

# **PURIFICATION AND RESISTANCE**

Glocal Meanings of Islamic Fundamentalism in the Netherlands



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ZUIVERING EN VERZET  
Glokale betekenissen van islamitisch fundamentalisme in Nederland

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## Introduction

### CONSIDERING THE 'OTHERNESS' AND ATTRACTION OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

What else can we do? You can wear a belt and take two people into death, if it doesn't go wrong. (...) Eventually we are prepared to do anything, in a broad sense, anything. (...) Mohammad B. said it right: 'the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November Allah sent his soldier'.<sup>1</sup> - Nidal

It is good, finally they feel it. (...) It is true that they are suppressing more Muslims now, but they know now that we offer resistance and that scares them. They can't distinguish the terrorists from non-terrorists. (...) There is a hadith that says that if the end of the world is coming near, a war will take place between believers and unbelievers. The believers will win. - Yelda

It is these kinds of statements and violent actions that have aroused fear of Islamic fundamentalism in the Netherlands since 9/11. Nidal's and Yelda's words express a conviction of the ultimate truth and a dualist vision of the world. From this conviction they derive a sense of superiority and that violence is legitimate against their enemies. Viewpoints like theirs have, moreover, promoted the clash of civilization thesis that presents (fundamentalist) Muslims as diametrically opposed to Dutch non-Muslims. But how 'other' are fundamentalist Muslims in the Netherlands? What are their beliefs and practices? How do their beliefs and practices develop over time? And what attracts Dutch Muslims to fundamentalism? These questions form the principal focus of this book.

The introduction will, on the one hand, clarify the context in which these questions have emerged and, on the other hand, elaborate on the approach to find answers to them. First it will consider how Dutch society has come to see the threat of Islamic fundamentalism. Thereafter it reflects on the limitations of explanations that emphasize the 'otherness' of Dutch fundamentalist Muslims. The introduction continues to discuss the exact focus, the research questions, and the added value of this criminological study. Finally, it presents an overview of the structure of this book.

#### **The Perception of an Islamic Fundamentalist Threat**

Islamic fundamentalism has fostered a sense of threat in the Netherlands. The sense of threat stems in part from international events. On a worldwide scale, the

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<sup>1</sup> Nidal refers here to Mohammed Bouyeri, who killed Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the name of Islamic *jihad* on November 2, 2004. His motivation was to defend Islam against the insults of van Gogh. See the next section of this introduction for an elaboration on this matter.

most notable events are those of 9/11 – that demonstrated violent *jihad* going global – and the transnational ‘War on Terror’. Within Europe violent plots of extremist Islamic groups in various countries, as most notoriously expressed in the Madrid and London bombings, have fuelled social fear.

The perception of threat, however, has not been reserved to groups that promote violence.<sup>2</sup> Instead, Islam in its entirety has received criticism for posing a danger to liberal democratic societies. In the Netherlands the main critics of Islam have been the politicians Pim Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Geert Wilders, and filmmaker-columnist Theo van Gogh. Fortuyn’s anti-immigration and especially anti-Islamic statements found broad resonance in Dutch society after 9/11. He chose a populist approach and indicted ‘the left-wing church’ for its politically correct views regarding multiculturalism. As opposed to their views, he was particularly critical of Muslims in the Netherlands because he viewed Islam as a ‘backward’ religion that failed to conform to Dutch liberal standards (Fortuyn, 2002). As a result of his popularity the 2002 opinion polls predicted that his party would become the big winner of the elections. It was only a few days before the elections in May 2002, that he was murdered by an environmental activist. Still, the Dutch voted massively for his party, thereby signalling to the old political establishment that they wanted change. Consequently, mainstream political parties also adopted Pim Fortuyn’s ‘new political correctness’. This correctness involved criticism of multiculturalism and an awareness of the alleged ‘dangers’ of Islam becoming more widespread. From 2002 onwards, the loudest voices came from members of the Dutch Liberal Party: former Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the former Minister of Integration and Immigration Rita Verdonk, and Geert Wilders.

These politicians criticized different aspects of Islam. Hirsi Ali directed her criticism mostly towards the position of women in Islam and claimed that Islam and democracy are irreconcilable.<sup>3</sup> Wilders agreed with this latter clash of civilizations argument (Huntington, 1996) and developed a general anti-Islam rhetoric with his film ‘Fitna’ in 2008 being one of the intended highlights. Verdonk’s criticism was of a more general nature, in line with her post as a Minister. She stood for strict immigration and integration policies for ethnic minorities. Over time, Wilders became the principle representative of the

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<sup>2</sup> In fact, in the Netherlands the threat of terrorism has been put into perspective in recent years. In line with the absence of actual terrorist attacks, reports from intelligence services and policy documents demonstrate a return from the perception of radicalization and extremism as a mostly internal to a largely external, yet ‘limited’ threat (NCTb, 2011; Zaitch, van Swaaningen & Geelhoed, 2007). In addition, policy documents acknowledge the need to distinguish between, on the one hand, orthodox and even radical Muslims – who do not have to pose an actual threat – and, on the other hand, violent extremists who are presented in these documents as the real danger. The government argues that “non-violent forms of extremism and orthodoxy are not necessarily troublesome from a safety perspective. To prevent violent extremism among individuals and groups it is required to intervene as quickly as possible” (NCTb, 2011: 9-10). Yet, as a consequence of this view and despite the nuances, the Dutch government continues its ‘broad’ policy approach and, hence, unavoidably continues to target a large group of Dutch Muslims.

<sup>3</sup> She eventually left the Netherlands to become part of the American Enterprise Institute, a think tank in the United States.

population's discomfort. He started his own political party which takes a harsh stance against Islam, for example by calling for a stop to immigration from Muslim countries and by calling the Quran a fascist book.

Besides these politicians other public figures expressed criticism of Islam. One of them was filmmaker and columnist Theo van Gogh, who called Muslims 'goat fuckers' among other things. With Ayaan Hirsi Ali he made the film 'Submission' about the alleged inferior position and abuse of women in Islam in which they showed projections of Quranic verses on the bodies of naked women. This film attracted the attention of Mohammed Bouyeri, a 26-year-old man of Moroccan descent who was raised in the Netherlands. Motivated by indignation about the movie, he tracked down van Gogh on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2004 and killed him, shooting him five times and slicing his throat. The note he left on the body and the subsequent trial proved that he believed to have murdered van Gogh in the name of Islam.

The assassination of van Gogh caused a shock in the Netherlands that led to an intensification of the criticism of Islam and a call for a fierce reaction by the criminal justice system. In response, policy makers and Intelligence Services implemented a 'broad approach' aimed at a large group of potential radicals through new legislation and policies that increase the possibilities for their detection, disruption and prosecution (de Graaff, 2008; Ministry of Security and Justice, 2011; Zaitch, van Swaeningen & Geelhoed, 2007). One of the main changes in criminal law concerns the newly introduced 'terrorist objective' as a reason for harsher punishments. The trial of the 'Hofstad group' – of the group around Mohammed Bouyeri – was the test case for the new law. The suspects in this trial were initially convicted of being members of a terrorist organization.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a change in criminal procedural law allows for exceptional measures against alleged terrorists, for instance by keeping them in a special detention regime. By simultaneously attributing more powers to criminal justice agencies, the human rights of suspects and convicts are jeopardized. Besides these legal changes that have already taken effect, a discussion on the prohibition of certain religious expressions is taking place. Wilders' party calls Islam "primarily a political ideology and thus it cannot in any way make an appeal to the privileges of a religion" (PVV, 2010: 15). As a result, the party promotes a 'fight against Islam' and requests anti-Islamic policy measures. Among the measures the party suggests are the closure of Islamic schools, a prohibition of the Quran and the face-covering *burqa*<sup>5</sup>, and the introduction of a tax on headscarves, the so-called 'head-rags tax' (PVV, 2010). Several scholars have expressed their concerns about this kind of policy development as being irreconcilable with the Dutch constitutional state (e.g. de Graaff, 2008; Maussen, 2006: 232). These concerns are fuelled because Prime Minister Rutte's cabinet depends on the support of Wilders' Freedom Party, which became the third biggest party after the

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<sup>4</sup> In appeal the suspects were acquitted of the charge of being members of a terrorist organization, but in 2010 the Supreme Court decided that the Court of Appeal has to reconsider the acquittal.

<sup>5</sup> Since September 2011 women who wear a *burqa* can receive a fine of up to 380 euros.

Parliamentary elections of June 2010. As a result, the cabinet is obliged to acknowledge Wilders' arguments.<sup>6</sup>

The massive number of votes for Wilders reflects the broad social support that the anti-Islam rhetoric has. The media are also claimed to have contributed to this supportive atmosphere. According to, for example, Shahid (2005) they have fostered a climate of polarization by focusing on sensational issues related to Islam and Islamic radicalism in particular (also see Bouabid, 2010). Opinion polls have confirmed that Islamophobic sentiments among the population have risen. In their turn these feelings have inspired violence against Muslim targets. In response to the extremist violence of 9/11 and the murder of van Gogh there have been reports of vandalism against Islamic institutions, such as setting fire to Islamic schools. Furthermore, Muslims have more frequently become victims of physical abuse and discrimination (Bovenkerk, 2006).

At the time of finishing this study, the call for democracy in the Arab world has become louder. This call has already led to the downfall of several undemocratic regimes while some other political leaders still face massive protests from their population. Depending on whether democracies or religiously inspired regimes will be installed in these countries, the clash of civilization thesis could be proven wrong or claimed to be right. In the first case, this could eventually lead to less polarized views, also in the Netherlands. For now, however, the social reality is still, in sum, that the relation between the Muslim and non-Muslim populations in the Netherlands is tense and polarized. But what underlies this polarization? This raises the question whether, or to what extent, Islamic fundamentalism results from cultural otherness.

### **How 'Other' are Muslim Fundamentalists?**

When considering the otherness of Muslim fundamentalists one has to remember that the phenomena of fundamentalism and radicalism are, firstly, not limited to Islam and, secondly, have historically occurred within 'civilizations'. The term fundamentalism, for example, was first applied to scripturalist Christian movements in the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism also have fundamentalist currents (Marty & Appleby, 1991-1995). Moreover, past and present societies have known radical groups in different shapes and forms, with both religious and ideological

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<sup>6</sup> In its 2011 Integration Policy the cabinet demonstrates how it is trying to achieve a balance between anti-Islamic sentiments and a more nuanced approach by arguing: "The cabinet is aware of the fact that Islam, which as the religion of many immigrants has quickly become one of the larger religions in the Netherlands, evokes concerns among parts of the population for its different traditions, attitudes and the association with violence and radicalization elsewhere in the world, but also in the Netherlands. In its view, the requirements of a democratic constitutional state could end up under pressure. The cabinet acknowledges the existence of these concerns and sees it as its task to take them away wherever possible because they threaten societal cohesion; but neither through misrecognition of Islam's freedom of religion nor by a principal distrust against this religion. The freedom of religion, however, should not offer protection to radicalization or behaviour that is anti-democratic or fundamentally opposed to the foundations of Dutch society" (Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2011: 5-6).

motivations. Examples range from radical Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland to 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchists in Russia and communist radicals and extremists from the late 1960s till the 1980s (e.g. Juergensmeyer, 2003; Duyvesteyn & de Graaf, 2007). Of the latter type, the most notorious groups are the Rote Armee Fraktion in Germany and the Brigatte Rosse in Italy, who received support from – among others – ‘De Rode Jeugd’ in the Netherlands (Pekelder, 2007). It is important to note that while the members of these groups adopted a communist rhetoric, they generally had the same cultural background as their fellow nationals. The same applies to contemporary movements like those of right-wing extremists and animal rights activists, but even to Islamic fundamentalist movements in Muslim countries. Thus the radical or fundamentalist ideas of these groups do not seem to result from a clash of civilizations. Instead, it appears that the emergence of these groups can better be explained by other social processes and conflicts, such as has been done for radical groups in the past (Duyvesteyn & de Graaf, 2007; Pekelder, 2007). The logical question is thus why one would presuppose that this is different for fundamentalist Muslims in Western countries like the Netherlands.

One argument in favour of a different approach towards (radical) fundamentalist Muslims could be that they have a non-Western cultural background. A popular perception of fundamentalist Muslims in the Netherlands – and other Western European countries – is that they are immigrants, often second-generation, who have failed to integrate sufficiently and/or are living in between two cultures that they find hard to reconcile. As a result, the argument goes, they fall back on a fundamentalist interpretation of their religion. Previous research has put a large emphasis on this type of cultural explanation. This is the case for both publications on the basis of governmental and governmentally commissioned research (most notably Buijs, Demant & Hamdy, 2006; Meah & Mellis, 2009; Slooman & Tillie, 2006) and independent research by academics (see Benschop, 2004 and de Koning, 2008). These studies have focused on second-generation Moroccan youngsters and their interest in ‘Salafism’ and principally its ‘radical’ interpretation. Considering this limited focus it is not surprising that the researchers present cultural factors – such as living a diasporic life and intergenerational conflicts of second-generation Muslim immigrants – as principal explanatory factors. Yet, this cultural argument falls short in three senses. First, it over-predicts the popularity of Islamic fundamentalism among Dutch Muslims. Second, it fails to explain why only some of those who adopt Salafi viewpoints choose a radical interpretation (e.g. Balogh, Siesling, Jacobs & Moors, 2009; Roex, Van Stiphout & Tillie, 2010). Can the same cultural factors help to explain these differential responses? Third, the cultural argument fails to account for converts who turn to Islamic fundamentalism. Such a turn appears to have happened with Jason and Jermaine Walters in the Netherlands, but also with – for example – the British Germaine Lindsay (e.g. Benjamin, 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2007; Pargeter, 2008; Spalek, 2007). There were also a few native converted women involved in the background of the Hofstad group, such as Martine van den Oever.

In light of the shortcomings of previous explanations, my argument is that – instead of taking cultural differences as a starting point – it is necessary to adopt a more open attitude. This attitude implies a close review of the personal experiences and narratives of Dutch fundamentalist Muslims, including converts, in the light of the broader social context. It is through such an approach that one can discover what inspires their turn to various forms of Islamic fundamentalism. Further, to discover why some individuals opt for non-radical and others for radical interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism, it is necessary to look outside the box of existing radicalization studies. Unlike previous studies,<sup>7</sup> I therefore treat Islamic radicalization as a specific form of conversion: ‘radical conversion’.

Before moving on to the question of how to undertake such a project, the next section reflects briefly on the exact focus of and the reasons behind this study.

### **Fundamentalism, not Terrorism**

Although one of the issues addressed in this book is indeed how certain Muslims come to legitimize religious violence, the foregoing indicates that violence is not the central focus of this book. The main question is how Dutch Muslims become convinced of the absolute, dualist truth of fundamentalisms. Even though there are studies that use the term fundamentalism to describe religious militant movements, I follow the example of other studies which consider the term also applicable to non-militant movements that take a scripturalist approach to return to what they see as the ultimate fundamentals of their religion.<sup>8</sup> Why is it that certain Dutch Muslims feel that they need this type of ultimate answer? And how do some of them, like Nidal and Yelda, come to use this claim on truth to legitimize violence?

These are questions that have fascinated me ever since adolescence. With a father from a very strict protestant family and a brother who entered a new age world of absolute truth, love and light, I have always been around people who claim to hold THE truth, as opposed to mass deception. In the eyes of these ‘chosen ones’ everybody who does not recognize the universality of truth’s nature seems to be ignorant and captured in the seductive nature of the material world and their human egos. Because of my fascination with dualist belief systems, it was logical for me to become interested in Muslims who were labelled ‘radical Muslims’ after the murder of van Gogh. It was only a few months after his murder that I got the opportunity to write a research proposal. At that time, the discourse in the media and politics was changing from a focus on an external Islamic threat to the internal threat of the ‘home-grown’<sup>9</sup> radical Muslim. In the

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<sup>7</sup> Scholars on radicalization have neglected the lessons of conversion studies, with Spalek (2007) as an exception. Yet, she too fails to explain the differences in conversion to non-radical and radical interpretations of Islamic fundamentalism.

<sup>8</sup> A more detailed description of fundamentalism and the different types of fundamentalism follows in Chapter 2.

<sup>9</sup> The term ‘home-grown’ is commonly used to refer to radical Muslims who grew up in the Netherlands.

following years 'radical Muslims' became associated with 'Salafism'. I wanted to know who these people were, what they believed and how their Islamic views developed over time. The case of Bouyeri suggested that a young person, who seemed to be well-integrated into Dutch society, could suddenly become radicalized. He performed reasonably well at school, was involved in volunteer work in a youth centre. Some incidents in his personal life, such as his mother's death and the failure of a youth project that he had developed, seemingly pushed him towards another view of society. How would this be for other young Muslims like him? Furthermore, I was curious about their experiences in Dutch society since 9/11 and the murder of van Gogh. I wondered if they experienced more criticism of Islam and if so, how they responded to it. The events since 9/11 thus offer a suitable opportunity to address questions of fundamentalist truth, its appeal to people in certain social contexts and how it relates to polarization and violent and other behaviour.

