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# “I Have Dutch Nationality, But Others Do Not See Me as a Dutchman, of Course”

*Perception of and Participation in Society of Orthoprax Young Muslim Adults in the Netherlands*

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## Abstract

This interview study examines the attitudes of orthoprax young Muslim adults in the Netherlands toward their context, by distinguishing their perceptions of society and their participation in society. In this study, we discover that orthoprax young Muslim adults oppose themselves to Dutch society and do not feel really connected to it. However, most of the time, they participate in society by having jobs, studying and having friends. We also see that respondents are particularly active in and involved with their own Islamic community. Respondents in many cases do not link their religious identity to their participation in society. This study shows three different styles of

linking religion to participation: “Participating as far as Islam allows,” “Religion is very personal and individual,” and “Bridging the gap.” We discuss what the reason is for not linking religious identity to participation.

### Keywords

young Muslim adults – adolescents – identity development – society – perception – participation

Identity development can only be understood by incorporating within its subject of study the context broader than the individual (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Rangoonwala, Sy, and Epinoza 2011; Schachter 2005b; Duerden, Taniguchi, and Widmer 2012), because identity development is dependent on the context, situation and reactions of others (Erikson 1968; Mitchell 2006; Schachter 2005b). Diverse sociocultural contexts result in diverse identity structures (Schachter 2005a; Schachter 2005b; Baumeister and Muraven 1996; Côté 1996; Schachter and Ventura 2008). Bronfenbrenner (1979) has stated that all the different contexts in which one is embedded interact with one another and influence the individual.

When we focus on *religious* identity development in particular, we must also take the context into account. It is more likely that religious identity will be found in people’s turning outward to seek their place within society rather than when individuals turn inward on themselves (Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1999). We have come to realize at least since Durkheim (1915: 226) that religion is a system of ideas by means of which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members and the obscure but intimate relations that they have with it.

The current interview study examines the attitude of highly committed young Muslim adults toward their context by distinguishing their perceptions of Dutch society and their participation in it. The following questions led this study: *How do highly committed young Muslim adults perceive the societal context of the Netherlands, and how do they participate in society? And how does religious identity play a role in how they participate in society?* This study is part of a larger research project on the development of the religious identity of highly committed Christian and Muslim young adults in the Netherlands, and it aims to describe the development of their religious identity and to explore similarities and differences between the two groups.

In this article, we start by describing the theories we use in studying the attitude of highly committed young Muslim adults toward society. Second, we give a description of how tension may be experienced by young Muslims respondents, by outlining general perceptions about Muslims in the Netherlands and existing studies on Muslims in the Netherlands. Third, we describe our methods for the empirical part of the study and present our findings. Finally, we draw conclusions and discuss the implications of the findings for the study of religious identity and attitudes toward and participation in society.

### Studying Perceptions of Context and Participation

The relation between religious identity and context is transactional. The context and the individual change in a process of ongoing adaptation (Alma 1998). We cannot simply state that context influences the religious identity of young adults, because “they are mutually constitutive and thus highly interdependent” (Schachter 2005b: 377). Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens (2007) distinguish two perspectives: the objective perspective (that of the society acting upon the individual by transmitting religious meanings, values and expressions, both institutional and personal) and the subjective perspective (that of the individual responding to the society by constructing an individual religiosity in the process of adapting him- or herself to the environment).

In this study, we enrich our understanding of the religious identity of highly committed young Muslim adults by focusing on their perception of their context and their attitudes towards it, distinguishing between their perceptions of and participation in society. How does religious identity influence the way they participate?

Studying the attitude of highly committed young Muslim adults towards society is important and interesting, because the Dutch majority can be seen as a powerful “other” (Phalet, Baysu, and Verkuyten 2010), not least because the Netherlands is also one of the most secular countries in the world (Te Grotenhuis and Scheepers 2001). Development of religious identity depends crucially on acceptance and acknowledgement by relevant others (both Muslims and the wider society) (Phalet, Baysu, and Verkuyten 2010). According to Thompson (1995: 194), “religion provides with a sense of belonging to a community, a sense of identity as an integral part of a broader collectivity of individuals who share similar beliefs and who have, to some extent, a common history and a collective fate”. We wonder whether this is the case with regard to highly committed young Muslim adults when Dutch society can be seen as a powerful other.

We may expect that the broader context of Dutch society can be seen as important in the development of the religious identity of Muslim youngsters. But it is also important to take the smaller context, or “place” seriously (Wellman and Corcoran 2013). Sunier (2009) also calls for local cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 2005) to be taken into account as an influence upon Muslims. Although the interaction between religious persons and their context is important for understanding their religious identity, studies have failed to adequately take “place” into consideration (Wellman and Corcoran 2013).

Wellman and Corcoran (2013) introduce the concept of “tension” (following Iannaccone 1994; Smith et al. 1998; Stark and Finke 2000), because experiencing tension will influence the religious identity of individuals by, for example, by leading to a higher average level of member commitment to a group (Iannaccone 1994). Stark and Finke (2000: 143) define tension as the “degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the ‘outside’ world”. They indicate that a sense of distinctiveness and separateness is a component of tension. Wellman and Corcoran (2013) emphasize that tension must be seen as a dyadic property that exists only in relations between religious groups and environments. They show that tension is not always experienced as oppositional; rather, it may result in positive cooperative responses.

