is a member of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA); as a socialist he clearly made a distinction between Islam as a conformist perspective and a stumbling block for 'integration', on the one hand, and Muslims who were conceived to be more or less its victims, on the other hand. As a result, 'Islam' became a reification, demanding that Muslims not participate in Dutch society. Talking about the 'dangers' of immigration was no longer taboo, even on the left side of the political spectrum, and, although both Bolkestein and Scheffer had already mentioned Islam as a potential danger to Dutch society, the focus on Islam became even sharper after 9/11, when the debate took an element from the Western archive that had defined Islam for many centuries (Daniel): violence.

Instead of being concerned about security and human rights in the non-Western world, after 9/11, The Netherlands became worried about its own security. Pim Fortuyn entered the political stage, representing liberal Dutch democracy and defending liberal rights through a tough anti-immigration and anti-Islamic discourse. With his 'Lijst Pim Fortuyn' (LPF), which had been established in 2002, he was the intended president of many, as he fiercely defended 'free speech' as the most fundamental element of a tolerant democratic society. As early as 1997, Fortuyn had published a book on the Islamisation of The Netherlands, which many considered prophetic, especially after 9/11 (*islamisering*). Fortuyn warned against a cultural war. He created the distinct profile of a political prophet, constantly warning against the decline of 'Dutch culture' and 'tolerance' (*verweesde* 178). Indeed, Fortuyn used 9/11 as an easy frame for the already criminalised Dutch Muslims: 46% of the Dutch Muslims declared to have sympathy for the 9/11 attack, while 11% would support a *jihād* against the United States, Fortuyn stated (*ibid* 10). His rhetoric was, however, predominantly focused on 'norms and values', a phrase which he borrowed from the Christian democrats and which he contrasted with 'Islam': "western modernity is at odds with the core-norms and values of Islam" (*ibid* 9). The incommensurability of Islam and Western modernity also instructed his perspective on immigration: "If I could arrange this legally, I would say: no Muslim is coming in any more. But I cannot arrange this. Islam is backward, I just say it, it is a backward culture." (qtd in Poorthuis and Wassink). Besides using the term 'backward', Fortuyn labelled Islam as 'primitive' and 'undeveloped', in contrast to 'Dutch culture', 'tolerance', and 'democracy'. Emphasising this dichotomy, he used the language of war. 'Dutch culture', he argued, is sustained by 'values' that are the result of a history of battle. "We fought for it." (*verweesde* 233).

Interestingly, Fortuyn described an identity that is rooted in the imaginary of an heroic history. William McNeill has argued that a dichotomist understanding of society (in this case: the split between Islamic and Western cultures) effects a new construction of history, which he coined as 'mythistory' (5). In this context, it is certainly not a coincidence that Fortuyn also described Islam as 'culture'; it was an attempt to make plausible a comparison between 'Islam' and 'the West', as if he was speaking about two world perspectives, excluding each other as each other's opposites, and fundamentally writing

totally different histories—one history of sheer violence and repression, the other of battles for peace.

After the assassination of Fortuyn by the animal rights activist Volkert van der Graaf in 2002, the popular media exclaimed that ‘the Left’ had murdered him (Nieuwsuur). ‘The Left’ represented the fatal soft stance towards Islamic immigrants and was held responsible for just about every ‘misconception’ of Islam, but especially for the so-called ‘multicultural drama’. In particular, the Left was held responsible for tolerating an intolerant culture and instigating social unrest. Fortuyn was spectacularly buried in Driehuis (and later re-buried in Provesano, Italy). After his death, criticising his political ideas was not *salonfähig* for many years.

In the context of these tensions, the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 by Muhammad Bouyeri, a young Dutch Muslim, created a strong anti-Islamic press in the Netherlands. Considered a figurehead of free speech, van Gogh’s death was seen as a serious attack on one of the basic tenets of Dutch society. After his murder, social unrest resulted: according to one broadcasting company (RTL Nieuws), there were over 800 reported incidents, including arson attacks on mosques, Islamic schools, and some churches. Based on a survey of research on victims, the *Monitor Racisme en Extremisme* speaks about “thousands, maybe even ten thousands of incidents” in the period 2008–2009, showing no substantial change compared with the period 2004–2005 (Wagenaar and van Donselaar 21). Islam was hotly debated and Muslims felt excluded, which contributed to the radicalisation of young Muslims (ibid 103). The media were blaming fundamentalists, ‘Arabs’, and terrorists for spreading fear and terror in society. Anti-Islamic speech, which would have led to convictions of hate speech during the 1990s, had become commonplace and cemented—what Jolle Demmers and Sameer Mehendale have analysed as—a ‘culturalist’ anti-Islam regime of truth (53–70).

