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Remediating Religion as Everyday Practice: Postsecularism, Postcolonialism, and Digital Culture

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Introduction: postsecular and postcolonial engagements

This essay focuses on instances of religion in everyday online practices as expressed by migrant youth (i.e., Moroccan-Dutch youth in the Netherlands). We explore, in particular, how the engagement with digital practices, such as participation in social network sites like Hyves and Facebook and online discussion forums such as www.Marokko.nl, offer specific instances of the postsecular condition that deserve further scrutiny. The digital realm offers, in fact, medium-specific modalities for creating counter-publics – locations of appropriation and contestation of the dictums imposed by so-called secular society on migrant groups and their faiths and beliefs – but also an arena for alternative affective networks, through which religion is embedded and incorporated in everyday personal needs.

   In order to do so, we take into account how the reawakened interest in the role of religion, or spirituality, in society at large has taken a radicalized turn after the events of 9/11, creating a racialization of religion (Balibar, 1991) which often leads to singling out Muslim groups as outside of the frame of modernity. In response to this, migrant groups construct strategies and tactics to react and subvert these wider phenomena from safe/intimate digital spaces. For this purpose, an exploration of the entanglement of the 'postsecular' with the 'postcolonial' is timely as the two terms share a prefix which contests both the secular and the colonial as common requisites for the condition of modernity.[1]

Despite this connection, postcolonial critique has been reluctant to engage with the recent postsecular turn, based possibly on Said's heritage of secular humanism, which has been hugely influential for postcolonial studies. In his introduction to *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Said explains his notion of 'Secular Criticism' (Said, 1983) as inherently linked to his notion of humanism. In the conclusion to the same book, within the chapter titled 'Religious Criticism', he positions the return of religion as a result of 'exhaustion, consolation, disappointment' among intellectuals (Said, 1983: 291). In his world view, Said does not take *per se* religion as his target, nor attempts to bypass religion as irrelevant within postcolonial societies. He rather calls for a challenge to fundamentalist dogmas in all societies and cultures. Criticism can be secular only if it takes nothing as sacred, and submits to no certainties. As Robbins writes, 'this credo reinstates in the vocabulary of the sacred and the secular what Said elsewhere put into a geographical figure: the sacred is being at home, the secular is being in exile' (Robbins, 2012,: 118–119).

Elaborating on Robbins's understanding of Said's secularism Aamir Mufti argues that Said most often opposes the term secular not to religion *per se* but to nationalism. Secular implies, for Said, a critique of nationalism that is enunciated not from an elite but from a minority position. As Mufti further writes, 'Said's use of the word *secular* is therefore catachrestic, in the sense that Spivak has given to the term – that is, it is a meaningful and productive *mis*use. It is an invitation to rethink, from within the postcolonial present, the narrative of progress that underlies the very notion of secularization' (Mufti, 1998: 107).[2]

Therefore, if we extrapolate from this, we intend the postsecular as another challenge to the legitimizing and normative narrative of Western modernity, one that contests the 'secularization myth' as a prerequisite for democracy and progress. Though these 'posts' (postsecular and postcolonial) can never be seen as interchangeable, they signal a deconstructive manoeuvre which contests fixed notions of political subjectivities and affective belonging.

Digital postsecularism

In this chapter we want to explore, therefore, the notion of postsecularism as one of the many disjunctions and differences in the global cultural economy which signal the need for a renewed understanding of the relation between migration, technology, and religious belonging. Appadurai explains how previous thoughts of separate centre-periphery models and push and pull (in terms of migration theory) do not

correspond to the movements of cultural expression. For this we need to take into account diasporic movements and the new circulation of goods, people, media, ideas, and money in order to make sense of the tensions between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization, and how locations, identities, and imaginaries are constantly on the move (Appadurai, 1996).

Though the relation between religion and media (both old and new media) has received attention in recent studies (Couldry, 2003; Højsgaard and Warburg, 2005; Hoover, 1988, 2006; Mitchell and Marriage, 2003; Morgan, 2008; Nynäs, Lassander, and Utriainen, 2012; Stolow, 2010), the link to (new) media studies, and the way in which 'religion' manifests itself and is reconfigured online, has not been sufficiently elaborated upon, especially in the combination between theoretical and empirical approaches. In her recent *Digital Religion* (2012), Heidi Campbell argues, for example, that different religious communities negotiate complex relationships with new media technologies in light of their history and beliefs. This requires the further exploration of the nexus between postcolonial studies and new media studies, in order to address the racialization of religions as new forms of cultural and political exclusion along with emerging critiques of multi-layered digital inequalities (Huggan, 2010; Nayar, 2010; Nakamura and Chow-White, 2012; Gajjala, Yartey, and Birzescu, 2013). For this purpose the link between the postsecular debate, postcolonialism, and digital culture in Europe, and in particular the Netherlands, is explored, focusing on how religion, or religious practices, are lived, articulated, and performed online, responding to public debates as well as to intimate needs.

Europe, the geographical context of our study, can be understood as being coterminous with Christianity, its later project of secularization, up to the contemporary question of European Identity in relation to the EU expansion and consolidation. These questions culminate in anxieties regarding the integration of post-communist Eastern Europe, secular Turkey and its predominant Muslim populations, and also in particular the frictions with European Muslim youth, mostly descendants of guest workers from Morocco and Turkey (Baban and Keyman, 2008). In the contemporary European urban centres, the dividing lines between religion and the secular are increasingly blurred (Beaumont and Baker, 2011). In particular, the returning of postsecular frictions with Muslim populations are largely played out in the digital sphere, including the controversies surrounding Theo van Gogh's 2004 *Submission*, the Danish Muhammad cartoons in 2005, Geert Wilders's 2008 *Fitna*, and Nakoula Bassely Nakoula's 2012 *Innocence of Muslims*, and recent controversies

across Europe over YouTube videos and Facebook pages supporting Islamic State (IS) violence in Iraq (Vis, Zoonen, and Mihelj, 2011).