The current study investigates the attitude of highly committed young Muslim adults by taking into consideration both “tension” and “place” (Wellman and Corcoran 2013). We do this by using a qualitative research approach to investigate the following three aspects. First, we investigate the perceptions respondents have of Dutch society. We also investigate who are the objects of our respondents’ strategies of “othering” (Malik 2013). Othering can be seen as a psychological function, drawing a line between “us” and “them”. Second, we investigate what these perceptions will lead to by focusing on the respondents’ attitudes towards and participation in society. We focus on the practices of these Muslims in their own context, which is what Sunier (2009) called for. In his opinion, their “everyday Islam” helps them to connect to society instead of making them border-defying outsiders or completely isolated individuals (Sunier 2009). Third, we investigate how their religion is related to their attitudes towards and participation in society.

### **Defining Highly Committed Young Muslim Adults**

To characterize highly committed young Muslim adults, we choose the term “orthoprax” (Visser-Vogel, Westerink, De Kock, Barnard, & Bakker, 2012). In this study, being orthoprax is identified by four characteristics, which were used as

criteria for the selection of all interviewees. During the selection process, we asked the respondents whether they agreed with the four criteria. The criteria aim to select highly committed young Muslim adults and to identify groups of highly committed Muslims that would be comparable to groups of highly committed young Christian adults, as we were aiming, in a parallel project, to compare the two groups.

We considered young adults to be orthoprax only if they met all four of the following criteria (Visser-Vogel et al., 2012: 112): 1. A scripture is believed to be sacred and is believed to contain the exclusive truth about humanity and deity; 2. Religion is perceived to be meaningful for every aspect of life; 3. A strong sense of community with a strong internal cohesion between members and religious institutions is experienced; and 4. The attitude toward modern society can be characterized as critical.

Since the respondents agreed with all four criteria when we asked them directly, we already knew that they had a critical attitude towards modern society. Through the present study, we investigate how this functions as an internal characteristic of the group in relation to the environment (Wellman and Corcoran 2013).

### General Perceptions of Muslims in the Netherlands

In Western Europe, suspicion of Muslims has increased (Pehrson and Green 2010). We can see this in the growing number of societal debates on the increasing visibility of Islam in the public sphere (Fadil 2013) and on immigration and diversity in Europe (Zolberg and Long 1999). With regard to the Netherlands, public opinion surveys show widespread resistance to the Islamic religious way of life in Dutch society (Maliapaard and Gijsberts 2012; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2003; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). Muslims are commonly perceived as the primary “other”, because of the way they regard the perceived moral integrity in society (Schinkel 2007) or because of the fear of “Islamic” terrorism (Sunier 2010; de Graaf 2011). This resistance to Muslims has emerged in national debates about Islamic schools and the place of other Islamic institutions, practices and claims (Verkuyten, Thijs, and Stevens 2012), and strong anti-Muslim sentiments have been expressed by political actors such as Geert Wilders, a Dutch politician and founder of the right-wing political party ‘Party for Freedom’ (pvv), who has targeted Islam and Islamic believers.

It is important to ask what the effect might be of this public climate on Dutch Muslims and the development of their religious identity. Naber

states that the public discourse of “us vs. them” induces an “internment of the psyche ... a sense of internal incarceration ... manifested in the fear that at any moment one could be harassed, beaten up, picked up, locked up, or disappeared” (Naber 2008: 292; Laird, Abu-Ras, and Senzai 2013). For young Muslims, this discourse requires a constant negotiation with the rest of the society, because they are associated with a religious tradition that is under the microscope (Kinnvall and Nesbitt-Larking 2011). For second-generation Muslim immigrants, it is bound to be particularly difficult and cause identity crises, because they lack the traditional networks on which members of the first generation were able to rely (Sunier 2012).

### Research among Muslims in Western Europe and the Netherlands

Several studies have explored what these circumstances might imply for the religiosity of young Muslims in the Netherlands (Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012). These studies have reached different conclusions (Ersanilli 2009; Verkuyten and Yildiz 2010; Fleischmann 2010; Pels, Gruijter, and Lahri 2008; Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012). According to some scholars, Muslim youngsters become less religious in Dutch society and downplay their religious commitment in order to “prove” that they are integrated into Dutch society (Sunier 2009, 2010; Beekers 2014).

Other studies show that such circumstances lead to a stronger religious group identification and high levels of religious involvement, because this can provide a sense of belonging, certainty and meaningfulness and a way of feeling in control (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey 1999; Verkuyten, Thijs, and Stevens 2012; Hogg, Adelman, and Blagg 2010; Ysseldyk, Matheson, and Anisman 2010; Buitelaar 1998; Vertovec 2001; Cesari 2003; de Koning 2008; Phalet, Baysu, and Verkuyten 2010; Fleischmann and Phalet 2012; Güngör, Fleischmann, and Phalet 2011). Iannaccone (1994) states that the more behavioural restrictions a religious group experiences, the higher the group’s average level of member commitment.