Islam as Ideology

In 2010, the liberal Dutch politician Geert Wilders and his party gained 24 of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives during the national elections. He called for a ban of the sale of the Koran, which he called a ‘fascist book’. Wilders was summoned before a judge in 2010, having been charged for hate speech. In court, his lawyer Bram Moszkowicz compelled the judge to read long texts from the Koran and the *hadith* on violence, which were to show that Islam was indeed a violent ideology endangering liberal democracies. The unusual request that the judge read sacred texts in court, which are to reveal violent content, shows that ‘Islam’ was considered a transhistorical, transnational entity without tradition. It seemed to be extremely difficult after the murder of the free-speech advocate Theo van Gogh to convict anti-Islamic discourse as hate speech. In June 2011, Wilders was exonerated of all charges. One of the decisive arguments used by the judge had to do with the distinction Wilders makes between ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslims’. This remarkable argumentation, based on statements by Wilders like “I don’t hate Muslims, I hate Islam and the Koran”, illustrates the increasing level of political abstract thinking about Islam. The distinction between Islam and Muslims enables politicians to engage their discourse in a liberating crusade against ‘barbaric’

and violent otherness. Islam had by then become an ideology that captures and represses poor people, especially women and homosexuals. Anti-Islamic discourse thus becomes a liberating discourse that sells well within the Dutch people's self-perception of being a tolerant nation; it is an attempt to liberate Muslims from Islam. Beyond this effort, there is the social imaginary of individuality, one of the basic tenets of the law: a Muslim can only adhere to Islam because it is his or her personal free choice, which is defended by the law as an individual right. Behaving as a Muslim must be based on personal choice, not on *sharia* law. Liberated from the authoritative and repressing structure of Islam, people can be installed in the modern imaginary of free individuality.

In this way Islam becomes the other side of a peaceful civilization, based on individuality, respect for all life, freedom of speech, and tolerance. For Islam to become the other side of these secular imaginaries—to assume this considerable role, as I will show—it seems important to detach Islam from its religious content (rituals, prayers, traditions, laws) and re-frame it as an 'ideology': in Wilders's words, Islam is a 'violent ideology', just like fascism and Communism. This ideology blinds people and makes its victims turn into violent competitors of the democratic constitutional state. Wilders refers to the influence Islam has been gaining in Dutch society in terms of a guerrilla war, taking up the discourse of war used by Fortuyn:

In the meantime, many people feel that we are losing The Netherlands. District after district, street after street, school after school is being Islamised. Mass immigration gains new sad records year after year and this will explode in the near future. Criminality is rampant. (Verkiezingsprogramma 4, author's translation)

Despite the fact that school inspectorates argued that Islamic schools were making enormous efforts to create good conditions for social cohesion (Merry and Driessen 212), in Wilders's political programme, all Islamic schools should be shut down (Verkiezingsprogramma 15). His intention was supported by a critical report of the National Security Service (BVD) on criminal activities at Islamic schools and animosity towards Western values in Islamic school books. Although this accusation was strongly denied by Islamic school organisations (Shadid, "Public" 22), Muslims disappeared behind the political labels of 'Islam' as 'criminal', 'alien' or at least 'disloyal', taking 'street after street'. From this perspective, Muslim immigration becomes a 'disaster':

mass immigration [...] is a disaster, it affects all aspects of society; it affects the quality of our education, increases lack of safety in the streets, leads to an exodus from our cities, expels Jews and homosexuals, and flushes decades of women's emancipation down the toilet. (Verkiezingsprogramma 6, author's translation)

Precisely at this point, Islam is not perceived as a religion, but as a competing ideology, introducing different rules to society (ibid 12). As an ideology, Islam is portrayed as disrespecting the liberal value and right of having a faith of one's own. Instead, dominance is at the very heart of Islam: "Democracy and Islam are incompatible. The Netherlands must be protected against the import of Islamic culture. Islamic culture is killing our tolerance and democracy."

(Wilders, *Kies* 65) 'Islam' is portrayed as a competing ideology, contesting national laws with *sharia* law.