This chapter focuses on the discursive participation of young, urban, Muslim migrants in digital culture as this provides an uncharted entry point to explore the complex trajectories of European metropolitan postsecularism and postcolonialism (Salvatore, 2004). By examining digital practices of Moroccan-Dutch young people our aim is to investigate how the 'postsecular' is enacted and experienced from different positionalities and medium specificities. This chapter explores how issues of religion are surfacing and being negotiated online by Moroccan-Dutch migrant youth between 12 and 18 years old. In particular, we draw upon survey findings, qualitative in-depth interviews, and ethnography, and demonstrate how this data speaks back to new media, postcolonial, and postsecular thinking. We specifically approach digital practices from two analytic angles: the public sphere where collective counter-publics are created in order to respond to the racialization of religion in the public domain, and the individual realm through the creation of intimate and affective belongings that create identity networks.

The first angle concerns the online formation of safe collective spaces, or digital 'subaltern counterpublics' (Fraser, 1990: 67). Nancy Fraser developed this notion in extension of Jürgen Habermas's ideal-type of the 'bourgeois public sphere'. In Habermas's view, society resolved around a singular, all-embracing public sphere. Fraser rightly noted this conceptualization does not meet the demands to capture the reality of contemporary stratified societies. Rather, she recognizes that a multiplicity of competing publics provide arenas for subordinated groups. By circulating 'counter-discourses' these people can engage in 'discursive contestation' (Fraser, 1990: 62). Online discussion forums provide subordinated groups with particular counter-publics; away from the mainstream they can be seen as safe 'hush harbors' where hegemonies can be scrutinized and group cohesion can be fostered (Byrne, 2008: 17). In particular, we argue Moroccan-Dutch youth appropriate forum discussion pages as counter-publics through which they forge relations and establish their own shared space to counteract, subvert, or engage with dominant spheres of state-based secular culture, defiant public media reports, and parental versus peer expectations with its imposition of dictums and norms about proper religious behaviour.

The second angle is dedicated to the analysis of religion as being part of affective belongings and emotional networks. Digital everyday

experiences illustrate the workings of affective belongings. The affective encounter of bodies with digital artifacts shifts attention from understanding processes of symbolic meaning making towards apprehending digital practices as sparking emotions, feelings, and experiences that matter to the individual user (Karatzogianni and Kuntsman, 2012). Online, religion is not something exceptional and visible only in the public sphere (where it gets attacked) but is also intimate, private, and personal, subject to multiple interpretations and tied to multiple other belongings. In particular, we unpack the postsecular notion of 'cool Islam' (Boubekeur, 2005; Gazzah, 2009; Meyer, 2011), which captures how religiosity is infused with youth culture. By combining Islam cultural signs with fashion, life styles, and music, religion is re-appropriated to counter stereotypes and negotiate multiple affective belongings that often steer away from either identity politics or the embracing of a delocalized brand of global youth. Migrant youth digital practices show how religion is a cultural and affective marker that is used both to affirm diversity while practising inclusion. It connects the intimate with the political through several forms of negotiations which are shown through forms of self-profiling. In particular, we take the practice of hyperlinking as an entry point to address the intersection between affectivity and digital media experiences that span local, national, and transnational contexts.

Postcolonial and postsecular readings of religious practices online allows to detect how the postsecular condition is not a new label, or particularly expresses the revival of religion and religiosity among Muslim migrant youth as distinctive form of identification, but a public and private everyday practice that is deeply embedded in digital affordances and networks (Lynch, 2010; Meyer, 2011).

Moroccan-Dutch youths in the Netherlands: society and academy

Moroccan-Dutch youths have become the primary locus of fear over ethnic and religious otherness in the Netherlands. Consisting of 355,883 people, those of Moroccan-Dutch descent make up some 2.1 per cent of the total Dutch population of 16.6 million. Of this group, 47 per cent migrated to the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards as guest workers, while the second and third generations, who were born in the Netherlands after their parents had migrated, amount to 53 per cent (CBS, 2011). The majority of guest workers who arrived in the Netherlands originate from the northern Morocco Rif area, where people mostly identify as Berber

in contrast with French- and Arab-speakers in Morocco's urban areas (Gazzah, 2009: 403–404).

Moroccan-Dutch young people receive a lot of attention in media reporting, governmental policymaking, and scholarly research. They are systematically stigmatized and made hypervisible by right-wing journalists and politicians, who frame them as anti-citizens that pose a threat to secular Dutch society. Time and time again, politicians such as anti-Islamic Member of Parliament Geert Wilders and fellow members of his Freedom Party (PVV) argue that the Netherlands has to strongly respond strongly to the so-called 'Moroccan problem' it is facing. Simultaneously, parental expectations experienced by Moroccan-Dutch youth born in the Netherlands may differ from Dutch (youth) cultural expectations.