### Research Questions

In short, the objective of this study is to gain insight in the attraction of Islamic fundamentalist views in the Netherlands. This study, therefore, aims at deepening knowledge about 1) the differences between various Islamic fundamentalist movements, 2) the relation between beliefs and behaviour, 3) the religious development of Dutch Muslims over time, 4) the attraction of fundamentalist beliefs, and 5) the involvement of converts. These aims find expression in two central research questions:

1. *How does the development of Dutch Muslims who turn to Islamic fundamentalism take place?*
2. *What are the reasons for and motives of these Muslims to get involved in Islamic fundamentalism?*

Both central research questions focus especially on converts and include women.<sup>10</sup> The first question is of a descriptive nature. It implies exploring how and when respondents construct their Muslim identity. At what moment in their lives do they become interested in practising Islam? How does the process of identity construction take place? What is the role of other people when they turn to Islam? How do they legitimize their fundamentalist truth? And how does it affect their attitudes and behaviour in daily life? In brief, the first question aims

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<sup>10</sup> While research on radical and extremist women exists (e.g. Blee, 1998, 2005; de Cataldo Neuburger & Valentini, 1996; McKay, 2005; Moser & Clark, 2001; Ness, 2005), and also in Islam (e.g. Cook, 2005; Nivat, 2005), recent studies on Islamic radicalization in the Netherlands focus largely on men. Neglecting women is unjustified since the Dutch terrorism convicts formed part of a group which included converted and born-again women, of which one – Soumaya S. – has been convicted for membership of a terrorist organization, among other things. Similarly, little is known about what attracts Dutch female converts to orthodox Islamic views that are often presented as limiting women's rights. The question as to why Dutch women – Muslim or otherwise – opt for Islamic fundamentalism and what it brings them thus remains to be answered.

at clarifying the process by which individuals come to accept the ‘absolute truth’ of Islamic fundamentalism.

The answer to the second question contributes to understanding the attraction of the fundamentalist truths that the people in this study are convinced of. To arrive at this understanding, this study explores issues related to personal experiences, life events, and group dynamics from a criminological perspective.

### **The Added Value of a Criminological Study**

To determine the added value of this particular study this section first considers its relevance. At present, there is a risk of increasing polarization which could prove to be a matter of socially toxic interaction. In social debate Islam is regularly equated with radicalism or even terrorism. Through this kind of equation Dutch Muslims are ‘othered’ and considered a threat to Western constitutional states. This generalization is problematic for two reasons. First, whether the fear of Islam is justified or not, the Thomas theorem proves itself right: if people define something as real, it is real in its consequences. In this case that means that polarization contributes to Muslims being viewed and treated as the other. According to survey results of the CBS 95% of the 850.000 Dutch Muslims are from non-Western origin. The majority is of Moroccan and Turkish descent. This makes them relatively easy to distinguish from the native Dutch population in both an ethnic and a religious sense (van Hertem, 2007). It is therefore likely that in their everyday lives Muslims experience Islamophobic reactions, which can increase polarization (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). The second problematic aspect concerns the possible impact of polarization. Islam is the second largest religion in Europe. With an estimated 5.8% of the population the percentage of Muslims in the Netherlands is among the highest in Europe (Forum, 2008: 11). Consequently, generalizations and simplifications (on either side) could enlarge social problems instead of solving them. Unfounded generalizations and simplifications could be prevented with the answers to the research questions.

It might not seem evident why these in themselves relevant research questions should be the subject of a criminological study. What is the relevance and added value of a criminological perspective in the study of fundamentalist Muslims? Criminologists have studied a broad scope of subjects related to crime and social problems, varying from deviants to victims and social reactions, such as safety policies, media discourse, and social exclusion. The development and attraction of Islamic fundamentalism in the Netherlands fits this picture in several ways. To begin with, social discourse generally presents Islamic fundamentalism as a social problem. Islamic fundamentalist views have been linked to ‘radicalization’ which could lead to intolerance and violence. According to this discourse, Muslims who turn to fundamentalist interpretations of Islam potentially form a criminal or other threat to Dutch society. In addition, and as a result, these Muslims have become the object of safety policies through which they experience labelling and social exclusion. Radicalization and the impact of

social exclusion are thus both criminologically relevant issues (e.g. Hamm, 2004, 2005b; Ruggiero, 2006, 2010). A criminological study of these phenomena should not be limited to radical Muslims, however, because one is likely to understand radicalization more fully when one compares radicals to non-radicals.

In terms of the added value of a criminological approach, one of the strengths of criminology is its interdisciplinary nature. This interdisciplinary approach recognizes that social problems are too complex to understand within the borders of a single discipline (e.g. Ruggiero, 2010). Therefore, criminologists study their subjects from a broad range of disciplines. The disciplines that this study draws lessons from are sociology, social psychology, globalization studies, religion studies, political sciences, and anthropology. Some of these lessons relate to the methodological approach while others concern the theoretical framework. For the methodology, it is sociology, psychology and anthropology that form the main sources of inspiration. This inspiration has contributed to a mixture of qualitative research methods: in-depth interviews with participant observation and analysis of discussions on internet forums. These methods help to reveal the insider perspective of fundamentalist Muslims and consequently allow for a unique insight to be gained into the complexities of their world.

The theoretical framework is equally interdisciplinary. It emerged over the course of this project through evaluating the data in the light of literature from the various research disciplines. As a result of this evaluation the main theoretical point rests in cultural criminology, sociology and social psychology. Key concepts in explaining the attraction of fundamentalist views are identity, belonging, strain, liquidity, othering and glocal subculture. From criminological theories I will make most use of subcultural theories and cultural criminology. From sociological theories I focus especially on ideas about the identity project and social interactions in a liquid, consumer society (Bauman, 2004; Giddens, 1991). Thereby this study considers to what extent the respondents' religious development and identities reflect 'glocalization' processes in which global phenomena – such as Islamic fundamentalism – merge with the local into glocal shapes (Robertson, 1995).

The main themes indicate that the theoretical framework includes explanatory factors that range from social structure on a macro-level to psychological processes on a micro-level. By recognizing the relevance of individual psychology, this study responds to the call to re-introduce a critical, social psychology into criminology (Chancer & McLaughlin, 2003; Gadd & Jefferson, 2007; Jefferson, 2004). Gadd and Jefferson argue for a 'psychosocial criminology' that addresses:

(...) the need to understand human subjects as, simultaneously, the products of their own unique psychic worlds and a shared social world. (...) The important point is to hang on to both the psychic and the social, but without collapsing the one into the other. Conceptualizing this psychosocial subject non-reductively implies that the complexities of both the inner and the outer world are taken seriously (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007: 4).

Then how does such a psychosocial criminological approach help to fill in the blanks in current explanations of Islamic fundamentalism in Western countries such as the Netherlands? A psychosocial orientation requires researchers to probe deeply into the individual's biography and conscious or unconscious narratives. While previous research in the Netherlands has paid insufficient attention to individual conversion or radicalization processes, this study demonstrates that these processes – in relation to the current social context – shed light on the motives and reasons to turn to Islamic fundamentalist views. As will become clear, such a close look offers indications for the differential attraction of non-radical and radical fundamentalist beliefs. The resulting understanding contributes to insight into what motivates people to adopt a radical interpretation of Islam. This insight allows governments to evaluate existing discourses and policies and points to new directions to address these motives. As such it can lead to a decrease in violent expressions, such as the murder of van Gogh, and their support. In short, the understanding that this particular criminological approach brings forth would ideally be able to help diminish tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims.

### **Structure of the Book**

Several building blocks bring answers to the research questions. The first step concerns the methodological foundation of this study. For that purpose, Chapter 1 includes a description of the three qualitative research methods – semi-open interviews, observations, and analysis of internet discussions – and a reflection on the use of these methods.

Chapter 2 elaborates on Islamic fundamentalist views in the Netherlands. It does so by presenting previous research findings and comparing these to the practice of the respondents. It sketches a broad picture of the respondents' beliefs concerning those matters that public debate is most concerned about. It reveals the different approaches that the respondents have regarding the 'truth' of Islam and their attitudes and behaviour as citizens of a Western, democratic society such as the Netherlands. The chapter finally distinguishes between moderate, orthodox, radical and extremist views, a distinction that is used throughout the remainder of this book.

The following three chapters deal with the reasons and motives for the respondents to turn to the various fundamentalist views. To begin with, Chapter 3 will show how the religious development of the respondents has taken place. The principal question that this chapter addresses is how the respondents developed a cognitive opening for fundamentalist views (Wiktorowicz, 2005). The chapter therefore considers experiences of identity crisis and strain as well as the role of significant others. Chapters 4 and 5 address the appeal of fundamentalist discourses of self-identification and resistance. These chapters thus deal with the question about what fundamentalist discourses have to offer to the respondents with their specific cognitive opening.

The reflection on attitudes is followed by a comparison between the respondents' attitudes and their actual fundamentalist practice in Chapter 6. This chapter reflects on how the fundamentalist respondents internalize and express their Muslim identity. As such, this chapter provides further insights into the attraction of different fundamentalist viewpoints.

Chapter 7 evaluates the lessons of the previous chapters and places the findings in the broader social context. In addition, this chapter finally presents the theoretical framework of this study. While it might seem odd to discuss theories at the end, the reason for doing it is that it is only once all the pieces of the puzzle have been laid out that they can be put together. So reflecting on what Islamic fundamentalism and the turn to it means to the respondents helps to bricolage a suitable theoretical framework.

Finally, the conclusions present the overarching message of this study. As such the conclusions put together the answers of previous chapters concerning how and why the Dutch individuals in this study, from Muslim or non-Muslim families, men and women, have turned to orthodox, radical or extremist Islam. On the basis of these answers the conclusions shed light on the question of how 'other' the participation in these Islamic movements in the Netherlands is, which leads to policy implications and suggestions for further research.

In the chapters which present the data I have included a number of text boxes. These boxes serve to give an impression of the data and stories of the respondents. In most cases they tell the stories of the interview respondents, whereas in a couple of other chapters they involve a fragment of an observation report or of an internet discussion. Obviously, these figures only contain a selection of the available data even though I have attempted to include all relevant information for the topic of the chapter at hand based on interview reports. As a result, some boxes are rather lengthy, while others are relatively short. In either case, the boxes could be read independently, but the main text clarifies the relation of the fragments to the chapter's topic.



## REMOVING THE VEIL

“It is about time that the girl in black gets looked at differently!” says Layla, a student of a so-called Salafi teacher, when asked to participate in an interview. In her view she is well-integrated and she disagrees with the image that Salafi interpretations of Islam are radical. Layla’s views point to the methodological issues that this chapter deals with. On the one hand, her willingness to cooperate is indicative of some of the problems concerning validity. By trying to shed a favourable light on Salafism, for example, she could hold back information and give socially desirable responses. On the other hand, her disagreement with negative opinions about Salafism confirms the need to understand the insider perspective. Understanding is obviously not the same as ‘agreeing’ or ‘justifying’. It simply means gaining insight into the beliefs and experiences from the perspective of fundamentalist Muslims. Existing studies which search for reasons and motives of Western Muslims to turn to fundamentalist views generally fail to explore the insider perspective. Most common are studies based on secondary data or interviews with specialists (e.g. Bakker, 2006; de Poot & Sonnenschein, 2009; Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009; Precht, 2007; Sageman, 2004, 2008; van der Pligt & Koomen, 2009; Vidino, 2007), questionnaires (e.g. Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008; Mirza, Senthilkumaran & Jafar, 2007; Slooman & Tillie, 2006; van den Bos, Loseman & Doosje, 2009<sup>11</sup>), and internet research (e.g. Benschop, 2004; Bunt, 2003; de Koning, 2008; Rogan, 2005; Roy, 2004). There are some researchers who did conduct qualitative interviews with orthodox and/or radical Muslims (e.g. Balogh, et al., 2009; Buijs, et al., 2006; Hamid, 2007b; Marranci, 2007; Pargeter, 2008; Stern, 2003), but the use of ethnographic methods, such as observations, is rare. In the Netherlands the study by de Koning (2008) is the main exception even though his study is about the meaning of various forms of Islam to youngsters of only Moroccan decent.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, it is particularly qualitative methods and ethnographic research which can shed light on the reasons and motives behind conversion and radicalization (see Horgan, 2004).

This chapter presents the three research methods that have been employed to explore the perspective of Islamic fundamentalists: semi-open interviews, observations, and analyses of online discussions. After an introduction to the qualitative approach this chapter continues with the researcher’s role in the field and the validity and reliability of this study.

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<sup>11</sup> The researchers of the latter two studies also conducted some interviews.

<sup>12</sup> The study by Roex, van Stiphout & Tillie (2010) and to a lesser extent that by Moors & Jacobs (2009) also employ ethnographic methods, but do not or hardly use the data to explain the turn to Salafism. More importantly, the focus on solely orthodox Muslims results in the common failure to address the differences between the groups.

## **1.1 Islamic Fundamentalism in the West: The Dutch Case and a British Impression**

Knowledge about 'home-grown' fundamentalist Muslims in Western countries is still limited. So what is their story? How did they turn to Islamic fundamentalist views and why did these interpretations attract them?

To answer these questions this study focuses on the Dutch 'case'. It is not a case study in the full sense of the word. Case studies are limited in scope, whereas this project includes a diverse group of Muslims and various locations (Leys, Zaitch & Decorte 2010: 176-177). Yet, it does share the objective to dig deeply into the social context and the diverse factors that contribute to Dutch Muslims embracing fundamentalist viewpoints. The aim is thus to come to understand this process, also from the insider perspective. Despite crossing the British border, this study does not involve a full international comparison, but it does include a modest glimpse into the British situation. This British outing is for two reasons. Firstly, the British situation is interesting for putting the Dutch data into perspective. Britain has a slightly longer history with Muslims and relatively large Salafi communities in cities such as London and Birmingham. Furthermore, Great Britain has experienced several terrorist attacks, but has responded to these issues in an allegedly more liberal way than the Netherlands. Secondly, some Dutch respondents have therefore argued that life for Muslims in Britain is better than in the Netherlands. One of the respondents even migrated to Great Britain. These two reasons made it a worthwhile endeavour to take a peak over the British fence.

## **1.2 Getting Started: Three Research Methods**

Exploring the meaning of Islamic fundamentalism to Dutch Muslims requires a combination of methods. To arrive at an insider perspective qualitative research methods are most suitable, because they allow for in-depth insight into personal biographies, conversion stories, the meaning of fundamentalist viewpoints in everyday life, social interactions and identity construction. Yet, not every qualitative method lend themselves equally well to these diverse issues. Personal biographies, for example, are easier to reveal in the face-to-face communication of interviews, whereas observations are more suitable for exploring social interactions. Combining interviews, observation and the analysis of online discussions made it possible to gather sufficient data to answer the central research questions. The following sections briefly review the scope, selection procedure and general research set-up for each research method. The practical employment and problems associated with these methods are the topics of later sections.

### ***1.2.1 Conducting Interviews***

In total, the data includes the transcripts of 42 formal in-depth interviews and reports of a similar number of additional conversations with a total number of 40 Muslim respondents. The interviews took place between May 2006 and January 2010. Keeping in regular touch with six respondents allowed me to follow their

development and, in some cases, their change of mind. Because of these changes, the interviews with two respondents have been repeated in their entirety.

### *'Recruiting' Respondents*

The first steps into the research field aimed at 'recruiting' respondents for the interviews. In order to encounter potential respondents I went to a variety of places and events. First, I attended the court procedures of the two principal Dutch terrorist cases. Other occasions were events held by diverse Islamic and other organizations, such as lectures held by Islamic student associations, debates in youth centres, Ramadan Festival events, and events organized by the multicultural organization 'Forum'.

The selection of respondents is based on a theoretical, purposive sampling technique (Mortelmans, 2010). The objective was to assemble a diverse sample in terms of background and ideas, but to principally include fundamentalists with a Salafi orientation. The respondents also include so-called 'moderate' Muslims.<sup>13</sup> By including them it became possible to compare divergent views and experiences. Such a comparison can clarify the meaning and attraction of Islamic fundamentalism. Moreover, the aim was to prevent a bias regarding gender, ethnicity, age, educational level, and the willingness to participate (which is possibly related to the type of story that they had to tell). In terms of personal characteristics the respondents are therefore converts and those raised as Muslims, both men and women. They have diverse ethnic roots and are of different ages. Regarding their religious environment the respondents had to come from diverse social networks, and a variety of cities and places. While trying to realize such variety I selected four respondents at the court, four at public events, three through introductions by colleagues, four through participation in another research project, five in the mosques, and three at various activities held by Islamic organizations. Another respondent was selected by following the lead in a newspaper article. The final 12 respondents resulted from snowballing through various other respondents. Although the snowballing led to some people who knew each other, there are only few who saw each other on a very regular basis. The snowballing within social networks even led to respondents with differing religious opinions, such as a moderate and two orthodox siblings within one family. Since the snowball method helps to recruit respondents through existing trust relations, this method probably contributed to acquiring respondents who might otherwise have been inaccessible or would have refused to participate. Among the respondents that I recruited through other means than snowballing there were also some who were immediately willing to participate, while others only agreed after a period of time. Furthermore, to prevent a biased sample I made sure to include not only people with 'interesting' stories.

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<sup>13</sup> An explanation of what this study views as a 'moderate' Muslim is discussed in Chapter 2.

In addition to these 36 respondents, four experts participated in this study. They are experts in the sense that they witnessed the turn to Islamic fundamentalism of young Muslims from close-by. One of them was introduced to me by a journalist, the other three I met at public events.