As a result of conceptualising or framing Islam as the 'barbaric other' of civilised liberal values, Wilders, like Fortuyn, is able to create a social dichotomy, as he did, for instance, before the House of Representatives on 4 July 2006, when he stated that

Those who intend to kill our constitutional state do not deserve the protection of that state. If you intend to kill, murder our constitutional state with brute violence and sheer hatred to, for example, implement a barbaric Islamic world dominion, it is our conviction that you do not deserve the protection of that constitution and from the international legal order. (Fennema, *Tovenaarsleerling* 131)

Wilders points in this context to so-called 'administrative detention' (ibid 213) and his rhetoric moves towards Giorgio Agamben's concept of *homo sacer*: although you are excluded from the protection of the law, the law still has power over you (Agamben 99, 122).

Part 2: Tolerance

In this part, I will further examine my argument that Dutch political discourses on Islam conceive of Islam as the negative side of the imaginary of liberal democracy and that, by doing so, these discourses are not about the Islamic religious tradition, but about a modern liberal self-perspective.

Tolerance is an important notion in Dutch discourses on Islam. This term can be understood as a 'social imaginary' in Taylor's sense. Phrases like 'we are tolerant' (Spruyt, "Tolerantie"), 'we were tolerant', and 'what started as tolerance has become...' (Blok, "Reactie") prevail in political discourses, as do discourses on 'the freedom of speech', especially after the murder of Theo van Gogh. 'Intolerance' is mainly directed towards social groups having different, often religion-based life-styles and values, whereas 'tolerance' is understood as a social virtue that underlies modern democracy and describes a socio-cultural attitude.

Islam and the Modern Self

A social imaginary, Taylor argues, "is not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society" ("Social" 91). One of the most dominant imaginaries is the Western construct of the self, translated into all kinds of individual freedoms and perspectives on 'the good' (Taylor, *Sources* 3). Because individuality is not an isolated stance, but constantly relates to the social and to what is 'good', the question of how to "force the individual into some kind of social order" and how to "make him or her conform and obey its rules" (Taylor, "Social" 99) is almost an obsession. The social imaginary consists of relational concerns, for instance, the question of how we 'fit together with others' or how things are going with us and our fellow human beings. It is, Taylor argues, about expectations "that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie

these expectations" (ibid 106). This is not unproblematic. For the notions and images which underlie common expectations seem to be the construction and use of language that safeguard the social imaginary not only of how we 'fit with others' but—more importantly—how 'others' fit with 'us'. 'Normal' expectations that create common understanding are constantly liable to practices of normalisation and discursive efforts. But 'expectations' also imply a sense of desire.

Jacques Lacan, who wrote about 'the imaginary' as early as the 1950s, from a psychoanalytical and Marxian view, argued that the "first object of desire is to be recognized by the other" (*Language* 31). For Lacan, this notion means that desire is constructed by language and not the other way around (*Écrit* 9). Lacan's notion that, without language, desire becomes difficult if not impossible can be fruitful to understand the role of 'tolerance' and 'Islam' in Dutch politics. 'Islam' in this respect shows negative desire; it shows what 'we do not want to be' (intolerant, backward, homophobe). But 'what we do not want to be' is unavoidably attractive and desired, simply because who we think we depend on it. This notion can explain why Islam in political discourses is often understood as a transhistorical and transnational entity and not as a living tradition, as observed by Cavanaugh (3). It is not the living Dutch Muslim community that is desired, not as a linguistic frame nor in a mimetic sense, but rather the abstract idea of the 'barbaric other' that is put in an affirmative structure towards the social imaginary of the modern, civilised self. Islam is thus a linguistic side-effect of this social imaginary, creating 'barbarism' and 'intolerance' in a Lacanian sense.

Tolerance and Judgement

The link between intolerance and religion in contemporary debates is not surprising from an historical perspective. In Dutch history, the 'archive' for understanding the relations and negotiations between the religious and the state, from the sixteenth century onwards, 'tolerance' has been a term used in the proximity of religion. Tolerance generally meant 'tolerating religious deviations', especially Catholics, Lutherans, and Jews in Protestant regions (Berkens-Stevelink, Israel and Posthumus-Meyjes). The intention of toleration was, as Maurice van Stiphout argues, to put those with a deviating religious conviction under the protection of the law (van Stiphout 39; Lecler). The 'religious others' were, from time to time, prohibited to 'show' their religion in public. It was, however, not forbidden to 'be' a Catholic, Lutheran or Jew, but only to act as one or to wear symbols related to these particular religions in public. Tolerance meant that something was tolerated as protected by the law without being acknowledged as truth, respected or accepted. The tolerating subject is in the first place the subject of the state, not the 'self' of its citizens.