Gender is of central concern in these processes as boys and girls relate differently to both Dutch society and Islam. Their position about Islam also differs in the public debates in the Netherlands. The stereotypical positions, racisms, and expectations they face are not the same (Farris and Jong, 2013). While boys are dominantly framed in mainstream news media as criminals or Islamic extremists, they are believed to achieve greater autonomy from their parents during adolescence (Pels and Haan, 2003). Two prejudiced discourses can be recognized to discipline Muslim girls in the Netherlands: secular (neo)Orientalist representations of backwardness and oppression by Muslim men and conservative Islamist discourses that criticize Western women as sex objects (Piela, 2012). Thus, young Moroccan-Dutch people have to carve out a path between notions of European secularity and gendered Dutch stereotypes, but also sometimes stringent views of their parents and the wider (Islamic) community (Brouwer, 2006).

In studies on the Moroccan-Dutch community, the focus has predominantly been on juvenile delinquency, mental health problems, reliance on social security benefits, discrimination in the labour market, and early school leaving (i.e., Jong, 2007; Crul and Heering, 2008; Farris and Jong, 2013). In studies of Internet use and religion, the focus is also often on excesses such as Islamic radicalization (i.e., Stekelenburg, Oegema, and Klandermans, 2011). These issues are undeniably important, but focusing on them singles out a narrow slice of their experiences. Things are going well for the majority of Moroccan-Dutch youths, but their realities remain largely invisible in contemporary debates. This chapter aims to provide greater insight in everyday realities of Moroccan-Dutch youths by considering their digital negotiation with multiple publics, taking into account how postcolonial issues intersect with notions of postsecularim.

Methodological framework

The fieldwork was conducted in the context of Wired Up, a collaborative, international research project operating at the interface of the humanities and social sciences, aimed at understanding the multifarious implications of digital media use among young migrants. By combining large-scale questionnaires with in-depth interviews and virtual ethnographies, we join differently located and situated but complimentary perspectives.

From early spring to late fall 2010, a survey sample of 1408 secondary school students was established among seven schools in the Netherlands through a collective effort of data collection. This article principally considers data from 344 Moroccan-Dutch students – 181 girls and 163 boys – who participated in the questionnaire. On average they are 14.5 years old and, when prompted, 98.5 per cent describe themselves as Muslim. Three-quarters (76.2 per cent) of these young people speak Dutch at home with their parents, both in combination with a Berber language (66.9 per cent) and with Moroccan-Arabic (52.6 per cent).

From all survey participants, 30 Moroccan-Dutch young people aged 12–16 were invited to join the second phase of the study that consisted of face-to-face in-depth interviews. In order to include 17- and 18-year-olds, 13 Moroccan-Dutch youths were contacted using snowballing methods in three cities. In sum, in-depth interviews were carried out with a group of 43 Moroccan-Dutch individuals, 21 girls and 22 boys between 12 and 18 years old. Their average age was 15 years. Except for four informants who have migrated themselves at a young age, the majority of the interviewees were born in the Netherlands from parents who had migrated to the Netherlands as guest workers. Interviews took place in winter 2010 and spring 2011, but additional conversations for the present chapter were held during winter 2012.

In the third and final phase, digital media texts, images, and videos circulating in online message boards, instant messaging, social networking sites, and video-sharing platforms such as YouTube were gathered through virtual ethnography, a form of online participant-observation. The informants found these four Internet applications most important and spent most of their time there. The ethnography included continued correspondence with informants both face-to-face as well as mediated via Internet applications such as instant messenger and social networking sites such as Facebook and its Dutch counterpart Hyves (Leurs, 2012).

Case study 1: Message boards as subaltern counter-publics

> It is a sort of support. As a process of feeding [your emotions], by sort of reacting to each other. You'll have everyone who backs you up. It's like everyone is on the same side. You kind of become more sure of yourself. You just know, yes, look we are not the only ones who think this way and so on. Thus you can express your opinion and just put everything up and you hear that others are similar to you.
>
> – Ilham, 13 years old

The first case study explores how Internet applications are used by Moroccan-Dutch youth as safe arenas to form counter-publics and exert agency. During our interview, Ilham eloquently described the emotional support she receives from being able to secure speaking power on the online discussion forum Marokko.nl. Message boards, also known as Internet discussion forums, are digital spaces where users can engage in conversations by publicly posting messages in response to each other. Seizing the opportunity to speak for herself and hearing others appreciate her voice, Ilham self-consciously claims membership within a group of people of her choice. Virginie Mamadouh observed that online message boards seems to hold a specific appeal: 'young Dutch Moroccans are more likely to discuss and dispute Moroccan and Dutch traditions in the safe encounter of quasi-anonymous forums than in face-to-face contacts with relatives, peers or teachers' (Mamadouh, 2001: 271). This section elaborates how online discussion forums such as Marokko.nl can be used to construct 'subaltern counter-publics', which Nancy Fraser defined as 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional inter-pretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (Fraser, 1990: 67). Online forums allow for the proliferation of new, oppositional, and/or alternative voices in the digital public domain, countering mainstream definitions of secularism and integration.