### *Personal Background of the Respondents*

As a result of the selection method, the ages range from 19 to over 60 years old, although most respondents are between 19 and 30 years old. Regarding the ethnicity there are Moroccan respondents, as well as a Turkish, Pakistani, Somalian, Bengali and two Eritrean respondents who were raised as Muslims. Furthermore, there are youngsters from mixed ethnic backgrounds who converted to Islam, native Dutch, a Spanish and a British convert. Of the 40 respondents, 25 have a Salafi orientation. Among them are 15 respondents who regularly attended services or lectures in the Salafi mosques mentioned by the Dutch Intelligence Service. Another six respondents of these 25 are close to those convicted for terrorism in the Netherlands. Of the 15 remaining respondents, one respondent is a member of the politically radical Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The other 14 respondents are non-fundamentalist Muslims. The respondents' level of education varies from secondary school to intermediate vocational level and university. Appendix I provides a more detailed overview of 19 female and 17 male respondents.<sup>14</sup> The four experts are not included in this table. They are all Muslim men with moderate views. Three of them have a background in social and youth work and one is a theologian.

Obviously, a diverse group requires more data to reach saturation (Mortelmans, 2010: 100-104). The data of the observations and internet analysis, however, compensates for the relatively limited number of interviews. Moreover, in accordance with the requirement for saturation, the final interviews did not lead to new information but confirmed earlier findings.

### *Semi-Open Interviews and Topics*

The emphasis on the meaning of Islam in the respondents' lives resulted in opting for semi-open interviews. A topic list served as an instrument to enable the respondents to talk freely, yet to cover all relevant issues (Beyens & Tournel, 2010: 203-205; Noaks & Wincup, 2004: 79-80). During the course of this study the interviews became more open. The structure of the interviews thus depended to a large extent on what respondents brought to bear first. The respondents' prioritization of subjects revealed the issues which the respondents consider important, which helped to demonstrate what Islam means to them.

The topics concern the respondents' religious development, their religious experience, the implications of their beliefs for life in Western societies, and their perception of social reactions to Islam since 9/11. These are quite a few topics and as a consequence, the interviews were extensive. The interview plus

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<sup>14</sup> Eventually, there were more moderate men than women in the sample. This results from the fact that some male visitors of Salafi mosques or respondents who appeared to have affinity with Islamic fundamentalism turned out to have moderate viewpoints.

the first additional conversation lasted 3.5 hours on average. As a result of this, more than half of the interviews and conversations took place on two or sometimes more occasions. Follow-up conversations over the years led to several further meetings mainly with six respondents.

### *1.2.2 Getting in Place for Observation*

The observations took place over a period of 11 months in the Netherlands and 3.5 months in Great Britain in a number of so-called ‘Salafi’ mosques and in mosques where youth preachers of Salafi mosques gave lectures. Occasional social activities outside the mosque enabled me to conduct additional observations.

#### *Finding a Suitable Setting*

In 2007, the Dutch Intelligence Service described four mosques as being Salafist and a threat to Dutch Society (AIVD, 2007). Because of the link the Intelligence Service assumed between Salafism and radicalism, I decided to ask two of these mosques permission to do fieldwork.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, however, the fieldwork took place in a variety of mosques, because the ‘students of Islam’ attended lectures and conferences at different institutions. These were one mosque in Eindhoven, four in The Hague, three in Amsterdam and an Islamic school in Den Bosch. Through visitors of the mosque I also became acquainted with a local foundation for Muslim women where I joined the women several times. During the research period in London the Brixton mosque was the principal observation setting, and occasionally South Bank University where I attended, for example, an Islamic lecture. The Brixton mosque is also a ‘Salafi’ mosque and has a controversial reputation because one of the suspects in the British terrorism cases frequented this mosque. The mosque has since been under close government scrutiny. The board of this mosque also granted permission for my presence as a researcher.

Although most events were for both women and men, the fact that I am a woman limited my access to the field. Men and women had separate spaces and so I was only able to learn about the attitudes and behaviour of women. Altogether the observations helped me to make contact with more than 100 women in the Netherlands and 35 in London. The women had different backgrounds, again ranging from women raised as Muslims, converts with a mixed ethnic background and converts from the native population. I undertook various social activities with them. Besides taking classes together, I accompanied some women to mosque stores and bazaars. At other times we ate together in or around the mosque, or we went shopping for food.

Some further observations followed from contacts with respondents from the interviews and from Arabic classes that I took in a local community centre. Several respondents invited me to social events, visits to other mosques, or we scheduled a private meeting. This allowed me to take part in an Islamic

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<sup>15</sup> The initial objective was to conduct observations amongst young Muslims in Amsterdam. In 2006, I volunteered at a foundation that in particular helped second-generation youngsters from the age of 12 to 16 years with their homework. The context of a homework class where there was little room for interaction, proved to be unfruitful.

wedding party, some dinners at home, and a dance class. On another occasion a respondent took me for a walk in the street in a long *khimar* and *niqab*, a combination that is commonly referred to as a *burqa*, to experience the social reactions to this garment.

### *Intensity and Length of Stay*

The observations in the Dutch mosques took place from September 2007 until July 2008. During this period I attended lectures and conferences organized by these mosques or given by their lecturers in other mosques. Some lectures lasted less than an hour, while the conferences lasted up to three days (of which I attended two days). In addition to these infrequent events I attended a weekly class at the As-Soannah mosque in The Hague from January 2008 to July 2008, which was sometimes followed by classes in two other local mosques. From April 2008 to July 2008 I attended weekly lectures in the El Tawheed mosque. Observations in the Brixton mosque took place from March 2009 to mid-June 2009 starting with (or right after) the Friday sermon until around 6.00 or 7.00 pm. In between the sermon and the class there were a couple of hours to talk with the women.

The principal aim was to observe and participate in the women's routines and thereby gain insight into group dynamics, attitudes and behaviour. The topic list for the interviews functioned as a guideline for the conversations. I had substantial conversations with over 135 women, as mentioned earlier. I had extensive conversations with approximately 75 of them, also individually. The conversations with the remaining respondents were limited to fewer topics in a group setting. The conversations did not only vary in terms of time and privacy, but also in terms of frequency. I met some women only once or twice, whereas I met other women on multiple occasions, for example every week in class, as a result of which it was possible to build up a bond with them.

### *1.2.3 Exploring Online Interactions*

For the analysis of internet discussions I selected relevant topics on two sub-forums from the Morocco Virtual Community. The selection includes 14 discussions in the summer of 2007 and another 24 discussions in the first months of 2008. To put the analysis in a broader context I read several dozen additional topics, emails through mailing lists and had MSN conversations with respondents derived from the fieldwork.

### *Choosing a Suitable Forum*

The Internet provides many options to do research on Islamic fundamentalism (e.g. Bunt, 2003; Højsgaard, 2005). Unlike in the case of interviews and observations, the problem lies not in gaining access, but in making a selection. The first task in the selection concerned an inventory of suitable online sources. This initial search led to online discussion forums, because these forums are popular among Muslim youngsters as a means to express their opinions. Internet discussions therefore provide vital information about online group processes,

differences in opinion, the creation of virtual identities and, in particular, radical opinions.

The most actively used Dutch discussion site among Muslims is Morocco Virtual Community (MVC). This community has existed since 2004 and was initially intended for Moroccans in the Netherlands and Belgium. MVC has grown from over 140.000 members in 2007 to over 212.000 in 2011, both from the Netherlands and Belgium (approximately 70% and 30% respectively) (“Marokko Media,” n.d.). MVC provides a variety of forums, ranging from news and business, to love and dating, sports and health, and Islam.

In the main this discussion forum is a place where mostly non-fundamentalist Muslims come together. Yet in January 2007 and 2008 the website became a topic of political discussion, because of the expression of radical views on the forum. As this site is both the most popular and has become known for attracting alleged radical Muslims, MVC was the logical option for conducting my research.

#### *Selection of Relevant Topics on Morocco Virtual Community*

The next step in the selection was to choose useful sub-forums within MVC. Because of the political-religious orientation of Islamic radicalism/extremism and the scripturalist attitude of orthodox Muslims the most relevant forums are those where participants talk about political and religious issues.<sup>16</sup> This happens in respectively ‘Moroccan youngsters and news’ and ‘Islam and me’. As each of these forums consisted of approximately 35,000 discussions, I had to make a selection. The selection criteria concern the period when the discussions took place, their content and their length.

Regarding the period, I opted for two moments: the summer of 2007 and the first months of 2008. The choice for the first period was due to the absence of any particularly dramatic events. On the contrary, the second period coincided with social upheaval concerning the movie ‘Fitna’ by Geert Wilders. The selection could therefore help to determine the response to criticism of Islam.

The content of the discussions was also a criterion for selection. A detailed inventory of subjects and their popularity resulted in a varied sample. The two samples not only cover various popular topics, but also topics which lend themselves to fundamentalist expression. To give an example, one of the most popular topics is Islamic rules. Within this topic, a discussion concerning the rules for interaction with non-Muslims, however, is more suitable than a discussion about rules for the preparation of food. Another selection criterion was the topicality of the discussion, such as was the case for discussions about the film ‘Fitna’. I subsequently evaluated the quality of the discussion. In some cases the start of a discussion may appear relevant, but then the participants tended to go ‘off the topic’. These off the topic contributions sometimes provide relevant and interesting information, but if this was not the case, such a discussion was not considered.

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<sup>16</sup> A description of these groups and their orientation follows in the next chapter.

The final selection criterion was the length. In terms of reactions, most discussions are of an average length, namely between 30 and 100 reactions. Shorter discussions offer too little information and are apparently unpopular, whereas the longest discussions are too lengthy and tend to turn towards other topics.

### **1.3 Ethical Issues when Entering the Field**

Obviously, selecting respondents and fieldwork settings are not the only decisions a researcher has to take before entering the field. In research methods that rely on human interactions, researchers have to take several ethical issues into consideration. Major ethical considerations pertain to the researcher's role and information about it, the nature of the study, and issues of anonymity and confidentiality.

#### *1.3.1 Being an 'Unveiled' Non-Muslim Researcher*

For ethical reasons I took on the role of an overt, obtrusive researcher (Noaks & Wincup, 2004; Zaitch, Mortelmans & Decorte, 2010). Whenever entering a new research setting or having a meaningful conversation with respondents I informed them about my identity as a researcher and the nature of the study. I introduced myself as a researcher from Erasmus University Rotterdam who wanted to gain insight into the Muslim side of the story regarding 'radical Islam'.

Since I did not wear a headscarf I was recognizable as a potential outsider in mosques where traditional garments were commonplace. As a result, women in the mosques often asked me if I was interested in Islam, which offered me an opportunity to introduce myself as a researcher. Only in the Brixton mosque this was different, because the Imam asked me to wear a headscarf. During the gatherings in this mosque I therefore had to take more initiative in introducing myself as a researcher. Obviously, I also revealed my researcher identity towards the representatives of the mosques when I asked them for permission to attend classes and conferences.

#### *1.3.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality*

Another essential ethical matter is to guarantee the anonymity and the confidentiality of the information shared by respondents (Creswell, 2007; Fontana & Frey, 2000; Noaks & Wincup, 2004; O'Gorman & vander Laenen, 2010). When asking potential respondents to participate in interviews I told them they would remain anonymous and that the data would only serve academic purposes. During the observations these topics usually came up when I explained that, unlike journalists, academics keep their sources anonymous.

Although internet discussions are freely accessible online, this does not mean that data from these sources does not demand the same anonymous use (Gruber, 2008). However, since the participants in online discussions have virtual names and rarely disclose personal information, their anonymity is sufficiently guaranteed.

### *1.3.3 Assuming Informed Consent*

When informed respondents interacted with other Muslims during the observations, I did not always introduce myself as a researcher. An introduction at such moments would have interfered with the course of interactions and render observing these interactions impossible. On those occasions, I assumed that the respondents would inform the other persons about my identity if they considered this important. Sometimes they did. At other times, I introduced myself as a researcher as soon as the opportunity arose.

### *1.3.4 Acceptance of Closed Inner Doors*

In some circumstances my formal request for permission to enter the field ended in refusal. When this occurred there was no informed consent and I had to leave. There were three principal moments when the Muslims involved denied me access to their activities. In all cases the refusal was based on recent negative experiences with researchers and the media. As mentioned before, however, these experiences were an exception as I mostly encountered cooperation. Consequently, all types of activities and groups were sufficiently accessible.

## **1.4 In the Field: Countering Obstacles and Limitations to Validity**

Like all lessons, the lesson of this study came with some obstacles. Implicitly in the qualitative methods of this study are issues of trust, socially desirable information and the unrealistic presentation of self, secretiveness, and unwillingness to participate. Each of these matters can affect the validity of the data. So how did I deal with these issues?

### *1.4.1 Problems in Gaining Trust*

As mentioned before, I told the respondents that I was interested in persons who were seen as 'radical Muslims'. Introducing oneself in this way may be regarded as a case of academic suicide, because radicalism is a sensitive topic. As a researcher of this topic one has to associate with people who sometimes feel they are scapegoats and might become more distrustful in response to such an introduction (Abell & Myers, 2008: 157; Babbie, 2001: 291). Yet, stressing that the research focus was on the story of the people that Dutch society has come to perceive as 'radical Muslims' turned out to be a good solution. First of all, because the interviews started with people around the Hofstad group who were very aware of having acquired this label. Furthermore, by the time of the observations in the Salafi mosques, the Dutch Intelligence Service had just described these mosques as 'dangerous' and 'radical'. Hence, in these mosques it sufficed to refer to what had been stated about them in politics and the media. In Great Britain, the Salafi community was also under some scrutiny, which helped to facilitate my introduction.

This introduction produced two – somewhat contradictory – immediate reactions. On the one hand, it resulted in some expressions of distrust. The distrust stemmed in part from unpleasant experiences in the past. These respondents felt that they had been misinterpreted and misrepresented by undercover journalists who had attended lectures or sermons in mosques. Being overtly and visibly present as a researcher, however, helped me to distinguish myself from negatively regarded journalists and allowed me a chance to ‘get in’ and also talk about other topics. Consequently, most people were open to informal conversations and they reacted positively when asked to participate in an interview.

On the other hand, the introduction inspired most respondents to immediately express their opinion on the social reaction to Islam in recent years. The introduction even served as an invitation to talk about sensitive issues like *jihad*. Most respondents brought up these issues themselves to show that they had distanced themselves from terrorist activities. Yet, eventually the respondents who were supportive of violent *jihad* in the Netherlands also talked to me openly. The reason for their openness seemed to be that they wanted their message to be heard.

In the British context there appeared to be more initial openness and more trust towards researchers. The Muslims I met in London talked about their religion with more pride and they were less defensive than the Dutch respondents. As an apparent result, they hardly needed time to open up. Overall, the fact that the Muslims I encountered were enthusiastic about their convictions and religion (or ideology) has probably contributed to a diverse sample of people. In other words, most respondents trusted me enough to participate.

#### *Being a Non-Muslim Woman in a Strict Islamic Environment*

Religious orientation and gender are issues that require extra attention in terms of gaining access and trust. Initially, one of the main concerns was that I would not acquire access because I was a non-Muslim. Over time this concern proved to be unsubstantiated. One of the reasons for the willingness to participate could be the fact that the Muslims I was interested in believed it to be a duty for every Muslim to do *da'wa*. That is, to invite other people to Islam. Some respondents hoped they would either convince me or the readers of this study of the truth of Islam. It also helped that this study focused on their favourite topics which they enjoyed talking about.

There also appear to have been advantages to me being a non-Muslim. Initially, the respondents did not have any expectations of me, as they considered me ignorant of ‘the truth’. Although I said that I was not interested in becoming a Muslim, they made every effort to inform me about their interpretation of Islam. They believed that they had to be patient, because it could take years for people to convert. They might have shown less patience and more expectations towards a Muslim researcher.

Another concern about access was in relation to me being a woman. The belief of fundamentalist Muslims that men and women should have limited contact could result in a lack of access to male environments. This disadvantage

was partly true; just as a male researcher would not have had access to the female part of the mosque, as a woman I could not enter the male part. In interviews, however, gender was hardly an obstacle. None of the men refused to talk to me on the basis of me being a woman, although two male respondents did want to have the interview together as they did not want to be alone with a woman.

Being a non-Muslim woman required a certain level of adaptation to the social environment (Zaitch et al., 2010). In the fieldwork period I opted for relatively wide outfits and hardly any make-up. Moreover, out of respect for the norms of conduct between women and men I avoided making as much eye-contact as I would normally do and refrained from shaking hands when greeting men.

### *Dealing with Distrust*

Of course, there was some distrust. Distrust expressed itself in various ways as there were diverse ways to deal with distrust. Regarding the observations there was more distrust when the women did not know me well. Particularly in contexts where women only saw me occasionally or just once, for example at conferences, I heard rumours about me working for the Intelligence Service. There were undoubtedly women who were therefore reluctant to talk to me. Although I tried to meet new women every time, not everyone was immediately open to having more than a superficial conversation.