However, many theorists have criticised the blurred notion of 'tolerance' in modern societies (de Dijn; Forst; Furedi). In a Dutch national campaign launched in autumn 2012, 'tolerance' is understood as a 'product' that may enrich 'your' life by encouraging you to join 'different' rituals, sports, meals, etc., but also to behave well in road traffic. Although this campaign presents tolerance as something for which The Netherlands is world famous (together

with cheese, tulips, DJs, marijuana, and football players), tolerance is de-politicised and personalised. It is about crossing borders, enriching 'your' life, granting 'you' prosperity and happiness (SIRE). This concept of tolerance is closely linked with Taylor's idea of the modern self as a social imaginary. The language in which tolerance appears translates tolerance into a positive attitude. Tolerance may thus become a social frame for intolerance towards groups that are labelled as intolerant.

Frank Furedi has argued that, in many Western contexts, tolerance has been dragged into spheres of political correctness and that it is used as an instrument of good behaviour and conflict prevention. As in the campaign discussed above, the popular use of the word is indeed based on recognition, the first object of desire according to Lacan, translating tolerance into an attitude of non-judgement. The real challenge of tolerance, however, comes with tolerating what you dislike and reject, what you consider objectionable (Furedi; Seligman). Without what Rainer Forst calls the 'objection component', there is no tolerance, but rather indistinct affirmation (315). Furedi emphasises an important argument to understand why the 'objectionable' is an important part of culture. Tolerating what is rejected not only grants the tolerated other the freedom to argue, convince, and develop, but also gives the tolerator the possibility to discover and reflect upon his or her own 'regime of truth', to use Foucault's words. In order to challenge yourself, you need to accept the other's paradigm, which is impossible if tolerance is based on recognition in the Lacanian sense.

The popular understanding of tolerance is not about accepting difference or—in Adam Seligman's words—about demanding "that we accept the presence of that which we find objectionable" and thus "demanding that we suffer our own discomfort at this presence" (2891), but rather this understanding contains the defence of personal choice and freedom that comes to the surface in public as 'freedom of speech', without taking the risk of change through dialogue. This very 'defensive tolerance' shows the tendency to avoid contestation, due to a certain degree of lack of concern, but it has become severely challenged by the political concept of Islam as barbaric and intolerant. Because politicians used quasi-traumatic language which points to invasions of Muslims, tsunamis, and other fears, suggesting the imminent bankruptcy of tolerance due to mass immigration, the popular idea that anyone can think whatever s/he likes as long as this view remains private became legitimised by the discursive presence of an intolerant, disloyal, and hegemonic Islam which has an increasing physical presence in the public sphere.

The physical presence of Muslims in Dutch public spaces seems to endanger the stability of tolerance as a social imaginary and thus the idea of autonomy that lies behind it. 'Islam' is teasing this self-perspective as a competing political construct and not as a living religious tradition. As a result, the focus is on the visibility of Islam in the public sphere: predominantly the headscarf, the most teasing symbol of Islam in the West. Liberal secularism takes the headscarf as a reference to Islamic backwardness and as a threat to liberal freedoms and women's rights, thus taking religious signs as "a kind of a moral index" (Morey and Yaqin 3). The visibility of Islam in the public space is taken as an obvious sign that the agitating impossibility to assimilate Muslims to Western values is failing and shows the inherent disloyalty of Muslims, an

accusation that echoes the age-old secular prejudice against religion as disloyal to the nation state (Cavanaugh 4). In this context, absurd discussions entered the Dutch political stage and even the House of Representatives, such as the debate about Muslim public servants and MPs holding two passports. This debate strongly focused on loyalty.

Society under Siege

Related to the visibility of Islam is the fear of the religious *occupation* of the social space, as illustrated by Fortuyn's and Wilders's rhetoric quoted above. Writing about 'the Islamic problem', conservative intellectual and co-writer of the first PVV-election programme, Bart Jan Spruyt, speaks about criminal Moroccan youth gangs, anti-Western attitudes, and terrorism in almost the same breath, before he speaks about demographic reports showing an increasing number of Muslims in Dutch cities, outnumbering the 'autochthonous' Dutch population (Spruyt, "Discuss" 313, 320–1). The idea that Dutch society is under siege, awaiting a 'tsunami' of Muslim immigrants while the 'non-realists' are neglecting the secret Islamisation of the big cities, reveals a deep concern about a threatening occupation by a competing alien force looming at the borders of tolerance and about losing the imagined 'self' as a subject of choice. On the other hand, the presence of Islam would be the litmus test for Dutch tolerance, precisely because it is seen as objectionable.