   Although message boards are, in principle, publicly accessible to all Internet users, the informants perceive Marokko.nl as a welcoming space to publish and read alternative voices. The site, in their view, operates under the radar. For instance 14-year-old Senna states, 'I don't know, I think that half of the [Dutch] people does not even know that it exists'. Message boards' perceived hidden character, tucked away from the mainstream, has been acknowledged as a main reason minority groups become attracted to them. Dara Byrne describes message boards that 'fly well below the mainstream radar', frequented by minorities

such as AsianAvenue.com, MiGente.com, and BlackPlanet.com with the postcolonial term 'hush harbors', a notion used to describe spaces in which slaves gathered away from supervision from their white masters (2008). As a space to negotiate unequal power relations, Vorris Nunley notes that historically 'African Americans have utilized camouflaged locations, hidden sites, and enclosed places as emancipatory cells where they can come in from the wilderness, untie their tongues, speak the unspoken, and sing their own songs to their own selves in their own communities' (Nunley, 2004: 223). In parallel, the hushedness of Internet forums, Byrne writes, is appreciated among ethnic minorities for developing 'group cohesion' and a shared sense of belonging. Because the right of access is based on foregrounding a shared ethnicity, dedicated discussion forums are 'relatively free of *mass* participation by ethnic outsiders' (Byrne, 2008: 17). More specifically, we focus in this section on how online forums are taken up among the informants as counter-publics to (re)articulate their positionality at the crossroads of gender, ethnicity, and religion. In our conversation, Ilham explained she receives emotional support to both negotiate the sometimes stringent religious expectations of her parents as well as the Dutch stereotypical representation of Moroccan-Dutch youth. The multiple roles online message boards play in the lives of these young people are explored: first attention is given to the ways in which generation-specific religious and gendered dictums are negotiated, while secondly the use of these forums to contest Dutch societal stereotypes is discussed. In this way, theoretical discussion on postsecularism is grounded in everyday practices and affinity networks.

Negotiating religious dictums

I was born and raised here in the Netherlands. But my father emigrated to the Netherlands together with my grandfather when he was 18 years old. He has taken Moroccan customs to the Netherlands and he uses them here. I think the habits of my parents are just very old-fashioned, even though they do try to learn the customs of the Netherlands. My parents were raised much stricter in terms of religion. My parents do teach me many things about our belief, but most of the time I go on and look up things about Islam myself. This is different from what they did: listening to the stories of their parents and copying those.

– Meryam, 15 years old

During our interview, 15-year-old Meryam spoke about *Handboek voor Moslimvrouwen* (*Handbook for Muslim Women*), a book that she had in her handbag. She shared that she liked to keep a book like that with her at all times: 'I read those, because it gives you a lot of rules and how you can do your best to become a good Muslim woman'. These books give her something to hold on to, offering guidance in making everyday decisions. For similar purposes, she turns to Marokko.nl to read about personal stories that people have shared. The book, she notes, was bought 'at the mosque and it gives you rules to abide by'. However, she says 'on the Internet, you can learn much more. In the mosque you have to listen to an imam who exposes you to topics you might not want to learn or that you know already'. While 'on Marokko.nl, I type "Islam" and many different pages appear. And I look at those'. Meryam described how she 'noses around' in discussions on Islam. The tension between Meryam being given meanings by authorities such as the imam and her parents and taking the opportunity to articulate personal religious interpretations herself lies at the heart of this section on the negotiation of religious dictums. Online, the specificity of Moroccan-Dutchness emerges as the informants publicly negotiate postsecular positionalities at the crossroads of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, generation, and youth culture.

Bibi (16 years old) said she feels at home on the forum because there, she says, she can experience 'that proper Moroccan atmosphere'. Such remarks resonate feelings among informants that message boards can be seen as a digital counterpart to the mosque. Another example is shared by Soufian (13 years old): 'I find it very important to go to the mosque, because there I feel I am among likeminded people', while on Marokko.nl users also congregate with like-minded peers. She continues, 'it is your own circle' and 'the people there are like you, that's nice'. Inas, a 13-year-old girl, explains that online 'you have the feeling you get nearer to each other, you feel connected'.

As a distinct invocation of a counter-public sphere our informants report to engage in religious meaning-making activities. Sixteen-year-old Ilana states that in the rubric 'Islam and me', 'many things about Islam are discussed, also the rules of Islam'. Sahar, a 14-year-old girl, also participates in the discussions in this rubric and adds that people exchange ideas 'about things you should and you should not do'. Negotiating sometimes-strict Muslim demands with Dutch liberal youth culture, informants told us that many young users discuss whether certain things are '*halal*' (allowed in Islam) or '*haram*' (forbidden in Islam). For

example, as Ferran, a 14-year-old boy, says: 'whether you may have a boyfriend and so on'.

Moroccan-Dutch girls are sometimes seen as gatekeepers 'to maintaining the family honour', and Pels and De Haan recognize 'they still face the most restrictions, and they spend much of their leisure time with female family members and friends in domestic settings' (Pels and Haan, 2003: 52–61). Especially Moroccan-Dutch girls confess they feel less restricted on discussion forums and, because of that, dare to bring up personal experiences they struggle with and cannot share elsewhere. During the interviews, it became apparent that online discussion forums are considered a safe space to speak about gendered taboo issues that might transgress the limits of dominant community standards. Bibi (16 years old) reports that she turned to Marokko.nl to discuss issues of intercourse and sexuality in the context of marriage, stating she would rather turn to the online community instead of bringing it up with her parents:

> [Y]ou don't dare to go to your parents, because you find it really embarrassing. Yes, for example about sex or something, and marriage, and then they say, 'Yes' because with the Muslim faith when you have the first day you are not to oppose your husband and just do 'it'. And [with] these things I'm definitely not going to my parents 'Mom, dad, listen, is that the case'. Yes it is *hchouma* you know, I am shy to tell my parents about these things.