For the interviews the issue of trust was even more essential, because it made the distinction between having a respondent or – in the absence of observation as an alternative – nothing at all. Of the selected people there were only few that did not want to give an interview. They used two types of arguments. One group consisted of people, particularly converts, who said that they were still ‘too ignorant’ of Islam and were afraid they would misrepresent their religion (cf. van den Bos et al., 2009: 69). Another argument was that either I or society would misinterpret their words. Nonetheless, some of the people who refused to give an interview were open to informal conversations.

There are several ways in which researchers can gain trust. The relevant methods in this project are 1) patience, 2) networking, 3) showing sincere interest and 4) by giving something in return (also see Noaks & Wincup, 2004: 62-63). Patience mainly concerned the observations, but it was also a strategy for approaching respondents for the interviews. Patience expressed itself, for example, by waiting to ask them to become respondents until we became better acquainted. The situation in the mosques was similar. When I was new to a certain context, I usually did not start by asking difficult questions (also see Oberhuber & Krzyżanowski, 2008: 188; Zaitch et al., 2010). Once women got to know me, their responses to me indicated that I could ask more and more difficult questions, also about more sensitive issues.

The networking strategy helped to increase trust thanks to positive contact with other group members. For example, having permission to participate in classes allowed me to tell the women that the board or Imam had agreed to my presence. Also contact with some women in a group contributed to

the other women having an open attitude. In relation to the interviews contact with their friends helped to gain the trust of new respondents.

Thirdly, showing honest interest and the intent to treat the data carefully also affected trust positively (also see Hamm, 2005a: 242-243). In the case of the interviews, I offered the respondents the option to read the transcript, which confirmed for them that I was not on a mission to confirm the negative stereotypes they so resented. During the observation period, my regular presence during classes and conferences showed that I was making an effort. Consequently, they became more sympathetic to the purpose of my presence, as was mentioned by some. In general, staying in touch with a number of respondents has contributed to building trust. Furthermore, some women said that they appreciated my openness and honesty about being a researcher and the purpose of the study.

Finally, I tried to be open to them by answering some of their questions. These questions were mostly about whether or not I was considering becoming a Muslim and what I thought about Islam. I answered these questions as honestly as possible without saying anything that could promote social desirability. Answering honestly led to interesting information in return. For example, in the form of stories about what they thought before their conversion and more generally, by demonstrating how they invite people to embrace Islam. This brings up the topic of social desirability.

#### *1.4.2 Internal Validity: Social Desirability and Hidden Transcripts*

Trust and participation are no sufficient guarantee for high quality data. The data can be seriously flawed if respondents portray their social reality in a distorted way. For this study one can think of several reasons for respondents to either give socially desirable answers or to present an unrealistic picture to the researcher. As a non-Muslim woman the respondents were likely to consider me to be part of the dominant out-group that is critical of Islam. They could therefore opt not to disclose their actual views (see Scott, 1990).

Socially desirable answers could, firstly, spring from a prioritizing of da'wa over being open. For that reason respondents could be tempted to only say what they thought I wanted or needed to hear. Secondly, respondents might have felt that they were on a mission to improve the image of Islam. Thirdly, they might have kept secrets for opportunist motives, such as not disclosing extremist beliefs to keep out of sight of the criminal justice system (Horgan, 2004: 52). Fourthly, the social context of the mosque and the Internet can lead them to consciously or unconsciously adjust to the group's dominant discourse or taboos. Around fellow Muslims they are likely to talk and present themselves as Muslims with certain views to manage their impression towards peers (Goffman, 1959). Similarly, particularly the converts could unconsciously or consciously reinterpret their experiences in a more dramatic way to contrast their new life with their old life (Denzin, 1989; McGuire, 2002: 76-77; Wohlrab-Sahr, 2006).

There are several ways in which researchers can deal with such obstacles to validity. For one, it is important not to take the respondents' reports at face value. It is therefore important to remain critical of their stories, such as by comparing reports to objective facts and by comparing attitudes with actual behaviour. For example, the messages given out during lectures, conferences, in mosque magazines and the literature available in the mosques' bookshops helped to shed more light on formal internal discourses within the Salafi mosques that I visited.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, having long and multiple conversations helps to probe deeper and get to actual opinions. In the interviews, for example, respondents with radical views became more open the more often we met. With one of them conversations took place over five different meetings that took over nine hours in total. Over time, they did disclose sensitive information. In retrospect, some respondents were even surprised about their own openness. It appears that people let their guard down when they experience the sincere interest and neutral attitude demanded by academic research. "What I like about you is that you don't judge" is how one of the women phrased it.

The triangulation of the interviews, observation and internet analysis also helps to raise the validity (Maesschalk, 2010; Noaks & Wincup, 2004). While all three methods have limitations regarding social desirability and hidden transcripts, combining them diminishes this problem. Each method offers an advantage: in interviews there is no risk of group pressure, observations make contradictions visible between behaviour and words (particularly over a longer period of time) and online discussions are anonymous and thus a relatively safe platform to speak openly.

#### *1.4.3 Validity of Virtual Reality and Personalities*

When analyzing online discussions researchers have to address several matters concerning internal validity. As in other forms of discourse analysis, in online discussions the non-verbal context is lacking. Moreover, because I had not participated in the selected online discussions I had no way of asking participants to clarify their contributions. I therefore had to triangulate the data through placing them in the broader context of the discussion and take into account symbols such as emoticons, other lines of discussion and links, and the broader social context of discourses regarding Islam in the Netherlands (Wodak, 2008: 12-13).

In online research the question of validity also has distinctive characteristics. A frequently heard criticism concerns the difficulty of determining whether or not a virtual personality and its online attitudes and behaviour correspond with those of its 'real life' counterpart (Flick, 2010; Hine, 2000: chapter 6). Are people who they say they are? Are they really women or men, young or old, native Dutch non-Muslims or Moroccan Muslims? In the contemporary world, however, online identities, attitudes and behaviour have

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<sup>17</sup> Obviously, one could argue that the messages of lecturers and speakers at conferences reflect social desirability as well, but this would imply that the Muslim visitors of these mosques are likely to adopt such socially desirable viewpoints and that it becomes their internal discourse.

become part of reality. One could even argue that the virtual world is almost as real as the ‘real,’ material world (Williams, 2006b: 99). Considering this study’s focus on online reality, authenticity is only relevant to the extent that the participants regard it as an issue. They try to expose unauthentic online identities and some express criticism when discovering inconsistencies in the messages posted by their fellow forum members.<sup>18</sup> In sum, the data exclusively offer information about virtual identities and interactions. Such information also contributes to an answer to the research questions.

#### *1.4.4 External Validity*

Qualitative research does not allow for generalizations outside the research population. In this case the findings only allow for conclusions concerning fundamentalist Muslims in the Netherlands. This is not to say that the findings of this study are not transferable to other communities. The following chapters attempt to offer a so-called ‘thick description’ of the research material which facilitates comparison to similar cases in other places. Transferability of the findings can also follow from theoretical generalizations. This study attempts to recontextualize traditional criminological, sociological and social-psychological theories on the basis of its findings. As such it contributes to the development of theory that could have validity in other cases (Maesschalk, 2010: 130-131).

### **1.5 Human Factors in Fieldwork**

The human factor plays an essential role in qualitative research. One’s personality and background influence the way one perceives the world and thus have an impact on how one interprets data, which affects the reliability of the data (Abell & Myers, 2008: 157; Oberhuber & Krzyżanowski, 2008: 197). For a researcher it is important to recognize and face one’s own subjective tendencies, including prejudices and emotions, as well as to be prepared to deal with the prejudices and emotions of the respondents. This section discusses two matters related to this human side to research. The first part concerns the need for a neutral position between the insider and outsider perspective. The second issue relates to dealing with personal relations and the expectations of respondents.

#### *1.5.1 Reliability: Opening up to the Insider Perspective*

Researchers need to be aware of their position toward the groups that they study. This position can be located between two ends of a spectrum: on one end that of the total outsider and on the other end that of the group member or insider. The risk facing outsiders is that they fail to understand the insider perspective, either

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<sup>18</sup> Thus it could be that the participants who resent ‘fake’ identities participate with their real-life identities. Another indication for the correspondence between ‘real’ and virtual identities is the information that participants disclose online. In some discussions participants talked about attending the same school or arranging to meet, for example to go to lectures together. A better image of the correspondence between ‘reality’ and ‘virtuality’ could have been obtained through contacting respondents and actually meeting them. For reasons of time and priorities I chose not to do this. Instead, I accepted the limitations.

because they hold a conscious or unconscious grudge against the reality of the insiders or because they lack a shared language and shared symbols, which renders them incapable of understanding. The position of insiders can also threaten the reliability of their findings. When researchers lose their distance from the groups that they study and become assimilated, they run the risk of 'going native'. As a result they can develop a blind spot for what they come to see as self-evident practices or beliefs. Alternatively, they may refrain from reporting certain findings, for example, out of fear of retaliation or because of conflicting interests (Zaitch et al., 2010). Since I am a non-religious person and not in search of any 'truth', the risk of going native was never an issue. The only risk that I had to be aware of was that of positioning myself as an obvious outsider.

There were several ways in which I tried to promote an objective, neutral balance between the insider and outsider perspective. To get to the insider perspective I reminded myself of the distinction between 'understanding' and 'accepting' the respondents' truth. This reminder helped to diminish tendencies to distance myself from their opinions and facilitated an honest interest. In addition, I made an effort to learn about the language and symbols of the Islamic movements in this study, initially by reading academic literature and books from Islamic bookshops, by reading the Quran, and by starting to learn Arabic. Later on I tried to further explore the insider perspective through interacting with respondents in the field. In these interactions I regularly asked questions to ensure that I had understood people or lessons in the mosque correctly. In this way, I gradually became more aware of the nuances in their way of reasoning and their view of the world. The good relations that I developed with both male and female respondents, the previously mentioned comments about me not judging, and their confirmation of the reports I made of interviews all indicate that my efforts to open up to insider viewpoints were successful. Overall, it turned out to be not as troublesome as I had expected to become familiar with the insider language and symbols, because despite the religious symbols and elements in their speech, they did not speak a 'different' language. Thanks to the fact that the people in this study had grown up in the Netherlands, we shared a common background that facilitated understanding.

While trying to grasp the insider perspective I simultaneously made sure to keep an appropriate distance at all times. A principal way of doing this was by making extensive notes and detailed transcripts that left room for etic reflections on emic categories. At the start of the fieldwork, my supervisors read a number of my transcripts and made suggestions to strengthen this study's internal reliability.

### *1.5.2 Dealing with Expectations of Respondents*

Building up relationships with respondents can result in expectations or at least certain hopes regarding the researcher. Such expectations and hopes can lead to tense situations. In this project, the most common expectations and hopes regarded my possible conversion to Islam. This was particularly true when it came to my observations over a longer period of time where the women could monitor my 'progress'. Overall this did not result in tensions. Usually the women

only asked whether I had decided to become a Muslim yet and some tried to give me more ‘proof’ of their truth to convince me.

When I left the Brixton mosque in London, however, the expectations of some women turned our final meeting into an emotional event. At that time I had started to analyze the findings and decided to present the women with my viewpoints as a test case. Instead of discussing the contents of my findings, the women inquired as to whether it was time for me to convert, as I had apparently learnt so much. The resulting discussion took about an hour. The women started by reiterating the wonderful aspects of Islam and ended with a negative forecast for me on Judgement Day. One woman started crying, because she refused to believe that I was leaving without taking the *shabada* and because she was angry with me for ignoring the ‘signs’ of Allah. In this emotional situation I had to deal with the expectations of respondents in a neutral way by confirming my outsider position yet showing respect for their views. Finally, the women concluded that “Allah guides who he wishes” and that I might convert in a few years time.

## 1.6 Registration of Observations and Interviews

(...) about notetaking, obviously you find corners in the day when you can take notes. And every night you should type up your fieldnotes. [And] you have to do it every night because you have too much work to do and you’ll begin to forget. If you put your notebook on a large piece of paper, people won’t see your notebook. It’s masked. They won’t be disturbed by it – Goffman, 2001: 157-158.

As Goffman emphasizes, accurate data registration is essential (also see Babbie, 2001: 295; Oberhuber & Krzyżanowski, 2008: 189-190; Zaitch et al., 2010: 309-311). In the course of my research I employed different strategies for notetaking during the interviews and observations. Obviously, I could hardly use a notebook or dictaphone because of the sensitivity of the topic and the alertness of the respondents to my activities.

### 1.6.1 Observations: Overt Researcher, Covert Notetaking

Islamic lectures might appear the perfect context for a notebook on a sheet of paper and writing down some notes. Yet, notes on these occasions were hardly private. In particular during the lectures the women took notes, but if they missed something, they would look at somebody else’s notes to fill in the blanks. Maybe it was because of my detailed notes of the class or because the women wanted to check if I was not writing down anything else, but they regularly glanced at my notes. At other times women asked if I was taking notes about them or about the lecture. It felt, therefore, inappropriate to take notes of conversations, personal backgrounds and life stories during the classes.

Instead I limited the notetaking to the contents of the lecture, like everybody was supposed to do. Similarly, it was possible to make notes of the students’ questions, because they were part of the lessons. When something

special occurred I did put little signs in my notebook. For the gatherings that only lasted a couple of hours, postponing recording was unproblematic. Under those circumstances it was possible to remember events and conversations in detail. Long conference days, however, demanded alternative solutions. One of the methods that I used – following the example of a fellow criminologist (de Jong, 2007: 90-91) – was sending myself a text message with key words during prayer. This was less ‘suspicious’ as there were more women who used their mobile phones. Alternatively, I used to quickly write down key words in a separate notebook during prayer. Because conference days took up to 15 hours, these notes were a precondition for a detailed report.

Besides such modest fieldnotes, the notes had to wait until after the event. Immediately after having left, usually on the way home in the train, I made notes. I would recall the events in a chronological order and write everything down that came to mind. Usually, this resulted in two to three pages of short words and incomplete sentences. In the initial phases of the observation, I made a detailed report of these notes within a day or two. At a later stage and for shorter meetings I followed the same protocol of detailed short notetaking, but finished the report with a few exceptions within a week.

#### *1.6.2 Interviews: No Recording Please!*

Despite the recommended practice to record interviews (Beyens & Tournel, 2010), only 12 of the respondents plus the four experts agreed to a recording. The other respondents argued that the negative attention for Islam made them worry about who could get hold of (and misinterpret) the recordings. For the first respondents that I met at the trial of the Hofstad group I felt uncomfortable about digital voicedocuments as well.

Without recordings conducting the interviews was a demanding business. I had to write everything down as quickly and extensively as possible, while simultaneously being alert to non-verbal communication and thinking up questions. Even though it was impossible to write down everything verbatim, I secured important quotes by writing rapidly. There is one exception to this recording practice. One male respondent was clearly uncomfortable and gave meaningless answers. After several attempts to encourage him, he eventually said that he did not want me to take notes. As soon as I put the notebook away he gave me a full record of his past radicalization process. By making notes immediately after our meeting also the report of this interview is substantial (with over 7,500 words). Clearly, quotes are missing in this case.

Besides the disadvantages, not recording had the advantage of providing me with a reason for a second meeting. Because of the sensitivity and the need for accuracy the respondents of the non-recorded interviews were given the opportunity to read the transcription. Obviously, the purpose was not to get their approval. Instead, I checked for misunderstandings and used our second or third meeting (if the interview had taken more than one meeting) to gather new information or clarify matters. The attempts of some respondents to rephrase answers more favourably were thus in vain. Their comments did become part of the transcription as they point to social desirability and the lack of it in the

original transcript. The second time, the respondents tended to open up more, which led to more information about sensitive or personal topics. So not recording also had a positive effect on the data.

The aim was to make the transcripts as soon as possible. Within a day after the interview I described the interview setting, impressions about social desirability and suchlike. I finished the transcription within a few days. In a couple of exceptional cases I added notes to prevent misunderstanding when transcribing the interview at a later time.

### **1.7 Analysis of Data**

Another essential part of the methodological process is the data analysis. To analyze the data, I employed various strategies. This section presents some of the principal choices concerning the analytical instruments, software, and coding (Decorte, 2010a; 2010b).

Two methods mainly facilitated a thorough analysis: an analytical instrument and the use of Atlas.ti. The instrument served to systematically analyze the internet discussions. It also contributed to the internal reliability by comparing my own analysis with that of a student assistant who helped to analyze the second series of discussions. As Appendix 2 demonstrates, the instrument includes a variety of topics to detect both radical thoughts and explanatory factors.

Atlas.ti contributed to creating order in approximately 1,200 pages of interview transcripts and observation reports. By the end of the data collection I started to reread and organize the data with Atlas.ti. The analysis was partially deductive, because I had derived some ideas from common theories on radicalization and conversion studies. Yet, the analysis was also inductive as the data also formed the starting point for additional theorizing. The combination of inductive and deductive methods led to different types of codes. Some codes are linked to existing theories, such as 'liquidity' and 'signs of subcultures'. Other codes are theoretically neutral, for example 'Chapter 3', 'global' or 'local'.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to its usefulness in organizing the data, Atlas.ti also helped to make sense of the underlying meaning, particularly through the use of memos. While coding the data I made memos of any interpretation that came to mind. Memos therefore contained comments on the overall impression of the answers, the relation to other respondents, internal inconsistencies and suchlike. Moreover, I made a summary of each interview with descriptions and deeper reflections on the respondents. After the coding and during the writing process I repeatedly scrolled through the data to check for new thoughts and relevant parts.