Not only does society’s image of Muslims influence their religious identity and religious involvement, but Muslim youth also experience difficulty as they try to become a part of the larger society in their transition to adulthood (Rangoonwala, Sy, and Epinoza 2011). They might struggle with combining feelings of belonging and commitment towards their ethnic community and towards the nation (Verkuyten, Thijs, and Stevens 2012). The threat to their religious identity implies a tension between their subordinate group membership as Muslims and their inclusion as citizens at the

superordinate level of the wider society (Jetten et al. 2001; Mummendey and Wenzel 1999).

Some researchers have undertaken studies to discover how Muslim youth participates in Western societies in general or in the Netherlands in particular. Blogowska and Saroglou (2013) state that, for strongly religious and orthodox people, religious norms take priority over society's moral norms. Phalet, Baysu, and Verkuyten (2010) found that Moroccan-Dutch Muslims have a general willingness to resist Dutch civic norms in reaction to the threat against their religious identity. Other research among second-generation Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch Muslims has shown that their identification as Muslim is also partly reactive (Ketner 2009; Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007). Verkuyten, Thijs, and Stevens (2012) found that Moroccan-Dutch adolescents' ethnic group identification and religious identification were negatively related to their Dutch identification. Buijs, Demant, and Hamdy (2006) found that Salafi youth in the Netherlands had a critical attitude towards, and turned away from, Dutch society. Buijs, Demant, and Hamdy (2006) state that a lack of social connectedness seems to be an essential condition for radicalization.

On the other hand, Maliepaard and Gijsberts (2012) state that most youngsters among second-generation Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch Muslims do not agree with the proposition that Islam must be represented in Dutch politics and Verkuyten and Yildiz (2010) found that Islamic orthodoxy was not related to disidentification in terms of turning away from and contrasting with society. The studies in Gijsberts and Dagevos (2009) also indicate that young Muslims see their future in the Netherlands and increasingly seek to join Dutch society. In comparison with the first generation, second-generation Muslims are likely to attach less importance to their religious identity and have a stronger sense of national belonging (Maliepaard, Gijsberts, and Lubbers 2012; Phalet and Güngör 2004). Slooman (2016) states that religious identifications do not necessarily reflect cultural "otherness", because she found different social mechanisms which shape identifications with certain identity labels.

To conclude, currently available research reveals that the presence of Muslim minorities in the Netherlands is highly politicized and conflict-ridden (Phalet, Baysu, and Verkuyten 2010) and that there is widespread resistance to the religious way of life of Muslims in Dutch society (Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012; Sniderman, Hagendoorn, and Prior 2003; Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007). Different researchers have undertaken studies to discover what these societal circumstances of young Muslims in the Netherlands imply for their religiosity (Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012). However, little is known about how young Muslims perceive (Dutch) society, how they participate in society or

how their religious identity is influenced by this participation, so these are the questions considered in this study.

## Method

To answer our research questions, we designed a small-scale interview study in which young orthoprax Muslim adults were invited to construct life stories about, for example, their perceptions of Dutch society and their participation in it. We used qualitative research methods, because they would provide a more distinct and detailed picture of the nature and the dynamics of religious identity exploration (Layton, Hardy, and Dollahite 2012; Pearce and Denton 2011). Qualitative methods can enhance the researchers' understanding of the perception of and participation in society from the individuals' own point of view. In addition, because previous scholars have usually used quantitative methods, we have assumed that qualitative methods can contribute by providing a more thorough understanding.

## Sample

For this study, we chose to interview young adults aged between 20 and 22. Young adults are more capable of constructing a more complex, abstract and self-related life story than are those in younger age groups (Grysmen and Hudson 2010). For the selection of young orthoprax Muslim adults, we asked an Islamic secondary school in Rotterdam for support and the school provided a list of former students. The choice of a school in Rotterdam will also enable us to conduct a comparative study with Christian young adults in the near future, because a fundamentalist Christian secondary school in Rotterdam is prepared to provide us with a sample of Christian young adults. Moreover, the only Islamic secondary school in the Netherlands at the time of research was situated in Rotterdam.

Eighteen young adults were contacted by telephone and e-mail. They were informed that the study would be on religious identity and its development from the perspective of young adults. Because we contacted and selected former students, we took into consideration their gender, the level of education achieved, and whether or not they met the criteria for orthopraxy (Visser-Vogel et al., 2012).

Ten former students who met the criteria were willing to participate in this study. All of the young adults participating considered themselves to be orthoprax. Five participants were male, and five female. The level of education



achieved varied from prevocational education to university education. The small sample size of ten young adults limited the scope for generalization, but it is consistent with current sampling techniques in identity research (Bauer, McAdams, and Sakaeda 2005; Josselson 1987; Levinson and Levinson 1996), and was appropriate for exploratory studies.