Having a space to discuss issues that are difficult to broach in conversations with parents is of the utmost importance. This enables Moroccan-Dutch girls to express themselves and discuss behaviour that is not possible in their usual social-cultural spheres. Not everyone appreciates bottom-up interpretations of what is *haram* or *halal*. Some see disadvantages in online performances of religion, as Nevra, a 16-year-old girl, critiques that 'you now see that people who are engaged with their faith, they actually make a personal version of their faith. They do things that they are not allowed to do, because many people do it [and share their actions online], they say, they can also do it'. Inas, a 13-year-old participant, also voiced her scepticism about online discussions on Islam: 'I do not try to find too many things about it'. She chooses to uphold her own conceptions about Islam: 'those are my own opinions. And no one should change them'. Nonetheless, these forum discussions remain popular.

In her study on online discussion forum use, Lenie Brouwer found that Moroccan-Dutch girls in their message board participation 'demonstrate

counterviews towards the dominant western image of Muslim women as well as to their own communities' (Brouwer, 2006). The remarks informants made resonate her argument: participating in online forums, Moroccan-Dutch girls turn to message boards to engage with topics such as health, meeting new friends, intimacy, romantic relationships, and sexuality (Leurs, Midden, and Ponzanesi, 2012). Girls report to experience a greater sense of freedom to discuss the sometimes-stringent social-cultural codes of socialization of their parents and wider community. In this way, religious dictums from the community as well as expectations and requests from the hosting society about gender agency and freedom are appropriated and abrogated in specific personal ways. By doing so, normative ideas about emancipation as a secularizing process are deconstructed.

Countering stereotypes

Users appreciate discussion sites such as Marokko.nl because they can communicate with their own circle of people and share or hear alternative voices regarding Moroccan communities in the Netherlands. The existence of this religious-ethnic-minority communication platform to some extent reflects the need for this group to have a mediated voice and counter-public of their own. This corner of the Internet is often used to discuss and reframe dominant images circulating in news media. Thirteen-year-old Salima describes Dutch news media as follows: 'they speak about Moroccans very often. If it would be a Turk or someone else, then it is not immediately news or so, but when there are Moroccans involved, it is immediately like: all right, these are Moroccans, instantly on the news'. Ideally, national news media reflect the broad dynamics of a society, including the multicultural dimension of that society, however in the Netherlands, ethnic minorities feel as though coverage is skewed (D'Haenens et al., 2004: 69). Fourteen-year-old Senna remarks that, 'on Marokko.nl you also get news, news is discussed, it is more about Moroccan news and so on. That you do not find in *de Telegraaf* [a popular sensationalist Dutch newspaper]'. Sixteen-year-old Nevra finds 'there is often negative talk about Moroccan youths', while 'different stories' can be shared on Internet forums.

   Interviewees especially emphasized the heated debates over controversial Dutch anti-Islamic Member of Parliament Geert Wilders on Marokko.nl. They have a sense that Wilders can say whatever he likes, while everything Moroccan-Dutch young people say is put under the microscope. On the forum, interviewees feel more secure and confident

to speak out than they might feel elsewhere. In the words of Bibi (16 years old):

> The main topic mainly concerns Geert Wilders and so on. He of all people can say things about Muslims. While we for instance cannot talk about the Jews, because then we are the racists. About those things, we say 'Why is he allowed to do it,' and to be honest, everyone thinks he is a retard, a dog; we do not like him at all.

Fifteen-year-old Inzaf maintains that message boards such as Marokko.nl help Moroccan-Dutch youths to cope with negative positions ascribed. Site members share a number of ideas that also bond them together. They all refute the polarizing brought forth by Wilders and the PVV:

> We speak about various Moroccan things, but we agree about one thing. For instance about Geert Wilders, all of Marokko.nl agrees that he is no good, or that he lost his mind. On Hyves it would be different; everyone would have a different opinion. You have very few people who have a totally different opinion. Everyone would think something like, 'yeah if I see him on the streets, I will shoot him dead', and then you have few people who would say something like 'No why? He is not doing anything wrong?'

Marokko.nl is considered as a safe space of one's own where people agree upon a shared set of assumptions. Perpetuating the stereotypical frames of extremism, at first glance the statement by Inzaf demonstrates how forum contributors are complicit in perpetuating the othering of the Moroccan-Dutch community as a whole. However, the statement is only a polemic mimicry of extremism, as it is to be read in the context of cultural repertoires of street language and hip-hop youth culture. Her way of expressing her feelings about the debate in the Netherlands can therefore be interpreted as a 'diss', a strong carnivalesque polemic, instead of an actual death wish. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the carnivalesque refers to 'peculiar folk humor that always existed and has never merged with the official culture of the ruling classes' (Bakhtin, 1965: 474), which may include 'ridicule of officialdom, inversion of hierarchy, violations of decorum and proportion' (Brandist, 2001). The carnivalesque is a theatrical form of parody that can offer resistance to hegemonic forms. The controversial song 'Hirsi Ali Diss' by the Moroccan-Dutch rappers DHC from The Hague is another example of carnivalesque ridicule. In the song, Somalian-Dutch prominent Islam

critic Hirsi Ali was similarly dismissed: 'We are busy preparing for your liquidation / Bomba action, against Hirsi Ali / That is my reaction for the unrest she is making / Talking on TV about *integration*' (lyrics to 'Hirsi Ali Dis', 2004). In this song, coarse language of the street, assertive dissing, and the demand for respect come together in a reaction on the Dutch debate on integration. Verbally threatening Hirsi Ali in the song is DHC's way of forming a response to being mistreated (Koning, 2005). In the global, linguistic flows of hip-hop youth culture, 'the-violence-as-verbal metaphor' is a significant example of a particular politics of language (Newman, 2009: 200).