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<sup>19</sup> These latter two codes denote alternative factors on either a global or local level which appeared to explain the religious development of the Muslims in this study.

### **1.8 Summary**

At the basis of this study are three qualitative research methods designed to gain insight into the religious development of and the meaning of Islamic fundamentalism for Muslims in the Netherlands (and to a lesser extent in Great Britain). The methods are semi-open interviews, observations and analysis of online discussions. The data includes 42 interviews and an equal number of more informal conversations. The observations have resulted in reports of Islamic activities in the mosques that I visited over the course of a period of 11 months in the Netherlands and 3.5 months in London. These reports contain data about substantial conversations with over 135 women. Third, the internet data are derived principally from the analysis of 38 discussions on Morocco Virtual Community.

To gain access to the interview and observation settings, I had to choose an appropriate research role and deal with several ethical issues. I have opted for an obtrusive researcher role by openly presenting myself as a non-Muslim researcher. The presentation as a researcher largely resolved the ethical matter of informed consent in case of the observations. Regarding other ethical concerns the respondents received information about the academic nature of the research project, its purpose and planned use of the data. Finally, I guaranteed the respondents anonymity.

In addition, to maximize the quality of the data I had to safeguard their validity and reliability. The major challenges were the respondents' refusal to participate, lack of trust, and social desirability. The first way in which I tried to resolve these problems was by gaining their trust and asking further questions when I suspected socially desirable responses. Another way to confront these challenges and to increase the internal validity of this study has been the triangulation of theories, methods and data. Opting for a diverse group of respondents for the interviews with different religious views and backgrounds also contributed to the internal validity. A detailed description of data and the development of theory have helped to enlarge the external validity. The transparency offered to the supervisors of this study has contributed to its internal reliability.



## ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AS A THREAT TO DUTCH SOCIETY?

The methodology that we follow is the one of the Ahl-Sunnah wa'l Djama'a, so the people of the Sunnah and (...) the Salaf al-salih. (...) Those are the Prophet, the companions, and then the three generations of followers. (...) It is in fact the true methodology, according to me. (...) Our characteristic is that you follow the truth and you can only know the truth through knowledge. Knowledge in Islam is literally proof: proof from the Quran and proof from the Sunnah. - Layla

Like the other fundamentalist respondents in this study, Layla is convinced that her interpretation of Islam represents the absolute truth. This study's central focus is to understand how and why some Dutch Muslims embrace such fundamentalist, absolutist claims. Yet, before turning to explanations, it is necessary to determine what Islamic fundamentalism in the Netherlands is about. What do Islamic fundamentalist beliefs entail? To what extent do the respondents adopt fundamentalist viewpoints? And what indications are there of Islamic fundamentalism threatening the Dutch democratic order, as has often been assumed? To answer these questions this second chapter deals with the attitudes and practice of Dutch fundamentalist Muslims regarding those issues that have worried Dutch society most, namely their approach to non-Muslims, *sharia*, and *jihad*.

The first section considers the concept of Islamic fundamentalism. Then follows a brief review of the global ideological roots of local, Dutch manifestations of Islamic fundamentalism. The next section discusses the main findings of previous research on fundamentalism among Dutch Muslims. Since previous studies principally focus on attitudes and tend to neglect the behavioural factor, the chapter continues with the respondents' attitudes in relation to their everyday practice (also see Roex et al., 2010). The final section discusses how one could best categorize the various fundamentalist attitudes of the respondents. This categorization will be used throughout the remainder of this study.

### 2.1 Conceptualizing Islamic Fundamentalism

Our first objective is to clarify the concept of Islamic fundamentalism. 'Islamic fundamentalism' is perhaps the most commonly used term to describe the religious orientation that this study focuses on. Some other available terms are Islamism, political Islam and neofundamentalism (see Brown, 2000; Marty & Appleby, 1991-1995; Roy, 1994 and 2004; Tibi, 1998). A disadvantage of the term Islamic fundamentalism is that it has been used to describe a variety of

Islamic interpretations (Geelhoed, 2010). Scholars differ in opinion whether fundamentalism reflects a political or a merely religious orientation. The scholars with the latter opinion argue that the term originates from Christian movements in the United States with a purely religious focus (Arjomand, 1995: 193; Esposito, 2003). Other authors, however, consider the term applicable to political movements, such as Marty & Appleby in their famous 'Fundamentalism project' (1991-1995). In line with a political interpretation, the term fundamentalism is often used as an equivalent of extremist movements. Although the confusion about the term could be an argument not to use it (also see Phalet & ter Wal, 2004a: 67), alternatives also suffer from disadvantages. In fact, when one accepts these different meanings Islamic fundamentalism serves as an overarching term, which is useful as long as one remembers to distinguish between various Islamic fundamentalist orientations. The final part of this section deals with these orientations. First, this section discusses the principal communal characteristics of Islamic fundamentalist thought, as put forward in literature.

The first characteristic concerns the claim to go back to the foundations of Islam. Fundamentalist Muslims stress the need to return to an 'authentic' Islam that can be found through a literal reading of the Quran and the *hadith* and that has universal force (Hunt, 2005: 116-117; Roy, 2004: ix). Second, despite this apparent traditionalist approach, studies on fundamentalism have pointed out that this fundamentalist nostalgia for an 'authentic' Islam is in fact a modern phenomenon. The most notable modern element is that fundamentalism is reactionary to aspects of modernity that it sees as morally threatening to Islam (Giddens, 1991: 207; Gray, 2003; Herriot, 2009: 2; Roy, 2004).<sup>20</sup>

Other characteristics of fundamentalism are its dualist and millenarianist views. Millenarianism concerns the belief that the current social order will come to an end with an Apocalypse to make way for a return of God's rule on earth. This view legitimizes criticism of the social order in modern times and hope for improvement in the future (Herriot, 2009: 2; McGuire, 2002: 39, 44-48). The dualism concerns views of the world as divided between truth and deception, salvation and redemption, 'us' and 'them', et cetera, and the belief in Good versus Evil (McGuire, 2002: 39-44). Dualism also supposes certainty of the absolute truth as opposed to doubt. Towler (1984: 107) clarifies what such certainty entails:

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<sup>20</sup> Thereby it has proven the secularization thesis wrong that heralded the end of this kind of absolute religious claims only a few decades ago (Berger, 1967). Under the influence of globalization and individualism scholars of religion predicted religion to lose its grip on people's lives. Individualism would weaken people's ties to religious communities. Globalization would contribute to pluralism – whether in terms of ethnicity, religion or other social values – that challenges truth claims. As a result people were to become more open to alternative views. Although globalization has rendered the world at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century smaller than ever and individualization appears to be at an all-time peak, absolute truth claims have not disappeared. On the contrary, Islamic fundamentalism is thus an example of an opposite development under the influence of globalization: a countermovement to modern developments.

Certitude is the absence of doubt. The need for certitude is the attempt to escape from doubt. (...) Doubt (...) is an intrinsic part of faith, and since certitude is marked by the absence of doubt, or the attempt to escape from it, this places the two in sharp contrast. Certitude overshoots faith, craving for sureness. Instead of having a vision it makes a blueprint, and by fleeing from the last vestige of uncertainty it ceases to be conventionally religious.

Islamic fundamentalism thus ceases to be conventionally Islamic, which is visible in its interpretations of the Islamic creed (*aqeeda*)<sup>21</sup> and its sources. Fundamentalist views of what worshipping demands of Muslims in everyday practice are an example that is dealt with in the following part.

In short, this study is interested in Muslims who (in reaction to modernity) have a dualist and millenarianist vision and who claim an absolute certainty of the universal truth of Islamic beliefs.

## 2.2 Global Sources, Local Manifestations of Islamic Fundamentalism

Where does Islamic fundamentalism originate from? And how did fundamentalist movements spread to the Netherlands? These are questions that this section addresses on the basis of previous research on global roots and Dutch manifestations of Islamic fundamentalism.

### 2.2.1 The Rise of Transnational Fundamentalism

Scholars have documented the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist movements in Muslim countries particularly since these movements spread in the 1970s. The resulting research is largely historical and founded on literature and documents of political fundamentalist movements (e.g. Abu-Rabi, 1996; Bonney, 2004; Cooley, 2000; Davidson, 1998; Esposito, 2002; Gerges, 2005; Hafez, 2003; Hiro, 1989; Kepel, 2002, 2005; Lewis, 2003; Moaddel, 2005; Moussali, 1992,1998; Oliveti, 2002; Sidahmed & Ehteshami, 1996; Wessels, 2001). This body of work concentrates on the content of the ideology, explanatory factors behind the rise of principally politically oriented movements in Muslim countries and, in some cases, on how these ideologies have spread around the globe. In terms of the ideology, it shows the history of this kind of absolutist thought in Islam and describe the ideas of the Islamic scholars that form the historical

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<sup>21</sup> The creed involves basically the six articles of faith (*imaan*) and the five pillars of Islam (e.g. al-Barbahaaree, 1995; Esposito, 2003). The six articles of faith are belief in Allah, the angels, the books (most notably the Quran, but also the 'original', 'unfalsified' Bible and the Torah), the messengers, judgment day and fate (*qadr*). Accepting these articles of faith requires Muslims to live by the five pillars of Islam. The first pillar of Islam is the *shabada*, the witnessing of Islamic faith. The *shabada* requires Muslims to declare that 'there is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God' of which the first part is *la illaha illallah* in Arabic. By stating that there is only one God, they acknowledge *tawhid*, the unity of God. The other pillars are the obligations of prayer (*salaat*), the pilgrimage (*hadj*) to Mecca, fasting (*sawm*), and the paying of charity (*zakaat*). The approach of Islamic fundamentalists goes beyond the conventional by their strict interpretation of the obligations following from these articles and pillars.

sources of inspiration, such as Ibn Taymiyyah (approximately 1263-1328), Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (approximately 1703-1792), Hassan al-Banna (1906-1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966).<sup>22</sup> These ideologues shared the fundamentalist belief that Muslims have to return to the sources of Islam through a scripturalist approach to the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the pious predecessors (the *salafiya*). In terms of political approach the ideologues differed. Ibn Taymiyyah's had both a religious and a political interest. Besides his strict interpretation of the Quran and *Sunnah*, he promoted an Islamic state in accordance with Muhammad's community in Medina and the rule of Islamic law. Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab engaged in politics more actively, however, by building an allegiance with Abdelaziz ibn Saud, the founder of Saudi Arabia. Wahhabism has consequently become the official national doctrine. At present Wahhabism has turned into a conservative current of which the representative scholars – such as recently the very influential Abdul-Aziz bin-Baz – consider only discrete advice to the Saudi government allowed. Al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, took a more activist stance and favoured more open criticism of the Muslim governments. Even though he represented a non-violent approach, over time various branches of the Muslim Brotherhood developed, some of which were more radical and violently inclined. Finally, Egyptian Sayyid Qutb could be seen as “the godfather of Muslim extremist movements around the globe” according to Esposito (2002: 56). He had a dichotomous view of the division between the *dar-al-Harb* and the *dar-al-Islam*. In his view, the former part was reserved for the West, as the ultimate non-Muslim enemy, and its collaborators. He believed the latter territory to belong to ‘true’ Muslims who were obliged to expand and ensure the rule of Islam by means of *jihad*. He argued that if the Muslim masses would not start an Islamic revolution, then a violent revolution would be required to realize a true Islamic state (Abu-Rabi, 1996; Aslan, 2005; Esposito, 2002, 2003; Kepel, 2002; Meijer, 2009; Roy, 2004). In line with the various political approaches of their ideologues, scholars stress the diversity of Islamic fundamentalist movements. In addition, they point to the movements' modern nature that becomes clear, for example, from the belief that a perfect Islamic state can be reached through social ‘progress’ (Brown, 2000: 4, also see Ali, 2002; Gray, 2003; Watt, 1988).

The explanatory factors for participation in such movements mentioned by previous research are largely of a structural, macro nature, while only some studies offer explanations on a psychological level (like Taylor and Horgan (2001) who take a behaviourist approach, and Burdman, 2003; Loza, 2007; Post, Sprinzak & Denny, 2003; Stern, 2003). Concerning the structural level scholars present the rise of Islamic fundamentalist ideologies in Muslim countries as a consequence of Western colonialism, corrupt governments, the repression of alternative views and (relative) deprivation of the population. They show that it is generally the middle classes that take the intellectual lead in political fundamentalist movements. The lower, uneducated and poor classes, on the

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<sup>22</sup> Sayyid Qutb's (2001) 'Milestones' is seen as his most influential work (also see Zimmerman, 2004 for Qutb's influence on Al Qaeda).

contrary, form their 'foot soldiers'. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the end of the Afghan War and the first Gulf War represent a turning point. These wars and the international politics of Western countries, particularly the US, played a central role in these movements – most notably Al Qaeda – going global. In the eyes of movements such as Al Qaeda a transnational battle is going on between Islam and unbelievers. They see the presence of foreign troops in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, and the occupation in Palestine as a reason to wage a religious war against the Western states that they consider responsible for these military forces (e.g. Gerges, 2005; Kepel, 2002; Roy, 2004).

Since the late 1990s researchers started to focus on the reception of these Islamic beliefs among Western Muslims. Part of this research points to the global character of political fundamentalist movements as a result of Muslims with fundamentalist ideologies who flee from their countries of origin – usually because the rulers do not accept their political opposition – and start to fight their battle from Western countries. Over the course of the past decade, the image of fundamentalists coming from abroad has made way for that of 'home-grown' fundamentalists. Movements, such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Al Qaeda, have gained local support in the West. Some of these studies mainly stress the threat of these groups to Western countries and their link to terrorism (e.g. Jansen, 1997; Jordan & Boix, 2004; May, 2007; Rosenthal, Muller & Ruitenberg, 2005). Other studies are less focused on security issues and describe the nature of what is going on in a more neutral way (e.g. Pargeter, 2008; Roy, 2004). Recent studies offer a description of how, particularly young second-generation, Muslims in the West get involved in these movements (e.g. Abbas, 2007; Cole & Cole, 2009; Buijs et al., 2006; Phillips, 2006; Wiktorowicz, 2005).<sup>23</sup> This raises the issue of the presence of Islamic fundamentalist views in the Netherlands.

### *2.2.2 The Resonance of Islamic Fundamentalism among Dutch Muslims*

To what extent has Islamic fundamentalism found fertile ground in Dutch society? As mentioned, many different fundamentalist (and non-fundamentalist) interpretations of Islam exist, also in the Netherlands. Despite this variation of fundamentalist views, since 9/11 academic interest in particularly Salafism has grown. The reason for this interest is that groups such as Al Qaeda have adopted a specific interpretation of Salafism to legitimize their actions (Roy, 2004: 234; Wiktorowicz, 2006).

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<sup>23</sup> Obviously, 9/11 has also inspired a large number of publications on 'radical Islam' and radicalization of Muslims in popular reading material outside the academic realm. The perception of a threat of radical Islam has opened up a whole new market by forming a catalyst for the emergence of a genre of (semi)fiction (e.g. Erkel, 2007; Hamid, 2007a), personal reports of former 'jihadis' (e.g. Husain, 2007; Kaddouri, 2011), journalistic accounts (e.g. Chorus & Olgün, 2005; de Stoop, 2010; Emerson Vermaat, 2005; Groen & Kranenberg, 2006; O'Neill & McGrory, 2006) – sometimes of a sensationalist nature if reporters immersed themselves in alleged radical, extremist and orthodox groups (e.g. Groot Koerkamp & Veerman, 2006; Pouw, 2008).

*Focus on Salafism*

In line with the international interest in Salafism, this Islamic movement is under close scrutiny in the Netherlands. Four ‘Salafi’ mosques – in Amsterdam, Eindhoven, The Hague and Tilburg – have attracted public attention due to a number of incidents. One main trigger concerns a couple of youngsters that visited these mosques and joined *jihad* abroad or became terrorist suspects and convicts. Another trigger has been imams of these mosques that expressed intolerance toward anti-Islamic politicians, opinion-makers and un-Islamic lifestyles, like those of homosexuals. Despite recent studies showing the nuances in their thoughts (and to a lesser extent behaviour),<sup>24</sup> the dominant view in Dutch debate is that Salafis are radical and a threat to the Dutch social order (AIVD, 2006; AIVD, 2007).

Then what is Salafism about? Salafism strives for a pure Islam, based on the Quran and the *Sunnah* (the ways of the Prophet). The purity relates to getting rid of innovations, such as cultural elements and returning to the example of the pious ancestors, the *salaf al-salih* (Haykel, 2009: 33-34; Roy, 2004: 243-244; Wiktorowicz, 2006: 210). Academics have identified different orientations within Salafism. Wiktorowicz (2006) distinguishes three types of Salafis: the purists, the politicos and the *jihadis*. Dutch researchers have adopted this categorization, thereby following Buijs et al. (2006). According to this differentiation, the various types of Salafis all agree on the central issues, principally the *aqeeda*. The difference between them, argues Wiktorowicz, concerns the implications of their convictions for participation in the modern world. The first category of the purists believes that Muslims should stay away from politics. Out of fear of getting corrupted through participation in politics, purists believe that Muslims should focus on spreading their message, keeping the religion free from innovation and gain more knowledge about Islam. The second group, the politicos, on the contrary, do promote political activities. They believe it to be an immediate responsibility of Muslims to strive for the rule of God’s law and thus try to realize political change. The *jihadis*, the last category, go a step beyond the politicos. They consider violence necessary to instigate a societal revolution that installs a truly Islamic government (Balogh, et al., 2009; Buijs et al., 2006; Slooman & Tillie, 2006; Wiktorowicz, 2006). To what extent do Dutch Muslims adopt such fundamentalist interpretations?