### *Procedure*

The data for this study were collected from December 2011 to July 2013 and were gathered through two in-depth interviews by the first author with each participant. Participants were paid a total of €50 each for their participation in the study. In order to facilitate participation, the locations for the interviews were chosen according to the participants' preferences. Four of the first interviews took place at the respondents' universities in Rotterdam, two in the office of the first author, and four at Ibn Ghaldoun, the Islamic secondary school previously mentioned. For the second interview, three took place at the respondents' universities in Rotterdam, two in the office of the first author, two at Ibn Ghaldoun and three at the respondents' homes. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. To ensure anonymity, the participants have been assigned pseudonyms in this article.

### *Interview*

We developed a qualitative research approach using the method of in-depth interviewing. Our interviews are based on Marcia's Identity Status Interview model (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993) and the narrative approach of McAdams (2005, 2008) (Visser-Vogel et al., 2012). Like Lofland et al. (2006: 17), the first author used "intensive interviewing", entailing "the use of an interview guide consisting of a list of open ended questions that direct conversation without forcing the interviewee to select pre-established responses". Participants were asked to elaborate on their answers by providing examples and telling stories. Follow-up questions were often asked, to allow respondents to clarify their responses to the initial questions. Draft versions of the interview guideline had previously been commented upon by experts in religious education in the field of orthoprax Muslims and in the field of methodology.

### *Analysis*

The analysis for this study was conducted using Atlas.TI software. The interpretation process leading to assigning codes followed a standard procedure

of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). All interviews were read several times by the interpreter, which is consistent with this methodological approach.

In the first stage, we worked systematically through the data of the second part of the second interview, because this part particularly focused on questions about politics and perceptions of and participation in society. After finishing that part, we analysed the total data set, because respondents also referred to their perceptions of and participation in society in the other parts of the interviews, without being asked. We analysed the data coding line by line to identify prominent themes (Lofland et al. 2006). We focused on what respondents said about their perceptions of Dutch society, their participation in society and the way their religion influenced the way they participated. We assigned codes such as “attitude—finding a place by adapting” and “politics—more committed to politics in country of origin”. At this stage of coding, we wanted to be as inclusive as possible in identifying the issues of perception of and participation in society. This part of the analysis resulted in 106 codes.

In the second stage, we developed a profile of each respondent. In these profiles, we wrote the characteristics of the respondent’s attitude towards society. The third stage involved sorting all of the codes into overarching codes and themes. This resulted in a schematic model of the attitudes towards society of all the respondents and consisted of 21 overarching codes. This allowed us to gain a better understanding of the analysis.

These stages of analysis were conducted by the first author. Through the analysis, extensive annotations (e.g., memos) were kept, as recommended by Corbin and Strauss (2008), to facilitate the analysis process and to explore overarching codes. At the end of this stage, themes that were seen as similar were combined into one, and we developed more appropriate labels for existing categories and codes.

In the fourth stage, the analysis was reviewed in two ways. First, the data set was reread to ascertain whether or not the analysis “worked” in relation to the data set. Second, the codes, the categories and the interpretation were discussed by all authors of this article, who provided critical feedback.

## Results

In the following, we present our findings in three parts. First, we focus on and present the respondents’ perceptions of Dutch society. Second, we present the

ways in which respondents participated in society. Third, we show how the religious identity of young Muslim adults plays a role in their participation in Dutch society; we present three ways in which their religion influenced their participation.

### *Perception of Dutch Society*

It seems that the respondents perceived society as a “powerful other”. Because we selected our respondents on the basis of four criteria of orthopraxy, we already knew that they all had a critical attitude towards modern society. In this section, we present how this attitude functioned in their lives and the ways in which they described it. In answering the question of how they regarded Dutch society, the respondents used words and phrases such as “individualistic”, “assertive”, “capitalist”, “selfish” and “negative toward Muslims and Islam and religious persons in general”. Besides these answers to this particular question, respondents give more information in their life stories about how they perceived Dutch society. In many cases, they indicated their sense of distinctness from Dutch society. This is seen in formulations they showed they did not regard themselves as Dutch citizens, using words such as “we” (Muslim people) and “they” (Dutch people). This can be illustrated by Ammar and Ahmed. Ammar: *“Sometimes I think, they defend their right too little”* and *“I did not come here voluntarily, and even though I was in my own country, the situation is the same, there is no Islamic state.”* Ahmed: *“I am a Dutch man, yes, I have a Dutch nationality, (... ?), but others do not see me as a Dutch man, of course.”* Some respondents had the sense that Dutch people did not understand them.