Similarly, Inzaf's statement is a part of such a verbal duel expressed as a culmination of feelings of discrimination, injustice, and subordination. Inzaf shows how deep the feeling of being disrespected by anti-Islamic Dutch people runs among Moroccan-Dutch youths. Symptomatic of the social injustice inflicted on the Moroccan-Dutch community, they reveal a great deal about their perception of Dutch political and societal centres of power. As Soufian shared: 'I think that non-believers, not all of them, are very much discriminating in their thinking and talking about my belief, and that makes me very sad', adding 'we live in a multicultural society and I am of the opinion you should accept every human being as he or she is and treat his [or her] religion with respect'. However, maintaining contact and discussing intersecting matters of religiosity, gender, and ethnicity cannot be seen in isolation from other prominent digital activities such as publishing personal affective belongingness to various communities on social networking sites. The postsecular notion of disengagement with Eurocentric master narratives gets grounded and interwoven with multiple positionalities.

Islam and other affective belongingness

The second case concerns the personal, affective side of digital Muslim manifestations on profile pages. When prompted, 98.5 per cent of the Moroccan-Dutch youth who participated in our survey described themselves as Muslim. The question arises how they understand and circulate their Muslimness, especially in connection with other affective youth-cultural belongings. Affect is a translation from the Latin term *affectus* which can be understood as 'passion', 'emotion', and 'desire'. We consider the cultural politics of affectivity as theorized by Sarah Ahmed. She argued that emotions are doings that should not only be considered as mental states but also as 'social and cultural practices' (Ahmed, 2004: 9). Her focus is on how emotions arise from the contact of people with

material objects. Affectivity may cement personal attachments to groups of people, things, or ideas. Exploring affectivity and digital practices, for example, Lena Karlsson noted that the affective pleasures of women's diary blog reading stem from their search for various forms of 'recognition' and shifting alliances of 'sameness' along the lines of gender, age, and race/ethnicity (Karlsson, 2007: 138). Below, we unravel how religion is digitally remediated, showing how the personal 'Islamic touch' revives religion by absorbing it in a cool youth-cultural endeavour that links the everyday needs of a growing multicultural youth generation.

'An Islamic touch'

Among Moroccan-Dutch young people, both online and offline, 'Islam is used to give music, fashion, food, style or cultural imagery in general an Islamic touch' (Gazzah, 2009: 413). Islamic street-wear and the presence of Muslim rappers allows for the performance of a contemporary urban-based 'cool Islam' (Boubekeur, 2005; Meyer, 2011). In this second case study, we propose how an 'Islamic touch', as digitally published, must be understood in its relationship with multiple networks of affective belongingness, including youth culture.

In our questionnaire, we asked respondents which subcultural affiliations they would include on their personal social networking profile page (see Figure 8.1). Roughly half of the respondents reports to publish affiliations with a Muslim subculture and one-fifth see themselves as urban and hip hop. Gender differences become apparent; girls affiliate themselves more with dance music and being trendy and fashionable while boys see themselves more as sporty. As described in the previous section, religious positions are negotiated on Internet forums. It can be noted that defining oneself by expressing 'I am Muslim' for many Moroccan-Dutch youths has become a more positive way to articulate one's individual identity as opposed to an ascribed ethnic identity such as 'you are allochthonous'[3] or 'you are a c**t-Moroccan'. However, next to hip hop, urban, and the like, Moroccan-Dutch young people chose to be 'Muslim online' (Buitelaar, 2008: 244–247).

During the interviews, informants expanded on religious elements they incorporated in their self-presentations. Underlining ethnic proudness and wearing the headscarf as an important identity marker, 13-year-old Inas describes her construction of a personal profile page as follows: 'it's like, I'm wearing a headscarf. When I post a photo of me wearing a headscarf, you can so to say see that I have an Islamic background. And with my name and so on'. Furthermore, interviewees report to highlight their attachment to Islam by including religious acclimations such as
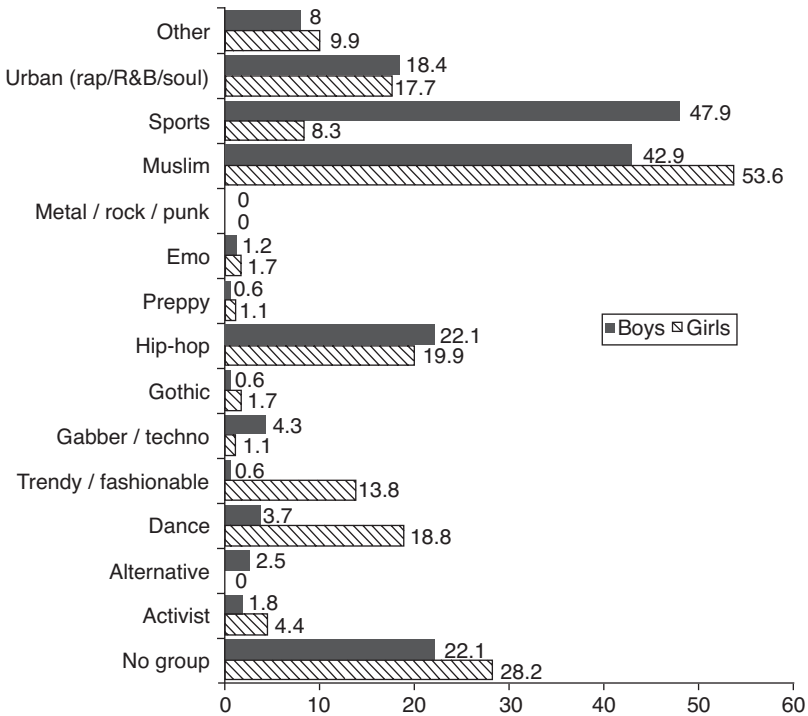
Figure 8.1 Subcultural youth group self-identifications among Moroccan-Dutch youths (percentages, multiple answers possible, n = 344)

'*Inshallah*' (God willing) in their nicknames or by showing they are a member of groups pertaining to Islam on their online profile page.