*Islamic Fundamentalism among Muslims in the Netherlands?*

To come to a better understanding of the position of ‘Salafi fundamentalism’ in the Netherlands, it is necessary to put Salafism in the larger perspective of the position of Islam in general in Dutch society. Overall, one has to beware not to treat Islam in an essentialist way by considering it a static, homogenous religion (Mandaville, 2004: 55). Muslims in Western countries like the Netherlands represent a social reality that contradicts such essentialist views of Islam; most

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<sup>24</sup> Roex et al. (2010) and Balogh, et al. (2009) in particular demonstrate that the Salafi mosques and its visitors consider it possible to respect the laws of liberal democracies and live in accordance with Islam at the same time, as long as they are granted sufficient freedom of religion.

Western Muslims opt for more moderate interpretations than those of Islamic fundamentalism. In line with this argument Roy (2004) argues that one should let go of the image of Western Muslims holding on to the culture and religion of their country of origin. He argues, on the contrary, that contemporary interpretations of Islam among Western European Muslims all result from the intention to reconstruct an Islamic identity. Vertovec and Rogers (1998) confirm that particularly the younger second and even third generation Muslims in Western Europe are creatively constructing Islamic identities that are 'hybrid'. This leads them to develop ways of living in accordance with Islam that match and respect the societies they live in (also see AlSayyad & Castells, 2002; Haddad, 2002; Nonneman, Niblock & Szjakowski, 1996). This is the case regardless of whether this identity is based on liberal, reformist or fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. Although Islamic fundamentalist interpretations promote a return to the foundations of Islam, they should thus also be seen as result of global reality's complexities and a modern phenomenon (Gray, 2003; Mandaville, 2004; Roy, 2004: chapter 3).

Another important element of the position of Islam in the Netherlands is that the general trend in religious participation is one of decline, despite the worries about the Netherlands being 'Islamized'. The number of Muslims that visit the mosque is dropping and this is more so for young Muslims. This development seems to have continued after 9/11, despite the fact that Muslim youngsters believe that 9/11 has stimulated them to learn more about Islam and that many of them consider being Muslim a very important aspect of their identity (Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008; Korf, Yeşilgöz, Nabben & Wouters, 2007; Korf, Wouters, Place & Koet, 2008; Nabben, Yeşilgöz and Korf, 2006; Phalet & ter Wal, 2004b: 8-15).<sup>25</sup>

With regard to the way young Dutch Muslims practise Islam Nabben et al. (2006) mention different groups: conformists, neo-orthodox, flexibles, hedonists and escapists. These groups vary in terms of how important they consider Islam to be, the extent in which they are critical of the cultural interpretation of Islam of their parents, their opinion on the political implications of Islam, the importance of school and a career and finally, the level of participation in Dutch youth lifestyles of consumption, clubbing and mixing of the sexes. The authors of this study believe that the conformists and the escapists are most susceptible to radical beliefs. This is because conformists follow the rules of Islam in a rather uncritical way and are relatively intolerant to Dutch lifestyles. The escapists have a questionable lifestyle, characterized by deviance and other problematic behaviour, which they blame on external factors such as the negative image of Islam in the Netherlands. As they do consider their Muslim identity to be very important, the authors believe that they might have a cognitive opening to radical Islamic views (Nabben et al., 2006: chapter 5 and chapter 9).

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<sup>25</sup> These studies concern Muslim youngsters from Muslim families. They thus fail to account for Dutch converts to Islam.

Altogether, it follows from this research that most Muslim youngsters construct much more moderate Muslim identities than the ones that fundamentalist interpretations of Islam offer. Nonetheless, there are young Muslims who do adopt or might be susceptible to fundamentalist interpretations (also see Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008; Phalet, van Lotringen & Entzinger, 2000; Slootman & Tillie, 2006). Roex et al. (2010) have estimated that approximately eight percent of Dutch Muslims are strictly orthodox and susceptible to Salafism. Among the Moroccan population of 15 years and older this percentage is the highest with 12 percent. An earlier quantitative study by Slootman and Tillie (2006) found that 1.4 percent of the respondents (only in Amsterdam) considered violence a legitimate response to the negative climate towards Islam in the Netherlands. They tried to estimate the number of Muslims who were susceptible to radicalization by measuring two preconditions: 1) an orthodox stance and 2) the sense that Islam was under political attack. These preconditions were present in the case of 35 percent of the respondents between 16 and 34 years old. Nonetheless, the researchers argued that these numbers could not shed any light on the actual number of potential radicals (Slootman & Tillie, 2006, chapter 3). Altogether, there are thus only vague estimates of the number of fundamentalist Muslims in the Netherlands. An important question that remains after these studies concerns the relation between political orientation and orthodox interpretations in radicalization. What political and religious attitudes indicate radicalization? How could these attitudes help to distinguish different types of fundamentalist Muslims? The following section considers the attitudes and behaviour of the respondents to shed more light on this relation.

### **2.3 Anti-Western Beliefs and Behaviour?**

So what are the attitudes of the Dutch respondents toward life in Western society? And how are these attitudes put into practice? One of the principal concerns in the Netherlands is that Islam is not 'simply' a religion, but a way of life, an image that all respondents confirm (also see Balogh a.o, 2009: 41; de Koning, 2008; Entzinger & Dourleijn, 2008: 38-40). Because of the all-pervasive role that Islam allegedly has in the lives of Muslims, its critics fear intolerance toward non-Muslims, the desire to implement *sharia* and the willingness to fight violent *jihad*.<sup>26</sup> Over the years, issues that were on the forefront of public debate included the animosity and isolation politics of orthodox Muslims, the opposition of certain Muslims to democracy and Dutch laws, and the support for violent *jihad* in the Netherlands or elsewhere in the world (e.g. AIVD, 2007; Balogh, et al., 2009; Pouw, 2008). In December 2009 the Dutch Intelligence Service published a report on the state of the four Salafist mosques in the Netherlands, among which are the As-Soannah and the El-Tawheed mosques where this research took place. The report states:

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<sup>26</sup> Also see (Baumeister, 1991: 187) and Fromm (1941) who point to the possible intolerance that can stem from absolute truth claims.

Although Salafist preachers proclaim a moderate message in public sermons, they do not hesitate to fiercely object to the West in private and they urge their followers to adopt an isolationist attitude. Thus, the Salafist centres still proclaim an anti-integrative and intolerant isolationist message that is irreconcilable with democratic principles and that can disturb societal relations. For instance, certain preachers summon their supporters to not adapt to Dutch society and to prioritize Islamic laws to the Dutch law (AIVD, 2009: 7).

From this perspective a strict religious doctrine thus goes hand in hand with socio-political activism. To be able to evaluate these concerns and the extent to which the respondents share an anti-Western attitude this section discusses their most relevant beliefs and practice. Questions to review are: What does the Islamic way of life imply for fundamentalist Muslims? How do they think their relation to non-Muslims should be and how is this relation in practice? What do they think of democracy and how do they deal with democracy in the Netherlands? What is their opinion on the situation in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, and specifically Israel? And under which circumstances do they consider violent *jihad* allowed? Together this will give an answer to the question what being a Muslim in the West is about in the experience of the fundamentalist respondents.

### *2.3.1 The Islamic Way of Life: Islam is Everywhere and Everything*

“It is not only religion. It is a way of life. You submit your entire life to Islam”. These words of Summeeyah correspond with the opinion of all respondents: from their point of view – and regardless of their Islamic orientation – they see Islam as the most important thing in their lives. They argue that Islam is more important to them than their parents, their partner, their children, their work, et cetera. At first glance this might seem threatening to non-Muslim societies. Yet, the participants in this study see Islam as a way of life that regulates their behaviour, including behaviour regarding significant others and work. By putting Islam first they feel that they have general guidelines (in the case of non-fundamentalist Muslims) or a strict framework of rules (in the case of fundamentalist Muslims) to become better children, lovers, parents, and employees. They thus see Islam not as competition for other important matters in their lives, but as a system that confirms the importance of these other matters.

It seems hard, if not impossible, to entirely submit to an Islamic way of life in practice, particularly for the scripturalist, dualist approach of Islamic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalist views offer very specific regulations for practically everything: for the way to pray, to wash oneself, to eat, to go to the bathroom, to interact with other people, and the like. The rules are not limited to obvious religious activities. On the contrary, it can apply to the most banal aspects of their lives, as becomes clear, for example, from a book with rules for

women during their menstruation period. Consequently, every aspect of the life of a Muslim can be covered by Islam.

Then how do the fundamentalist respondents believe they prioritize Islam in practice? When describing their daily routines the fundamentalist respondents clarified this in two ways. First, besides acts that are likely to demand more effort such as trying to always be modest or kind to others, they build in routine worship activities that are simpler to realize. Examples of such routine acts are thanking God every morning for waking up, praying five times a day, saying '*bismillah*' when entering a door, being aware of eating only with one's right hand, and so on. Second, especially the fundamentalist respondents emphasize that everything they do and that does not conflict with Islam can be an act of worship if they do it with the intention to worship. They mentioned a large range of activities that they see as possible acts of worship, ranging from getting a University degree, to cooking for one's husband, eating, and even sleeping. As Ava, a native Dutch convert to Islam, says:

My life is intertwined with Islam. Everything I do is Islam.(...) Even sexuality is prayer. There are oral traditions in which they say 'there is a time for prayer, there is a time for work'....for the men that is..., there is a time for prayer and there is a time for interaction with your family. So that means playing with your kids and satisfying your wife sexually. Period. That simply is an obligation. And that sexuality that is indeed...you could see it as prayer. (...) Well hello, isn't that great.

Similarly, Nidal – a 'born-again' Muslim who turned from a traditional interpretation of Islam to a Salafi interpretation – argues that he is "busy with Islam almost 24 hours a day". Nidal describes how a game of football can turn into an act of worship among brothers "We don't swear, whereas before I could bash someone after a game of football. Now we say, when somebody misses 'insh'Allah, next time better' and if we score 'mash'Allah, what a nice goal!"

Thus, the fundamentalist respondents believe that normal everyday activities in Western society can become appropriate Islamic behaviour by changing the intention with which they undertake these activities. In itself, adopting a fundamentalist way of life, therefore, does not have to interfere with life in Western societies. This could be the case, though, for those aspects of Western life that fundamentalists consider un-Islamic, such as contact with non-Muslims.

### *2.3.2 Contact between Believers and Unbelievers*

An important concern in Dutch society is whether fundamentalist Muslims promote isolationism and hatred for non-Muslims. In 2008 a Dutch journalist, Patrick Pouw, published a book on the experiences he had when taking classes in one of the Salafist centres in the Netherlands. Social upheaval resulted from his report of a lecture about how Muslims should deal with 'unbelievers'. The teacher told the students that, as Pouw repeats in his own words (2008: 101):

We learned that all unbelievers are enemies of Allah, that everybody who is not following Islam is an enemy of Allah. We heard that sincere love for Allah means that we have to hate His enemies, and should see them as our enemies. That was no less than an obligation.

The fundamentalist Muslims in this study generally disagree with the harshness of the lesson that Pouw learned, as this section discusses. As Roex et al. (2010) found in their study, the respondents with a Salafi orientation argue that they should not hate unbelievers personally, but only their unbelief. Moreover, the hatred of unbelief does not make them consider all non-Muslims bad people. On the contrary, opinions about these issues vary, even among those with a Salafi orientation. In addition, even the respondents with the fiercest stance against unbelievers show more nuance in practice. Hence, the hatred for unbelief seems to be of a largely discursive nature, as the next part will demonstrate.

#### *Different Attitudes and Nuanced Behaviour*

Then what opinions do the fundamentalist respondents have about (contact with) non-Muslims? And to what extent do they put these opinions in practice? Overall, the contact with unbelievers is a topic that occupies the respondents, which also becomes clear from online discussions in which participants question the position they should take. This topic is of particular concern to fundamentalist converts who usually have non-Muslim families and had mostly non-Muslim friends.

The main point of concern and disagreement is what the doctrine of *al-Wala wal-Bara* – love and hate for the sake of God – means in the modern (Dutch) context. Figure 2.1 contains fragments of an internet discussion that reflects the heart of the difference of opinion. One matter that the respondents do agree about is that Muslims are allowed to have contact with non-Muslims and that they should be friendly (also see Balogh et al., 2009: 47-51). The main group of the fundamentalist respondents argues that if such contact was not allowed, they could not invite people to Islam either. In addition, they frequently refer to a *hadith* about how kind the Prophet Muhammad was to a Jewish neighbour who used to treat Muhammad badly. On the basis of the Prophet's example, these respondents stress that patience is required. Although everybody agrees with the need to be friendly, they disagree about whether or not friendship is allowed. Among the fundamentalist respondents part believes friendship to be allowed to a certain extent. Bassam, a convert, is representative for this group. He still has some non-Muslim friends from prior to his turn to Salafism. In his view the issue is not whether such friendship is allowed as long as there is mutual respect, but whether there is sufficient common ground for a friendship. Bassam argues, therefore, "friends do easily become acquaintances. My present friends are mostly Muslim". Other fundamentalist respondents consider friendship with non-Muslims allowed as long as they make sure that they also have Muslim friends. They argue that being around Muslims strengthens them to follow the right path, while being mostly around non-Muslims might lead them astray. Convert Ava represents this opinion. Since she

has many Muslim friends she considers it unproblematic to have a non-Muslim lesbian as her best friend. She disagrees with her homosexuality but does not see it as an obstacle to their friendship. On the contrary, by staying friends she feels she does *da'wa* on her: "I kind of like, I also like it to do *da'wa* to my girlfriends. Simply to show that Islam is not weird, not strange, not scary or stupid". Finally, there are some who believe that friendship is not allowed. Yet, even they admit that there exist 'good' unbelievers that they respect and that some of these unbelievers might turn to Islam at a later stage in their lives.

In comparison to their opinions, the everyday practice of the fundamentalist respondents' shows additional nuance. Even some of the respondents who argue that they cannot have friendships with unbelievers have relations with non-Muslims that resemble friendship. Maysa, for example, admits that in the past years her contact with non-Muslims has been better than that with Muslims. She resolves the tension between rule and practice by talking of 'friendly contact' and calling these people 'acquaintances' instead of friends. Layla too believes that having a non-Muslim as her best friend goes against the Islamic code of conduct, but cherishes this friendship:

You have to interact with them in a good way, have respect for them, but you have to socialize with them for the sake of inviting them to Islam, to show them it is the truth. You do take distance to a certain extent. (...) That is not the way I interact with Elise. I've known her ever since secondary school and she tells me everything. That is actually not allowed either. The code of conduct is that you don't tell intimate things, but that is what the friendship is about for me. (...) My family knows her, my father totally adores her. She is like a sister or a daughter and everybody knows her so well. Yesterday we were watching football<sup>27</sup> and all my practising brothers were sitting next to her. (...) Life is not black and white.

The situation of fundamentalist converts is more complicated. As converts they have at least non-Muslim families that they have to interact with. Despite the fact that many parents have problems with their turn to Islam the converts emphasize that the Islamic code of conduct demands that they respect their parents. Thus even though many of their former friendships with non-Muslims dilute when they choose Islam, they claim the relation with their non-Muslim family to be very important.

In sum, when considering the interpretation that Pouw gave to his lessons about 'hatred of unbelief', the beliefs and practices of the fundamentalist Muslims in this study are much more nuanced. Concerning the public concern about isolationist behaviour the practice of fundamentalist respondents and their arguments show that they are more connected to Dutch society and culture and have more intensive contact with non-Muslims than one might suspect.

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<sup>27</sup> The interview took place at the time of the European Championship.

### 2.3.3 (Western Liberal) Democracy versus Sharia

Another principal fear in Western societies is that fundamentalist Muslims either work against democracy or advocate its replacement by a system based on *sharia*. The vast majority of the respondents, however, have no problem with democracy in the Netherlands. While they criticize certain policies and politicians, they argue that the Netherlands is a Western, non-Muslim country. They believe that because they choose to reside in this country, they have to respect the laws and the accompanying governmental system (also see Balogh et al., 2009: 44-45, 51; Moors & Jacobs, 42-43; Roex et al., 2010: 94-95).

FIGURE 2.1 | *Topic: How are we supposed to deal with unbelievers?*

In this topic the participant Abyad posts Quranic verses that – in his view – prohibit friendship with unbelievers. He wonders how Muslims should treat unbelievers and whether this should be ‘harsh’. Several participants nuance his contribution by arguing that Muslims should be friendly and respectful towards non-Muslims. After a while, Umm Moesab al Qoraishiyah posts a text that she translated and that reflects a politically activist Salafi stance about the doctrine of ‘*Al-Walaa wal-Baraa*’. Hence, this text presents one of the sternest views on rules about contact with unbelievers.