In some cases, Dutch society was perceived as threatening and respondents felt they had to be fierce and strong and to fight against society, because *“actually, yes, you are under attack”* (Ahmed). Respondents felt they had to be wary when in contact with others. All the respondents often mentioned that Dutch people had prejudices about Islamic people. Laila said: *“There were some racist, yes, sarcastic comments. Yes, such as, you are oppressed (...) Then I think, are you really interested?”*

Respondents gave different examples of being discriminated against or told stories about discrimination against Muslims in general, in marks given at school or in applying for jobs, for example. As a result, some respondents were quite frustrated about Dutch people’s perceptions of Muslims. This can be seen in the second interview with Ramiz. He raised his voice and spoke loudly:

*I got very uptight. I got very uptight! I hit the dashboard, because I got angry, because I cannot accept it. That’s against my norms and values, against my religion. It-is-not-possible! (...) Here (in the Netherlands), people*

*say: a Muslim did this, a Muslim did such. I cannot get angry about that, because that is a fact. If a Muslim steals, then he steals. But not every Muslim is a thief!"*

*Interviewer: "No." Ramiz: "But about getting uptight, that is not because they show that in the media, they have the right to do that...But I got uptight because, they, they pretend all Muslims are like that. That's why I become angry. I, I can deal, can deal with it, because I can quickly calm down. But maybe in two days there will come a stupid goat, a stupid person: 'I plan an attack'. Such things happen, or not? Why does that happen? No, it's not just going to happen, yes, frustration."*

That the respondents' sense of being distinct from Dutch society can also be seen in the fact that almost all of them wanted to improve the image of Muslims in the Netherlands. Ahmed: *"So, that's why I try to simply, uhm, you know, by my behavior et cetera to show that it is not true."* Laila mentioned that this improving of the image of Muslims was sometimes difficult: *"... Moroccans, that Muslims are not as they are always, uhm yes, portrayed. Sometimes I have the feeling that I have to prove myself constantly, that's tiring! You don't persist!"*

Almost all the respondents emphasized that Muslims are entitled to have their own place in society and to practise their religion. Tarek explained what he wanted: *"By freedom of religion I do not mean freedom of religious beliefs, but also freedom to practise your religion."* In their opinion, the Netherlands should adapt their opinions and accept Muslims in society, rather than making Muslims integrate into society. This is illustrated by Tarek, who argued that he understood the meaning of integration even without being asked for his interpretation:

They [Dutch people] have another meaning of integration. (...) They think, uhm, somebody is integrated when he abandons his norms and values. But that is not going to happen! I will not say, uhm, as Muslim community we will not say, uhm, okay, we live in your country, so we will not pray anymore, maybe. No! (...) A Muslim who lives in a foreign country, he has to respect the rules of that country, and stick by them. That is what we do, in any case, most of us. But there are things, uhm, we will not stop praying.

### *The Experience of Tension*

Tension was said to be felt towards the media and the negative opinions and prejudices of Dutch society, but the respondents also felt it in more localized contexts, such as experiencing prejudice and discrimination in their jobs, at

school, at university, and so on. In most cases, both forms of tension strengthened feelings of opposition and frustration rather than a desire to cooperate. At the same time, we note three things about this experienced tension. First, although the respondents had a negative attitude towards society, when they were asked who was against them, in most cases they mentioned or described the characteristics of the persons who opposed them without any specific reference to religious identity. Aysun described the opposing person as follows: *“A person who is engaged with himself. Uhm, how do you call that, (silence), uhm, (silence), uhm, anyhow, I do not like when people only think of themselves, selfish, a person who is selfish.”*

Second, although respondents set themselves over and against Dutch people during the interviews, they also told stories about how prejudices disappeared when they came into close contact with Dutch citizens. This is illustrated by Suoud, who at first thought all his neighbours had negative thoughts about him. The lesson he learned is that if you are in contact with people, prejudices will go away. *“Uhm, yes, contact is very important. They can get a wrong image of you. You can prevent it by having really good contact with them.”* He spoke of working in the garden with neighbours, and having a drink with them. In particular, when respondents undertook things together with persons outside their own religious group, they experience the fact that their differences were less serious than they had thought. Laila mentioned this during the second interview, after she had complained a lot about Dutch citizens' prejudices and negative attitudes towards Muslims. She said,

Actually, we have to try, I try to be myself. (...) Because, uhm, yes, it is a pity, because, on the one hand we say, uhm, they have such and such wrong opinions about us, but actually we uhm, we also have a, uhm really have uh, an image of the Westerner. (...) So, actually it is a two-way process.

In spite of experiencing prejudice and discrimination, respondents at the same time emphasized similarities between their religion and culture and the rules followed in Dutch society. This can be seen in all their justifications and their claims that the norms and values observed in the Netherlands are actually typically Islamic. In the following section, we present how respondents participate in society. As mentioned above, all the respondents had experienced tension in different ways and to different degrees. If they felt tension in relation to society, how would they participate in it?

### *Participation in Society*

To gain a better understanding of the respondents' participation in society, we focused on four different aspects: first, how involved they were in Dutch politics; second, how they considered that they were contributing to society; third, what goals they had in life; and fourth, which networks or communities in society did they participate in most.