However, Safae (18 years old) reported that signalling Muslim affinities sometimes backfires: 'I have a girlfriend, and she wears a headscarf. On Hyves she got a message from someone stating "we live in 2010, a headscarf is outdated, it's something of the past". That was bad, you can't say that. I feel that is discrimination'. Such discriminatory practices were also, for instance, apparent in computer game culture. A fan of the game *Counter-Strike*, 15-year-old Oussema shared that he had bad experiences after he disclosed his ethnic and religious background to white Dutch players he encountered while playing the game: 'When saying I am Moroccan, I am a Muslim, I get called a terrorist'. Similarly, discussing YouTube videos pertaining to the country of Morocco, 16-year-old Naoul said: 'When you watch a video on YouTube, they shout

"c**t-Moroccans" and this and that about Moroccans'. However, beyond such polarizing remarks that seek to categorize and essentialize Moroccan-Dutch youth identities, the following section demonstrates informants employ various tactics to express multiple belongingness.

Signalling the cultural politics of global-local flows of people, technologies, and feelings, the affective encounter of bodies with media objects such as hyperlinks shifts attention from processes of meaning making towards apprehending them as experiences that matter (Karatzogianni and Kuntsman, 2012). Digital practices on their own do not determine feelings, but the affective relationship between groups of individuals with particular signs – such as a cool Islam – can make them matter as they 'weave' the virtual and the real (Gajjala, Yartey, and Birzescu, 2013: 50). The notion of the everyday as affective gets invoked, as religion is not something exceptional and visible only in the public sphere (where it gets attacked) but is also intimate, private, personal, and subject to multiple interpretations. How the online world captures this dynamic is of particular relevance for the younger generations located at the crossroads between traditional ideas of religious behaviour and more fluid, negotiable, transnationalized ideas of being a good Muslim/Muslima. Online, various sources can be found on how to do things properly, how to wear a *chador*, to pray, to read the Koran, and so forth. However the new spaces created online for religious subculture also hint at the tensions between expectations and choices, respect and self-determination, radicalized practices and fluid negotiations. The ambivalence and liberatory character of personal affective renderings of religion online can be traced by following hypertextual links. These are as Odin writes (cited in Landow, 2006) the ideal format to contest linear and authoritative narratives, applying through material practices the principle of postcolonialism and postsecularism.

Hypertextual selves

At the beginning of our interviews, informants were invited to reflect on their personal positioning. Thirteen-year-old Ilham for example described herself stating 'I am Moroccan, Berber and Muslim, but as you can see I hold the Dutch nationality'. Sixteen-year-old Amir states, 'I have my own personal style, and I don't belong to one group in particular, it is just multiculti, I feel'. In a similar vein, Oussema asserts: 'My religion is Islam, but it does not play a big role in my life. However, the projected image that [arises] when saying I have Islamic roots, does play a role. I like to surprise people by behaving in a way that does not [fit] with how they project my people'. We want to zoom in on hyperlinking practices

to show how Moroccan-Dutch youth digitally destabilize narrow inter-
pretations of Moroccan-Dutchness and Islam.

Social networking sites allow users to add hyperlinks to their personal
profile pages, publish preferences, and participate in and affiliate with
interest-based communities. Through the publishing of hyperlinks,
informants render visible their distributed personal affective belong-
ings. Jaishree Odin argued hyperlinking practices shape an aesthetic
that can accommodate the multiplicity of postcolonial subjectivity:
'[t]he perpetual negotiation of difference that the border subject engages
in creates a new space that demands its own aesthetic'. Hypertext
aesthetic, she proposes 'represents the need to switch from the linear,
univocal, closed, authoritative aesthetic involving passive encounters
characterizing the performance of the same to that of non-linear, multi-
vocal, open, non-hierarchical aesthetic involving active encounters that
are marked by repetition of the same with and in difference' (cited in
Landow, 2006: 356–357). We would like to emphasize that hypertex-
tual selves not only demonstrates a postcolonial aesthetic but also docu-
ments the workings of postsecular digital practices.

Upon joining a Hyves group, a small icon appears on a personal profile
page. On her Hyves personal profile page, 13-year-old Midia hyper-
links to a variety of groups ranging from feminist interests ('Women
in Charge') and Dutch nationalism ('I love Holland') to food cultures
relating to both migration backgrounds ('Choumicha, the Moroccan
and Turkish kitchen', 'Moroccan tea junky') as well as global junk food
('McDonald's'). She expresses belonging to religious interests ('Hijaab
Style', 'Islam = Peace'), different clothing styles, from headscarves
('Respect is what I ask for the headscarf that I'm wearing') to Moroccan
dresses ('Moroccan dresses 2009') and global fashion trends ('Skinny
Jeans love' and the brand 'H&M'). Additionally, she joined the groups
'Moroccan Male Hotties' and 'Show you chose for Freedom – sign up
for the Freedom-Hyves'. These different visual statements cover a wide
spectrum of interests, belongings, and affiliations signalling distributed
recognitions of 'sameness' (Karlsson, 2007). Taken together on a profile
page, these different hyperlinks constitute an affective discursive space
of intercultural encounter. In expressing a variety of affective belong-
ings that Midia displays actively, she revalues her ethnic, religious, and
gendered embeddings. This example shows the unexpected postsecular
coalitions Moroccan-Dutch young people signal online rather than a
straightforward continuation of migrant and religious cultures. They
actively transform them in the context of the dominant youth cultures
in which they grow up.