Umm Moesab al Qoraishiyah posts the following message:

*Al-Walaa wal-Baraa - The Character of the Believer, from at-Tawheed Publications, Translated by Umm Moesab al Qoraishiyah*

Another fundamental aspect of our belief is the topic of *Al Walaa wal Baraa*. This topic if understood correctly clearly distinguishes the kafir from the Mu'min (believer) and lays down clear principles with regards to the alliance, support and friendship towards the kufar. (...) *Al-walaa wal baraa* is divided into two aspects, *al-Hubb* (love) and *al-Bughoud* (hatred), both of which have to be practised purely for the sake of Allah (swt) [swt means ‘glorious is he and he is exalted’]. *Al-Hubb* means to love for the sake of Allah (swt) otherwise known as *Muwalaat*. *Al-Muwalaat* means to accompany, to love, to support, to ally, to help, to elevate, to respect and to befriend, all of which must be done for the sake of Allah (swt) in the manner that He has commanded. *Al-Bughoud*, on the other hand, is to have hatred for the sake of Allah (swt) also known as *al-Muadaat*, which is the complete opposite of *muwalaat*. Hence the requirement upon the believers is to have *muwalaat* with the Muslims and *muadaat* against the kufar, to love Allah (swt), the Messenger and the Muslims that have hatred for the kufar, to love all that Allah (swt) commands us to love and show *walaa* towards them, to have no rejection or animosity towards a command of Allah (swt) and to hate all that Allah (swt) hates together with those who hate Allah (swt) and the believers. “O you who believe, do not take unbelievers as friends in preference to the Believers. Do you wish to give Allah a clear proof against you?” [Surat an-Nisa, 144]

Later on she adds in a milder tone:

[It] does not mean that one should not invite the kufar in a friendly way to Islam, because the Messenger of Allah, *salla Allahu ‘alayhi wa sallam*, was open against the kufar in his declaration against their kufr and he was open in his hatred and his animosity against them and this did not obstruct him, *salla Allahu ‘alahi wa sallam*, to invite them to Islam in a soft, mild manner as a good example. (...) They have to know that you reject unbelief, like you said, that ungratefulness that unbelievers have. But this does coincide with a just treatment and a friendly invitation to Islam. Does this make it clearer?

While the topic starter Abyad follows her opinion, there are several participants who disagree. Some are non-Muslims who state that Abyad and Umm Moesab confirm their fear of Islam. There are also Muslims, however, who contradict the texts of Umm Moesab.

Participant ‘On fire’ argues, for example: “I also have a friend that wasn’t a believer and exactly because I was friends with her, I told her about Islam and now she is gaining knowledge about it and she wants to convert inshallah”

Also Battle\_4\_Peace criticizes Umm Moesab’s interpretation:

You should take "Wala" and "Bara" matters from the Ulama’, and not from little .doc or .pdf documents, written by juhaal and self-crowned ‘shakes’. Imam Muslim cites Ibn Sirien who said that knowledge is religion, so he said: “Beware from who you take your religion”.  
Wasalaamu Alaykom Warahmatullaah,

Abyad and Umm Moesab do not respond to these nuances. The discussion ends after one more contribution of a person who posts links to [www.soennah.com](http://www.soennah.com), a site that argues Muslims have to treat non-Muslims well. This site also argues against terrorism.

### *Criticism of Western National Politics*

The respondents, converted or raised as Muslim alike,<sup>28</sup> are critical of Western politics and politicians. In their view anti-Islamic policies and legislation lead to the unjust treatment of Muslims. On the national level the Dutch respondents criticize mainly politicians with anti-Islamic attitudes, namely Wilders, Hirsi Ali and Verdonk.<sup>29</sup> The principal criticism concerns the current use of the freedom of speech. While the respondents value the right of freedom of speech, they argue that this right should also apply to Muslims and that it should not be interpreted as a right to offend. Marid, who was raised as a Muslim and turned to a fundamentalist interpretation, is one of the respondents who argues that the Dutch apply double standards to Muslims and non-Muslims: “When I give my opinion, I’ll be arrested tomorrow. But if there is a website that says ‘all Muslims

<sup>28</sup> And both for respondents with a fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist orientation.

<sup>29</sup> The British respondents criticize the political viewpoints of the right-wing BNP (British National Party).

should die', then nothing happens". Naqeeb, also a born-again fundamentalist, is one of many who deny that contemporary criticism of Islam and Muslims, like that of Wilders, should fall under freedom of speech:

You see that Muslims are pushed into a corner and generalization takes place: 'they are all terrorists'. That's what you see in the Netherlands the past couple of years. Muslims are supposed to accept that the Prophet is mocked, that the Quran is ridiculed. (...) That is not freedom of speech, if you tell lies and create hate. (...) If, for example, the government fails to forbid the slander of religion, and if there are no scholars as a result of which youngsters start to react by themselves, then you have a problem.

While Naqeeb – like the majority of the fundamentalist respondents – believes that Muslims should react calmly and peacefully he thus warns against a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Another sense in which Naqeeb represents the majority opinion is that he does not criticize all politicians. A minority of the fundamentalist respondents reject the entire Dutch government. One of them is Maysa who argues politicians lack capacity. She describes the government as consisting of incapable politicians: "the level is dropping. Everybody can get into it nowadays".

Online arguments from both positions are present. The general atmosphere among the online participants corresponds with that of the other Muslims in this study: an atmosphere of frustration. Muslimrose says, for example: "It seems at present that you only make the news if you have something to say about that 'damned' Islam. Like...boys, I'd like to give an impulse to my career!"

### *Opinions about Democracy*

The fundamentalist respondents that are most critical of the government also express the strongest opposition to democracy. Whereas all fundamentalist respondents criticize democracy for its human laws, the way this critical minority speaks about democracy shows anger about the way in which democratic countries like the Netherlands and the United States treat Muslims. Marid, for example, complains about double standards of Western democracies regarding Muslims. He argues that "the Dutch are always talking about democracy, but if you oblige others to install democracy, what is that?" Nidal confirms the opinion of Marid and adds:

The vote of the majority counts and the rest can get screwed. (...) Democracy, that's the laws of the majority. And the majority is stupid. (...) Democracy is wrong, but laws can be good. For example, I can't imagine any Muslim who would not agree with traffic regulations.

Nidal does not distinguish between different forms of democracy by, for example, only criticizing Western liberal democracies. Instead he and the rest of this critical minority express opposition to all democracies. Online they find

considerable support in discussions about democracy and Islam that form popular topics. In one discussion Qardawi expresses the frustration and sense of humiliation that underlies the rejection of democracy:

It is often said that the US is a democratic state, but actually it is a barbarian, imperialist, extremist, animalistic, capitalist (...) state... (...) Muslims are weak nowadays and don't have technology. So let's enjoy and start insulting and ridiculing...humanity does not exist in the mentality of the materialists!!! Just respect power, not fellow humans.

The remaining respondents express less disapproval of the democratic system. Their ideal for the Netherlands is a truly multicultural society where people respect one another, regardless of their religion. The respondents with a fundamentalist orientation generally believe that life in a democratic society can go hand in hand with being a Muslim, as long as they can practise their religion. In converted Khadija's words: "I follow the Dutch law as long as I can pray, do Ramadan and choose my own clothing". If laws would change in such a way that they become an obstacle for the respondents' religious practice, the respondents believe that they should leave the country. They do consider it better to live in a Muslim country and consequently the majority argues that they should eventually emigrate (do *hijra*). Whereas many respondents thus see a future in a Muslim country, they are not trying to realize these plans in the short run. Instead, for most it seems a surreal dream for a far away future.

#### *Participation within the Democratic System*

In their everyday practice, the fundamentalist respondents participate in Dutch society and sometimes even in the democratic system, such as by voting. There is difference of opinion about whether voting is allowed. Some see it as an act of *shirk*, the major sin in Islam, as voting would imply worshipping something else than Allah. Nonetheless, some Salafi scholars who advocate this opinion explicitly requested Muslims to vote in the 2010 elections because of the rise of Wilders. Apparently, the same act can cease to be *shirk* if it serves a higher religious goal, in this case securing the position of Dutch Muslims. There are also respondents with a Salafi orientation who consider voting allowed regardless of the political circumstances. Muhammad, for example, a loyal student of the controversial Ahmed Salam, does not see any problem in voting. He says "when I vote, I vote for the Christian Democrats, you can write that down". Alternatively, some consider it allowed to hand in a blank vote to ensure that their vote will not be divided between the various political parties.

Another way in which the fundamentalist respondents participate in the democratic system with its human laws is through their study or work. Some do a degree in political science or legal studies. Moreover, two Salafi oriented respondents work for municipal organizations. In short, the beliefs and practices of Muslims with fundamentalist views are not as univocal as they seem. The answer to a question that Abu Ismaiel, a popular lecturer of the As-Soennah mosque, gave during one of his classes summarizes the point of view of the

respondents. When asked for an opinion about working for the Dutch government he says “Why not? You’ve chosen to live here”.

### *The Islamic State as Far Ideal*

Despite their adaptation to the Dutch system, the fundamentalist respondents see a true Islamic state based on *sharia* as ultimate ideal. With a few exceptions, none of them want such a state in the Netherlands. Anna, a fundamentalist convert, upholds this opinion “I myself as a Muslim am an advocate of an Islamic state, but as a Dutch person I’m not. I live together with many non-Muslims, Christians, Hindus and then this form of government, democracy, is best”. The fundamentalist respondents do see the Islamic state as a utopian ideal for Muslim countries. They argue that there hardly are, if any, true Islamic states in the world, because of the incorrect implementation of the *sharia*. They criticize Islamic governments for being corrupted and the leaders for being puppets of the United States. Only few of the respondents, however, consider this their personal concern. In general the answers reflect an abstract awareness of the religious requirement of an Islamic state. The limited ideas that they have about how, where and when such a state should be realized, indicate that the Islamic state is hardly an issue in their everyday life.

A couple of respondents with a more political orientation form exceptions to this common position and see the *sharia* also as the ideal form of government for the Netherlands. During our first interview Nidal argues, for example, “as Muslims here we have the task to clarify our message to make people want sharia too”. Online this viewpoint receives some more support. Rechttuit says, for example, in an online discussion “sharia is the best solution for the problem of mankind”.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, when Nidal and I get to talk about this topic three years later, he has changed his opinion. He has come to see it as unrealistic to install an Islamic state in a country where the majority is non-Muslim and thus believes it better to realize such a state in a Muslim country.

### *Realizing the Islamic State*

In practice the realization of an Islamic state seems to be of (even) less personal concern. Overall the fundamentalist respondents and several participants in online discussions only express the intention to migrate once a truly Islamic state is there. Even Hujjat, a convert and member of Hizb-ut-Tahrir (a movement with the installation of an Islamic state as its principal reason for being) intends to only go and help when the Islamic state has already been proclaimed. Until then he sees it as his task to fight an intellectual battle by spreading the word of Islam and convincing others of the need of an Islamic state. In that respect even the most activist respondent when it comes to the Islamic state shows a kind of ‘armchair activist’ practice.

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<sup>30</sup> Yet, online discussions also reflect the strongest opposition to the *sharia* by Muslim participants who consider *sharia* to be a system of the past.

### 2.3.4 *International Issues and Jihad*

Since 9/11 the principal concern regarding the Muslim population in Western non-Muslims societies such as the Netherlands has been the interpretation of *jihad*. Studies on radicalization of Western Muslims limit their focus to the question whether respondents are in favour of (violent) *jihad* to change society or not (e.g. Abbas, 2007; Buijs et al., 2006; de Poot & Sonnenschein, 2009; Moors & Jacobs, 2009; Slootman & Tillie, 2006). As a result, these studies show a rather simplistic view concerning the issue of *jihad*, as if there is only one type of *jihad* and they largely neglect the difference of opinion about the conditions of *jihad*. The respondents in this study demonstrate that there are quite some nuances in support for *jihad*.

All participants, fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist alike, say that they feel the pain of their Muslim brothers and sisters who are suffering from wars and war crimes – most notably in Palestine – and corruption of Islamic governments. The politically aware respondents criticize both Muslim governments and the hypocrisy of Western countries, particularly the United States. In their view Western countries support dictatorial regimes for power and oil, but when these regimes fail to act in accordance with Western interests, the West wants to replace these governments in the name of democracy, if necessary through undemocratic means. From their viewpoint Muslims suffer as a consequence of such complex political games. Online a typical example of this argument takes place when an Islam critic called GalietBaconEter argues “Islam has never been peaceful so far it has been a large bloodshed with those Muslims. Islam is standing up to its ankles in blood”. To this criticism participant, Salaheddinne, responds:

You’ve seen that very well baconeater.... And indeed in the blood of her own people of which so much has been spilt by Western imperialists and Zionists. Islam has unfortunately never been offered the chance to flourish peacefully, not by the West nor by radical groups such as the Taliban.

Yet, opinions differ regarding which of the Muslim and Western parties involved are principally responsible for causing and solving these problems. More importantly for this study, opinions differ about the right response. Regarding the matter of violent *jihad* the respondents’ reports show three main categories of opinions. These opinions involve the promotion of 1) a reserved approach, 2) local defensive *jihad* or 3) global defensive and/or offensive *jihad*. Although in Islamic doctrine a distinction is made between defensive and offensive *jihad*, most respondents talk about both forms indistinctively.<sup>31</sup> Because the differences of opinion help to categorize the respondents’ views, this section reviews their positions in considerable detail.

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<sup>31</sup> Among Islamic scholars there is quite some disagreement about the conditions for defensive and offensive *jihad*. A review of these conditions is a theological endeavour that goes beyond the scope of this study. See Bonney (2004) for an extensive overview of the doctrines of *jihad*.

*Reserved Approach*

The first group of Muslims with a reserved attitude forms a minority of (in the interviews two male and two female) Muslims with a Salafi orientation.<sup>32</sup> The global suffering of Muslims does not occupy a major place in their lives. These respondents argue that they feel bad for their brothers and sisters or pray for them whenever they find themselves confronted with their misery. They do not, however, actively search for images and stories about international injustices and some of them doubt if *jihad* in countries like Iraq and Palestine is legitimate. This lack of certitude about the justifications of *jihad* has various reasons. One reason is that they focus on doing non-violent *jihad* in the literal sense of 'striving on the way of God'. They do not consider violent *jihad* their personal concern. Another reason is that they believe that not all conditions for violent *jihad* are fulfilled, such as it being for Allah and under Islamic leadership. Her turn from a moderate interpretation to Salafism convinced Ava of this group's argument:

Look, they aren't fighting for Allah! They don't have...jihad is a battle for Allah. That is not about oil, about people, about power, about land. It's not about that. And they really don't fight for Allah. (...) Where is a holy war at this time? The war in Iraq was also for power. That's about money, it's about...I mean, people who slaughter each other, people with suicide missions that is no holy war. (...) Sometimes it is maybe justifiable if you are under attack and that you defend yourself, but even then there are rules regarding how [you defend yourself]. And how you...no, yes, for me it is simply something that really does not concern me.

These fundamentalist respondents believe that Muslims' misery is a test and a punishment for the deteriorated state of the *ummah*. In their view suffering will stop when Muslims rebuild the *ummah* by starting to improve and gaining Islamic knowledge as individual members. In their view it is wiser to try and reason with the rulers, because violence only worsens the situation.

An online contribution of Lieveling indicates that this stand is not popular among the online participants. When she asks critically where in the world an actual violent *jihad* is taking place and how it can be that no Islamic leader has called for such *jihad*, other participants refuse to clearly answer her. The only response she gets is the comment 'turn on your tv' and a questioning of her Muslimhood.

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<sup>32</sup> It is very well possible that some of the women in the mosque also have this opinion. The conversations about *jihad* in the mosques, however, were usually limited to whether or not terrorism and violence are legitimate. The fine nuances between the first and second category did not become sufficiently clear during the observations.

In the online discussions the reserved position also seems rare. This could in part be because those who are not concerned with violent *jihad* are likely not to participate in discussions about this topic. It could also be that this position is hard to distinguish from the next one without probing, which the analysis of online discussions does not allow for. For example, a participant may call for a peaceful response to Wilders, but then it remains unclear what the participant thinks about other situations, such as that of Palestine.

*Local Defensive Jihad*

The second category consists of over two-thirds of the fundamentalist and the non-fundamentalist respondents, plus the women I spoke to in the Dutch mosques about this issue and many participants in online discussions. These respondents do express support for local, defensive *jihad*. Yet, the conditions under which and with which means they consider such *jihad* allowed are similar to the conditions and means Western states have laid down in international law for a 'just war'.

Regarding the conditions, they share the just-war argument that violence is only allowed as self-defence when under attack. The most common just-war arguments are the right to defend one's family and Muslim community, and the restriction to only fight military forces and not innocent civilians (e.g. Elshstain, 2002). Non-fundamentalist Labeeb's words are representative for this position:

Islam is against killing innocent citizens. But if a country is under attack, it is self-defence. The Prophet has been expelled from Mecca, but he didn't do anything, it wasn't self-defence under those conditions. Thus *jihad* is when you are at war and when you're under attack. Then you can defend yourself against the attackers, the soldiers.

Similarly, in an online discussion about Israel and Palestine Jamie\_3, a female participant, writes in response to some anti-Islamic Dutch participants about the violence by Palestinians:

What do you want..? They are driven away from their homes, systematically murdered and finally, life is made impossible for them...They have the right to defend themselves...☺ Go cry, you buggers that you are, just heard what the bombardments on Palestine have brought about...