First, we focused on how they involved they were in Dutch politics, because this is a type of participation in society. During the analysis, we discovered an absence of involvement in Dutch politics. One respondent did not vote, because in his opinion, voting is forbidden in Islam. Other respondents did vote but were not members of a political party. The choice of which political party they voted for seemed to be quite casual. Some respondents said that they did not consider their choice carefully. If respondents were asked how politicians should improve their policies, they usually did not know how, or only answered like Aysun: *"Education and uhm, they have to pay special attention to employment."* With regard to politics, many respondents were more committed to their countries of origin. Sometimes they spoke passionately about political leaders in Morocco or Turkey. Sometimes it seemed that they were loyal to both countries, as Ramiz stated: *"Of course, I also feel Turkish, but when the Netherlands have to play soccer against Turkey, honestly, I support both countries."* Some respondents said that they also felt connected to the "Ummah", the supra-national community of Muslims. In many cases, they were especially focused on their own Islamic community. Gülsen said:

You are in a context of Muslims, also, for example, in our homes, also my family, we are, we are all committed to Islam. And, uhm, you take part in lessons in mosque. So, these all are surroundings in which you come in contact with Islam.

Notwithstanding their negative perceptions about Dutch society, most of the respondents participated in society by having a job, studying and having friends. To the question of how they made a contribution to society, they only gave examples such as paying taxes, working, studying, not causing a nuisance or not being disruptive. Deriya said,

I studied, I am looking for a job, uhm, I know my way with people, (...) I have never heard, especially not in my neighborhood, never heard: we suffer from you, no. (...) Society has had so far no problems with us. Yes,

during my teens, but that was among ourselves, we do not have a criminal record, no, never.

During the interviews, respondents said many things about their goals in life, related to their contributions to society. Most of them saw it as an important goal to give a good and positive representation of Islam, to gain more space and to earn more respect for Islam in society. Beyond that, respondents wanted to climb the social ladder and get good jobs as Muslims. Two respondents said that they wanted to have a role in Dutch political or cultural arenas.

With regard to the ways in which respondents participated in society, they were particularly active in and involved with their own Islamic community. Respondents explained that their goals and participation were in many cases linked to and related to their own Islamic group. Almost all of them said that they wanted to help the next generation of Muslim youth to become “conscious Muslims”, by helping them in their studies and disseminating knowledge about Islam. They were actively involved by giving Islamic lessons, giving homework counselling, being active in the mosque, organizing activities for other Muslims and giving donations to Islamic charities. Their ideals were in some cases also linked to Islam generally, because they wanted to achieve more unity among Muslims. Ramiz claimed several times: *“Muslims have to be a unity, whatever happens, we have to be a unity. (...) Yes, that hurts me, that Muslims, uhm, Muslims have different opinions. All Muslims have different opinions. And I do not like that.”*

Ahmed was actively involved in his own religious group, but he wanted to bridge the gap with Dutch society by attempting to create contact between people from the mosque and people outside the Muslim community. Jamila was not really actively involved in the Islamic community. She was especially busy in her new job as a lawyer.

#### *Relationship between Religious Identity and Participation in Society*

During the selection procedure for the study, respondents agreed with the statement, “Religion is perceived to be meaningful for every aspect of life” (Visser-Vogel et al., 2012). Although they made the same assertion during the interviews, in many cases Islam seemed not to be related to their participation in society outside their religious community. It seemed that Islam was not a factor in making choices about education, jobs, political parties, and so on. This lack of linkage between their religion and their way of participating in Dutch society could be seen in various ways in the respondents’ life stories. In

the following, we present three different styles in which their religion influenced their participation.

#### Style 1: Participating as Far as Islam Allows

Seven of the ten respondents used this style of participating in society. They emphasized that religion is very personal and that they did not want to convert other people to Islam, but did want to present Muslims in a positive way. These respondents wanted to climb the social ladder, particularly to help their own religious group, and they were actively involved in their own Islamic community.

These respondents seem not explicitly to relate religion to their participation in society but at the same time, they did participate as citizens (not as Muslims). They studied, they had jobs and they spent their leisure time in society. Islam seemed not to affect these actions, and the link to Islam was not made explicit. On the other hand, religion had everything to do with their participation, because they participated as citizens as far as Islam allowed. Tarek told us:

At university, there are sometimes such, such parties. Yes, and I do not go to these parties, because they will drink alcoholic drinks in the evening. (...) As a Muslim, you cannot, uhm, you can behave normally with other people, but, of course, there are borders of course, you cannot do everything.

It is not the content of their choices about participating in society that was related to their religion, but only the extent of their participation; when their participation reached the limits of Islam, they stopped participating. Ammar described his experiences of tension between his willingness to obey the rules of Islam and, at the same time, his awareness of the expectations of Dutch people:

I said to the teacher, mister, you must not ask me that, he says, yes, as a social worker, if you will have a homosexual as client, will you help him? I said to him: As a human being I will give him help. No problem. But: you are a Muslim, aren't you? That is not allowed, isn't it? That kind of things. Then I tend to say, okay, I have a choice to refuse help. There are some teachers at school, they put immense pressure on me. Because they do not leave me any choice. Do I have to die? Do I have to leave this country? It is either one or the other.



### Style 2: Religion is Very Personal and Individual

Two respondents (Jamila and Suoud) follow style 2: Religion is very personal and individual. Like the respondents referred to under style 1, they also saw religion as very personal, but these respondents also participated fully in society and did not play an active part in their own religious group. They did not link their religion to participating in society at all, as they fully participated fully as citizens, not as Muslims.