Conclusions

In this chapter, by addressing the articulation of religion through the use of digital media among urban, Muslim, Moroccan-Dutch, young people, links between postsecular debates, postcolonialism, and digital culture were established. Internet applications are one of the social stages where ethnic and religious minority youth struggle to stake out their individual identities by narrating themselves in various ways. Our analysis hopefully contributes to countering the implicit resurgent conservative reaction in the contemporary European and Dutch debates on the revival of religion, which tend to isolate Muslims as the locus of the return of religion as a challenge to democracy, secularism, and progress.

Contesting the association of religion with backwardness, or straight 'foreignness', Moroccan-Dutch youth appropriate Islam, through their digital practices, as a cool affective marker, not an essentialized category, removed from other markers of identity and belonging. Allowing like-minded youth to connect and inserting in the public sphere alternative configurations of believing, forum discussions are recognized in case study one for circulating self-presentations among like-minded peers. These under-the-radar processes are recognized to foster agency through democratization of belief systems and religious authority and resisting hegemonic renderings of Moroccan-Dutchness and Islam. Though religion figures as one of the dominant markers of identity formation it has become an affective everyday practice that is deeply embedded in digital affordances and networks. Case study two demonstrated religiosity is never articulated in isolation from other affective hyperlinked ties such as that of nationality, ethnicity, education, age, generation, class, and gender. The focus on affectivity is also useful to counteract prior utopian disembodied understandings of signification through digital practices.

Through the exploration of these connections it emerges that digital networks constitute a safe arena to unravel and display one's multiple networks of affective belongings. It constitutes also a safe space to practice piety and alternative forms of religious agency, not necessarily in conflict with the dictums of the host society which label religion, and Islam in particular, as blocking youth from integration and girls, in particular, from their path to emancipation. Countering these stereotypes and public pressures, forum discussions and hypertextual aesthetic indicate we should go beyond assessing the risk of isolation and radicalization of religious groups. It should

not be forgotten, nonetheless, that the online world is not a separate sphere from the offline world, and that it often reproduces in more stark ways, and even reinforces, the dichotomy played out in society at large. However, as we have tried to show, youth migrant cultures in the Netherlands manage to create digital practices that both revive and revisit the notion of religion in everyday life, in playful and, at times, ironic ways. Hybridization, countering, carnivalesque, humour, parody, hyperlinking, and posting are some of the postcolonial and postsecular subversive strategies used that give an Islamic touch to everyday culture without resorting to violence or public defiance. At the same time, Islam or religion is re-appropriated and revisited from new perspectives. This makes the so-called revival of religion part of a cool endeavour that connect a more cosmopolitan public sphere with the everyday needs of a growing multicultural youth generation. This creates new forms of transnational ties and global branding along with new forms of religious affectivity and piety.

Notes

1. Postcolonialism has always been considered an offspring of postmodernism, though various critiques have focused on how the 'post' in postmodernism is not the same as in 'post' colonialism. In his famous essay 'Is the "Post" in "Postcolonial" the "Post" in "Postmodern"?' Appiah suggested, for example, that both 'posts' signal a spacing gesture through which the prefix remains inextricably connected to the root word ('modernism', 'colonialism') (Appiah, 1997: 428–429). Therefore, postcolonialism is bound to the legacy of colonialism it critiques and postmodernism to the modernism it continues. Obviously these relations are neither chronological nor teleological but are characterized by fracture and tense asymmetries. It is a 'post' that challenges master narratives and universalizing discourses, that aims at opening up the space for silenced histories and marginalized groups. Nonetheless, while the 'post' in postmodern emphasizes pluralism and multiplicities, the 'post' in postcolonialism wants to retain a certain humanism, or anticolonial humanism that can account for the suffering of colonial subjects while rejecting the master narratives of modernism (Appiah, 1997: 438).
2. This is in line with Huggan's argument in his 'Is the "post" in "Postsecular" the "post" in "Postcolonial",' who, paraphrasing Appiah on the relation of the 'posts' in postmodernism and postcolonialism, explains that postsecularism should be understood as a shift in the secularization paradigm which particularly applies to Western liberal democracies that 'are not postsecular at all but are rather caught in a continuing process of secularization, one symptom of which is the efflorescence of alternative spiritualities, and another the fundamentalist recoil against spiritual pluralism in the context of a consumer orientate late capitalist world' (Huggan, 2010: 753).

3. In the Netherlands, the term 'allochtoon' is widely used to refer to immigrants and their descendants. Officially the term 'allochtoon' is much more specific and refers to anyone who had at least one parent born outside the Netherlands. A further distinction is made between 'Western' and 'non-Western' 'allochtoon' people. The term is, however, often considered to refer to Moroccan, Surinamese, and Turkish immigrants to label specific immigrants groups. Therefore considered as stigmatizing, the city council of Amsterdam decided to stop using the term in 2013 because of its divisive effect.

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