This raises the question of the important social role Islam plays in the political discourses: how does Islam negotiate the social imaginary of liberal secularism? Cavanaugh argues that the secular state's interest in religion is that it envies the loyalty of its adherents. I have shown that part of the debate concentrates on loyalty. According to Cavanaugh, secularism has 'copied' this religious loyalty and transformed it into nationalism, but secularism nevertheless needs the image of an essentially 'barbaric violent religion' in order to legitimise its own (national or nationalistic) violence as liberating and necessary violence. General arguments about religion distort empirical data and open up religion to ideological use, Cavanaugh writes (18). Indeed, Islam, taking the place of 'religion' in Cavanaugh's argument, is not only important as the other side of civilization, but also legitimises certain practices that are part of the imagined self. As intolerant other, Islam not only sustains this imaginary, but also rouses a passionate practice of control and a deep wish to make the other conform to the imagined self. Bauman has argued that assimilation is the frontline of what he calls 'social engineering', the typical modern feature to reduce difference as uncontrollable chaos to identifiable political and economic entities (*Modernity* 147). Presenting Islam as barbaric, uncivilised, and pre-modern rouses the modern political passion to control, transform, moderate, and emancipate. As modernity is an 'ordering activity', as Bauman argues, Islam is a challenge, as it seems to fulfil an important role in sustaining the modern longing to control. However, whereas critics like Bolkestein and Scheffer still hold on to the idea of 'emancipating' Islam, Wilders seems to live up to Bauman's nightmare about the possible outcome of the 'will to control': the eradication of difference and cultural ambivalence through elimination. Wilders's PVV proposed to isolate petty Muslim criminals in so-called 'scum

villages' (Jansen and Naaktgeboren), to call up the army to control them (van der Kloor), and to deport under-age Moroccans together with their families if they create social turmoil (Wilders, "Debat"). These proposed strategies challenge 'tolerance' but can also be considered the result of a too personalised interpretation of the term where tolerance does not apply to the objectionable or put rejected worldviews under the protection of the law.

Conclusions and Prospects

The central argument of this article has been that 'Islam' in current populist and right-wing liberal discourses in The Netherlands does not refer to a living religious tradition, but that it is about sustaining a certain politics based on cultural concepts of the self. During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Islam has continually been labelled within the linguistic frame of the modern self, as being intolerant, barbaric, uncivilised, and—more specifically—as being homophobic, misogynous, and undemocratic. I have shown that Islam has increasingly been seen as an ideology and I have argued that this shift can be understood as an attempt to 'reject' Islam as a competing and threatening negation of the affirmation of a tolerating modern self. The concern with Islam is primarily a concern with this self that, understood as a social imaginary in Taylor's sense, frames Islam in such a way that the labels used to 'characterise' Islam derive from positive frames of the self as tolerant, civilised, hard-working, emancipatory, and democratic. Discourses on Islam can be understood as negotiating the modern 'free' self with concepts of authority, nationhood, and loyalty in a changing social context. Whether 'Islam' will fulfil this role in the future is uncertain. Current debates show that Islam is more intrinsically addressed as part of juridical arguments that seem to put the discussion on a more constitutional level.

However, the labelling of Islam as an ideology which competes with the modern self did not occur without consequences for the Dutch Muslim community. Most Muslims are not competing for the public space, nor do they contest the separation between state and religion. In fact, most Muslims enjoy the neutral state as a reality that grants them religious freedoms and rights. They are not *not* integrated into Dutch society (Blok, "Eindrapport"). Most young Muslims with a Moroccan background who commit minor criminal offences and have a high media profile long to participate in their idea of a rich Dutch society from which they feel excluded. As I have shown with reference to Lacan's thought, it is precisely the feeling of being excluded, the feeling of not being welcome, that results from the political meta-language used for Islam. While recent developments show a decrease of the use of Islam in political speeches and arguments surrounding tolerance, the effects of anti-Islamic discourses are felt in both Muslim and 'native' communities (van Stokkom). Moroccan-Dutch youths increasingly use religious language to distinguish themselves from themselves from native Dutch communities, as Martijn de Koning has demonstrated, and second-generation Turkish and Moroccan Muslims have a stronger affinity with political Islam or political action due to (group) discrimination (Fleischmann, Phalet and Klein).

"Tolerance presents us with a double burden", Seligman writes (2882), and states further that

We must learn that just because something makes us uncomfortable does not mean it is wrong, or evil, or barbaric, or should be outlawed. If it were just different, but not objectionable, there would be no cause for tolerance. (ibid)

In this sense, Muslims in The Netherlands are the litmus test for tolerance.

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