As an example of how their way of participating was not influenced by their religion. Jamila told us:

Absolutely not, no. I mean, I will be the same attorney. I mean, also if I would not be a Muslim, I think. You can see them very well separately. I mean, then you are working, then, see. Sometimes that's very difficult to make clear. (...) People have the opinion that, a Muslim, as being an attorney or a lawyer, they will engage their religion to it. But for me, being a Muslim means that I correctly practise my religion, that I pray, that I wear a headscarf, that's it, then it's okay. But if I go into the office, then, then, yes, when I have to prepare a court case, I will not include Islam in it. No! (Laughs). No, absolutely not! But they do not understand that.

Religion is important for these respondents, but only in the private sphere. Therefore, these respondents also claim that Muslims are entitled to have their own place in society in which to practise their religion.

### Style 3: Bridging the Gap

Ahmed was the only respondent who linked his Muslim identity explicitly to his participation in society beyond his own religious community. He wanted to bridge the gap between Islam and Dutch society. Together with other Muslims from the mosque he belonged to, he actively interacted with people outside his religious community. He undertook actions in order to present a better image of Muslims and Islam to society and to gain respect and a more prominent place in society for Muslims. Primarily, he wanted society to learn from Islam and not the other way round. He also wanted to play a role in politics as a Muslim. When he spoke about his membership of the youth council in the city where he lived, he said, *“Also to represent our ideas, actually. See, uhm, there were only Dutch people, and I was the only not-Dutch man, yes, I also have Dutch nationality, but, with respect to my background. And I thought, yes, uhm, who can look after our interests?”*

But Ahmed was not able to explain explicitly how Islam was connected to his opinions and choices. He also participated in society as far as Islam allowed,

but he Ahmed spoke several times about adapting its rules to accommodate Dutch society. *“It is just a little, yes, another way of thinking they have. But, it is simply permitted that I, also with regard to my clothing, will adapt to this society. That’s no problem at all.”*

### Discussion

Because the respondents met all four criteria for orthopraxy (Visser-Vogel, 2012), we already knew that they had a critical attitude towards modern society. Wellman and Corcoran have criticized the assumption that conservative believers are necessarily in conflict with their environment. In their research, they conclude, “the majority of respondents did not feel directly persecuted or oppressed, but instead see the secular PNW (American Pacific Northwest) as an opportunity” (2013: 517).

In our study, we discovered that orthoprax young Muslim adults saw themselves as distinct from Dutch society. Although they usually participated in society by having jobs, studying and having friends, they did not feel really connected to Dutch society. Most of them saw it as an important goal to give a good and positive representation of Islam and to gain more space and create more respect for Islam in society. With regard to how they participated in society, the respondents appeared not to be involved in Dutch politics. The question, however, is whether this is typical only of these respondents, or whether it applies to young adults in general and so can be attributed to their age.

Beyond this, we saw that the respondents were particularly active in and involved with their own Islamic community. This participation can also be considered as participation in society, because by participating in their own religious community, they contribute constructively to living together in society. Blogowska and Saroglou (2013) have already suggested, based on Saroglou et al. (2005) and Blogowska and Saroglou (2011), that religiosity and fundamentalism are associated with a willingness to help proximal people and ingroup members but not necessarily unknown people and outgroup members.

In many cases, the respondents did not relate their religious identity to their participation in society beyond their Islamic community. Most respondents participated in society as far as Islam allowed. They emphasized that religion is very personal and that they did not want to convert other people to Islam, but they did want to present a positive image of Muslims. These participants wanted to climb the social ladder, particularly to help their own religious group, and they were actively involved in participation in their own Islamic community. They seemed not to link religion to their participation in society, but at the

same time, they participate as citizens (not as Muslims). Two respondents saw religion as very personal and individual and did not link their religious identity to participating in society. They participated fully in society and did not participate actively in their own religious group.

Only one respondent (Ahmed) told us that he wanted to combine his religious identity and his participation in society by bridging the gap between the Islamic community and Dutch society. Nevertheless, he could not be explicit about how Islam was connected to his opinions and choices, and he also participated in society as far as Islam allowed. It is important to mention that Ahmed was the only third-generation immigrant among the respondents, all the rest of whom were second-generation. In conclusion, most of these orthoprax young Muslim adults did not really feel connected to the broader Dutch society and were very involved with their own Islamic community. Most significantly, according to our analysis, they did not relate their religious identity to their participation in society, and they participated in society as “persons” rather than as Muslims.

These conclusions provide a new insight into the religious identity of orthoprax young Muslim adults. Other researchers have investigated questions about whether, with the passage of time, Muslims in the Netherlands will attach less importance to their religious identity and have a stronger sense of national belonging (e.g., Anthony, Hermans, and Sterkens 2007; Verkuyten, Thijs, and Stevens 2012; Maliepaard, Gijsberts, and Lubbers 2012; Phalet and Gügör 2004). Verkuyten and Yildiz (2010) found a very small negative correlation between Islamic orthodoxy and identification with Dutch society. In their study, orthodoxy is not a predictor for opposing and turning away from society. De Koning (Maliepaard & Gijsberts, 2012) has criticized the simplistic distinctions between “modern vs. religious” and “integrated vs. Muslim”. We cannot answer the question of whether young Muslims’ religious commitment will decrease or increase in the Netherlands over time or whether the young adults’ religious identity is a predictor for their sense of not being connected to the Netherlands.

However, on the basis of our analysis, we add a new question, because orthoprax young Muslim adults set themselves over and against society and do not link their religious identity to their participation in society beyond the Islamic community. Our analysis indicates that, for the respondents, linking these two aspects seemed not to be an issue. What are the possible explanations for their not linking religious identity to participation? A first reason may be that the respondents did not feel connected to society. Why should they try to link their deepest, innermost religious identity to a society to which they did not feel connected?

A second reason may be that religion was perceived as very personal, so it was not relevant to their participation in society. At the same time, respondents wanted to have their own place in society, but one separate from non-Muslims. A third explanation may be found in factors related to the context. Perhaps the respondents' parents had educated them not to link religion to participation. Or perhaps their lack of linking religion to their participation was due to the general public opinion in the Netherlands, which considers religion to be a very personal matter, so that citizens are discouraged from bringing their religiosity into society.

Most of the respondents did not feel connected to Dutch society; they perceived it negatively and did not actively take part in society as Muslims. Nevertheless, a few respondents were more connected to Dutch society (Jamila, Ahmed and Suoud) and were trying to play a role in broader society as Muslims (Ahmed). On the basis of our study, we can give two possible explanations for the differences between the respondents' feelings of connectedness to Dutch society. First, Ahmed was the only third-generation Muslim immigrant in the sample, of the rest being second-generation. It could be that he took it more for granted that he could be a Dutchman and play an active role in Dutch society. Second, it is important to feel accepted and of worth and many of the respondents felt unaccepted by Dutch society. By actively participating in their own group, they received the recognition of group members. This may have caused a stronger commitment to their religious community. Respondents who received enough recognition outside their religious group did not hesitate to connect to the Netherlands and to lose commitment to their own religious group. In the stories, Jamila was well appreciated by her family for being a lawyer and had many Dutch friends. Suoud received a lot of respect and worth from giving music lessons to many children and organizing multicultural events. Ahmed found his self-esteem in organizing meetings between mosque and community. This explanation is supported in the study by Laird Abu-Ras, and Senzai (2013), who state that stigma and high status professions have an influence on belonging in social contexts. The studies in Korf et al. (2007) also state that young Muslims feel more accepted if they are in contact with peers of a different ethnic origin.

The lack of a sense of connectedness to Dutch society triggers the question in social debates of whether it may be threat to society. Buijs, Demant, and Hamdy (2006) state that a lack of societal commitment seems to be a necessary condition for radicalization. Doosje, Loseman, and van den Bos (2013) distinguish three determinants of a radical belief system which we can recognize in the stories of our respondents: personal uncertainty, perceived injustice and a perceived group threat. Schmidt (2004: 41) states, in describing some

provocative and dangerous Islamic movements in Europe, that we must not “forget that to some groups of Muslims ideal citizenry is not realized by integration within Western societies but rather segregation from them”. Although the present study does not give great cause for concern, it does indicate that some young Muslims who study, seek employment or have jobs, nevertheless maintain segregation as ideal. Future research is needed to investigate whether we must complete, reformulate or tighten existing definitions and whether we should regard the way our respondents perceived and participated in society as more dangerous than we expect.

This study gives some new insights into how young Muslims perceive society, how they participate in society and how their religious identity is connected to this. As researchers, we found that we had to ask many questions and analyse the whole data set to discover how respondents perceived society. If we had only questioned and analysed the answers to the question, “How do you perceive society”, that would not have given a good picture. We also emphasize the complexity of the relation between religiosity and participation in society. Other researchers have tried to discover whether religiosity influences participation or if (lack of) participation influences religiosity. By undertaking this study, we have learned that the question may be more complex, because the respondents themselves did not link religiosity to their participation.

As this research covers new empirical ground, our findings lay the foundation for further research. The main focus of the present study was on perception of and participation in society and their relation with the respondents’ religious identity. Future research should focus on the relation between perception and participation. In our study, we discovered the enormous complexity of this question. On the one hand, in some cases it seemed that the more the negative the respondents’ perceptions of society, the less their participation would be. But on the other hand, some respondents said that, by participating in society, their negative feelings about society diminished. More research is also needed to better understand how the sense of “self-esteem” and of “being treated with respect” influences respondents’ perception of and participation in society.

The qualitative method and the limited number of participants in this study makes generalizing the findings problematic, but this was beyond the scope of this study. Our aim has been to describe and deepen the understanding of the perception of and participation in society of orthoprax young Muslim adults, and how their religious identity plays a role in their participation. In that sense, we hope that our study contributes to the debate. On the other hand, we hope that our study might encourage psychologists and sociologists of religion and

religious identity development to engage in further discussion to establish a way to examine perception, participation and religious identity and the relation between the three.

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