Interestingly, especially in online discussions the participants hardly use the term *jihad* and simply talk of 'war' and 'self-defence', which gives the impression that the religious legitimization is not their main concern.

Within this category there is difference of opinion, however, about where such *jihad* is allowed. Most mention Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan and Iraq as legitimate religious battlegrounds. Yet, a couple of respondents argue – similar to Ava – that a defensive *jihad* is not taking place in Palestine, because it concerns a fight for land instead of for God. Another few argue that they have insufficient knowledge to determine where a defensive *jihad* is legitimate and consider this matter of limited relevance to their own lives.

In the case of defensive *jihad*, the respondents contend, this is a plight upon the Muslims in the countries where the fight takes place. For Muslims in the West they consider it sufficient to support the fight by praying, doing supplications, and according to some by sending money, clothes, and the like. Since they believe that only Muslims under direct attack have a right of self-defence, they

argue that there is no ground for a battle in Western countries. On the contrary, they fiercely condemn terrorism as un-Islamic. Moreover, although some claim to understand the despair of suffering Muslims, all respondents in this group view suicide missions as prohibited by Allah. Summeeyah, for example, explains that the attack on the WTC on 9/11 is not an act of *jihad* with reference to a book she read titled 'O youngsters, with what kind of mind is bombing considered jihad'. "The book explains exactly what jihad is. (...) Suicide bombing is not allowed anyhow". She emphasizes that killing women, children, the elderly and the handicapped is not allowed either, and then points at the general criticism among Muslims in this study to 'the Western style of warfare'. "Islam is very positive towards women. In America it doesn't interest them whether they kill a woman or a kid, as long as it's dead".

#### *Global Defensive and/or Offensive Jihad*

Finally, the few who advocated a transnational *jihad* at the time of the interview present a more black and white vision of wars involving Muslim countries.<sup>33</sup> These six respondents (three male and three female, of whom one male and one female convert) and several online discussants consider all such fights *jihad* in the sense of holy war. They believe that any Western country with military forces in Muslim countries is part of a war that the West under the lead of the United States waged against Islam. Because of the military involvement of Western countries and the resulting misery of Muslims they consider it legitimate or even obligatory to attack the responsible foreign powers on Western territory. When making their case they present common just-war arguments, but they adopt a broader interpretation of self-defence. In addition, most of them consider suicide attacks against civilians allowed. In line with their argumentation, these respondents admit that they are supportive of Al Qaeda and consider Bin Laden a hero. For example, despite the fierce criticism of the majority of the online discussants, a female participant, Roosje\_70, states:<sup>34</sup>

I think Osama bin Laden a real man. At least he does something. Where are the real Islamic men? They are simply watching how our brothers die in the Palestinians, in Iraq and the like. If only there were more men like him.

In line with their support for Al Qaeda, they are predominantly positive about events like those of 9/11, the London bombings and the murder of Theo van Gogh. Maysa clearly vocalizes the arguments for violence that these fundamentalist Muslims use. She believes that there is no true Islamic state anywhere in this world. Until this state is founded, there is no leader who can declare *jihad*. In her view this inevitably leads to chaos, because Muslims have the obligation to fight any power that prevents the Islamic state from coming

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<sup>33</sup> Another two respondents shared the visions of this group of people in the past.

<sup>34</sup> There are quite some grammatical errors in the original quote. For the purpose of readability I have only added punctuation and left the sentences incomplete to not risk changing the meaning.

into being without such leadership. She claims that there is a verse in the Quran that says: “Terrorize them. Allah will punish them by means of your hands. Sometimes that is necessary. (...) For us terrorism is defending yourself against your enemy, the suppressor. It is allowed and it even is an obligation”. Because she believes that the Dutch support the United States, which makes the Netherlands an accomplice to the suppression of Muslims and opposition to the Islamic state, she sees the Netherlands as a legitimate target for attacks. She argues that the ends of their fight justify the terrorist means, to which she adds: “We don’t have an army of weapons, so then you use an airplane or yourself”. In her view most attacks are directed at the government and not at women and children. Marid is one of the few respondents who mentions explicitly that he does not support violence against civilian targets, such as women and children. He argues that the Quran prohibits this.<sup>35</sup> Thus, there is some difference of opinion about who should be the target.

Regarding these attitudes two nuances are important to make, though. Firstly, in terms of putting beliefs into behavioural practice, none of the respondents in this category saw themselves as ‘strong’ enough to actually take up arms or they felt it to be sufficient to contribute to the battle indirectly, which appears to correspond with their ‘passive’ practice over the years of this study. The participants in online discussions show a similar passive promotion of violence. Whereas they copy and paste texts of advocates for violent *jihad* in the West, they do not show an intention of acting on their beliefs. They glorify Islamic fighters like Osama bin Laden and call for others to support them, seemingly also more in words than in illegitimate deeds. This causes them to receive labels such as ‘keyboard terrorists’ from other online participants. Some of the interview respondents even describe their online ideological allies as young, ignorant Muslims with great boast, but little roast.

Secondly, also convictions concerning the doctrine of violent *jihad* evolve. A couple of the respondents that initially supported terrorist violence have changed their opinion and came to condemn it. Among the respondents who still support terrorism, there are also some who had a slight change of mind. A few years after our first interview, Nidal, for example, still considers violent *jihad* legitimate in the Netherlands. Nonetheless, he has come to realize that violence decreases support from other Muslims. Furthermore, he has developed more respect for Muslim governments since he has come to understand that it is hard to be a truly Islamic state. He thus demonstrates a slightly more tolerant and patient attitude, which he attributes to him becoming older. He also admits that he no longer believes in the realization of a true Islamic state during his own lifetime.

In short, the dominant viewpoint among the Muslims in this study – regardless of their religious orientation (non-fundamentalist or fundamentalist) and some

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<sup>35</sup> Yet, what he considers a civilian appears to differ from the mainstream view. For example, when asked about his opinion about the murder of van Gogh he does not want to answer the question, but does express that van Gogh was not a normal civilian in his view.

changes of thought over time – is that violent *jihad* can only take place under strict conditions. Most use common just-war arguments of self-defence against military forces. The vast majority of the participants in this study consider violence against other than military targets as well as suicide bombings in Western countries un-Islamic. Altogether, only a minority of the fundamentalist respondents promote violence in the Netherlands and among them opinions differ about whom to target. Over the years the attitudes of some of the violently inclined respondents have become milder and none have put their ideas fully into practice.

#### **2.4 Moderate Muslims versus Orthodox, Radical, and Extremist Fundamentalists**

The question that remains for this final section is how the beliefs discussed in the former section could help to categorize the respondents. Evidently, as the variety of attitudes confirms, it does not suffice to simply distinguish between moderate and fundamentalist Muslims. Moreover, the distinction between purist, political and *jihadi* Salafis (see Section 2.2.2) cannot serve us, because of the non-Salafi, fundamentalist respondent of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and the nuances that Salafi oriented respondents make concerning the doctrine of *jihad* and which do not fit these categories. Instead this study distinguishes between three fundamentalist attitudes: orthodoxy, radicalism and extremism.

The use of these terms is far from new. In their leading work on radicalization among Dutch Muslims Buijs et al. (2006) have clearly described radicalism and extremism, which they distinguish from orthodoxy. For Islamic radicalism they mention six cumulative characteristics:

It is mainly characterized by the conviction that: 1) Islam in modern society is marginalized and threatened with extinction; 2) many civil rulers contribute to this situation and that distrust and resistance against them and their social-political order is therefore legitimate; 3) most religious leaders accept the loss of the central place of religion in society and thus betray the religious foundations; 4) the foundations of religion have to be restored by returning to traditional religious norms and values and a scripturalist reading of the Quran; 5) the own religion is superior and should in fact be the basis of society and the state, and should be the political guideline; 6) the true believer should play an active role in the realization of the desired society and taking action is a matter of great urgency (Buijs et al., 2006: 15).

They describe Islamic extremism as having another three features in addition to these six characteristics:

7) the ultimate objective, the desired ideal society and the realization of the rule of Allah, is formulated in absolute, utopian terms, that is, as a goal that legitimizes in principle all means; 8) the unity and superiority of the believers is emphasized and the opponent is demonized; whereby the

controversy between the powers of Good and Evil, between the party of God and the party of the devil, are made absolute; 9) a specific interpretation of *jihad* is propagated, namely that it is the duty of all Muslims to apply any means possible in the battle against Evil and to realize the good society (Buijs et al., 2006: 15).

It becomes clear from these descriptions that to be a radical or extremist one has to have an activist attitude and commit oneself to one's cause; radicals and extremists see it as their personal responsibility to bring about fundamental social change.

Yet, I argue that earlier studies on Islamic radicalization in the Netherlands have applied these terms with insufficient accuracy.<sup>36</sup> These studies see support for *jihad* and the promotion of an Islamic state as signs of radicalism (e.g. Balogh et al., 2009; Buijs et al., 2006; Slooman & Tillie, 2006; Roex et al., 2010). Thereby they neglect several complications. The main complication concerns the transnational and glocal dimensions of the contemporary world. As a result of these dimensions some problematic questions are: Should one consider it radical if Western Muslims believe violent *jihad* in a Muslim country like Palestine to be justified while using common just-war arguments? And should one consider it radical if Western Muslims see an Islamic state in a Muslim country as the ultimate ideal because they believe *sharia* to be better than liberal or other forms of democracy? The argument of the remainder of this chapter is that it is required to take a closer look at the attitudes of fundamentalist Muslims in order to be able to categorize their views in such ideal types as those of Buijs et al. (2006).

For this reason, Figure 2.1 summarizes the respondents' attitudes, as follows from the interviews and conversations.<sup>37</sup> This table categorizes these attitudes on the basis of the characteristics that Buijs et al. have given of radicalism and extremism. However, unlike Buijs et al., the table distinguishes the respondents' attitudes regarding, on the one hand, Western society and, on the other hand, certain Muslim societies. Furthermore, the table compares radical and extremist attitudes to 'orthodox' and 'moderate' attitudes.<sup>38</sup> 'Moderate' is a label that is common to denote a more latitudinarian interpretation of Islam. In sum, the table reflects how this study categorizes the respondents on the basis of the nuances in their opinions. These categories – moderate, orthodox, radical, and extremist – are ideal types, because there also is minor variation of opinion within these categories. Moreover, as the change in attitude of some of the respondents demonstrates, these categories are not static:

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<sup>36</sup> See in particular the study of van den Bos et al. (2009) which appears to apply the label 'radical' to certain Salafis without sufficient ground.

<sup>37</sup> The respondents were not literally asked for their opinion about the nine criteria of Buijs et al. (2006). Instead, I have deduced these opinions from their answers in retrospect.

<sup>38</sup> Esposito (2005) criticizes the fact that non-Muslims tend to apply the term 'moderate Muslims' to Muslims having similar pro-multicultural views as themselves. He believes that also traditionalist and conservative Muslims can be moderate in the sense that they reject extremism. This study, however, uses the term *orthodoxy* to cover the conservative and traditionalist viewpoints that are non-radical and non-extremist.

some respondents changed from extremist to moderate views, and from moderate to orthodox. One converted respondent, Reza, even turned from extremist to moderate to orthodox over the course of this study. For the purpose of clarity, the following sections summarize the attitudes of these ideal types.

#### *2.4.1 Moderate*

The label 'moderate' applies to the respondents who adopt more latitudinarian interpretations of religious texts to suit modern life. These respondents try to see Islam in its socio-historical context.<sup>39</sup> This view leads to room for some adaptations and innovations. As mentioned before, this position differs from the various fundamentalist ones. Attitudes that reflect a moderate approach to Islam are a limited emphasis on absolute truth, a less strict interpretation of rules, no objections to interacting with non-Muslims, the view that democracy and Islam are reconcilable, and little interest in the form and realization of an Islamic state. They believe it to be unproblematic for Muslims to live in non-Muslim countries. Finally, the moderate Muslims in this study argue that fights in countries like Palestine are legitimate on the basis of just-war arguments like self-defence and they hardly base their argument on the religious doctrine of *jihad*.

#### *2.4.2 Orthodox*

The orthodox Muslims in this study consider it – in theory – best for Muslims to interact with fellow Muslims. Moreover, they see the Islamic state and *sharia* as the ultimate ideal and thus prefer the Islamic state over democracy for Muslim countries. Yet, they claim no role for themselves in realizing this Islamic state other than by being good Muslims in their daily life. They attempt to strengthen the global Muslim community from the bottom-up and on a local level. They try to do so mainly by showing that there is no reason for non-Muslims to be afraid of Islam, by doing supplications for fellow Muslims and by trying to please Allah in their everyday lives. They present democracy as an appropriate system for Western countries and they intend to live in accordance with the Dutch law, even though they believe *sharia* to be better. Some claim to vote. They state it is possible to live in a non-Muslim country as long as they can practise their religion. Many of them argue that this has become harder due to anti-Islamic attitudes since 9/11. Consequently, the majority believes they should eventually migrate to a Muslim country. In principle, they consider *jihad* a legitimate means of self-defence against military forces in Muslim countries that attack Muslims, but because of their greater focus on rules some of them are critical about contemporary battles. They argue that for some of these battles not all conditions for *jihad* are fulfilled such as it being for the sake of Allah.

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<sup>39</sup> I have not discussed their viewpoints in depth, because the focus in this study is on fundamentalist Muslims. It therefore suffices to briefly mention what their position is to see how it differs from the various fundamentalist positions.

FIGURE 2.2 | *Categorization of the respondents* (based on the analysis of the respondents' attitudes and modified from Buijs' et al. (2006) nine criteria)

Dutch/ British Society	Attitude			Approach	Extremist		
	Moderate	Orthodox	Radical		Radical	Orthodox	Extremist
Muslim Societies	1 Islam is marginalized and threatened with extinction	Largely disagree	Disagree or agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	2 This is the partial fault of civil rulers and thus resistance is legitimate	Largely disagree	Largely disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	3 Religious leaders betray religious foundations	Disagree	Largely agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	4 Literalist interpretations of Islam are necessary to restore Islam	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	5 Islam is superior and should be the basis of societal/political order	Largely disagree	Largely disagree	Largely agree or largely disagree	Largely agree or largely disagree	Largely agree	Largely agree
	6 True believers should play an active part in immediate societal change	Disagree	Largely disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	7 The realization of the Islamic state legitimizes all means	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Largely agree	Largely agree
	8 It concerns an absolutist fight of good believers against evil enemies	Largely disagree	Largely agree	Largely agree	Largely agree	Largely agree	Largely agree
	9 All believers have the duty to fight jihad with any means possible	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree
Muslim Societies	1 Islam is marginalized and threatened with extinction	Disagree	Disagree or largely agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	2 This is the partial fault of civil rulers and thus resistance is legitimate	Largely disagree	Largely disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	3 Religious leaders betray religious foundations	Disagree	Largely agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	4 Literalist interpretations of Islam are necessary to restore Islam	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	5 Islam is superior and should be the basis of societal/political order	Largely agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	6 True believers should play an active part in immediate societal change	Disagree	Largely disagree	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
	7 The realization of the Islamic state legitimizes all means	Disagree	Disagree	Largely disagree	Largely disagree	Largely agree	Largely agree
	8 It concerns an absolutist fight of good believers against evil enemies	Largely disagree	Largely agree	Largely agree	Largely agree	Largely agree	Largely agree
	9 All believers have the duty to fight jihad with any means possible	Disagree	Disagree	Largely disagree	Largely disagree	Agree	Agree
Approach	No clear approach	Bottom up	Top down	Top down	Top down	Top down	Top down
No. of interview respondents	10 (of which 2 with orthodox aspirations, and 1 former radical)	19 (including 2 former extremists)	3 (plus the 1 former radical)	3 (plus the 1 former radical)	4 (plus the 2 former extremists)	4 (plus the 2 former extremists)	4 (plus the 2 former extremists)

### 2.4.3 Radical and Extremist

How does one distinguish the positions of the orthodox respondents from those of the radical and extremist ones? Concerning social interaction, the radical and extremist respondents share the conviction of orthodox Muslims that they should preferably interact with Muslims.<sup>40</sup> What is different is that they much more fiercely reject the liberal, capitalist democracies in the Western countries that they live in. Thus, they are principally against liberal democracy and its agents. They are equally distrusting of political and religious leaders in Muslim countries. They see the fights in various Muslim countries as part of global campaign against Islam. In their view Western countries under the lead of the United States try to prevent the installation of an Islamic state. They see it as their individual duty to take an active role in realizing an Islamic state and end the injustices done to fellow Muslims around the globe. Regarding the Islamic state, they generally show a pragmatic attitude. Their principal concern is its realization in a Muslim country. They believe that a top-down approach by a small group that takes the lead is required. The radicals promote a political battle in spoken words and in writing in the West, such as the member of Hizb ut-Tahrir and they reject terrorism, but support the idea of a revolution against Muslim governments that they consider insufficiently Islamic and responsible for Muslim suppression. They present Western populations as principally ignorant victims of dominant powers.

The extremists, on the contrary, consider it their personal responsibility to partake in a violent battle, both in Muslim countries and Western countries involved in the conflict. Some of them believe that it is allowed to also target citizens, either for the sake of their higher purpose or – in the case of Western countries – because citizens ‘are not entirely innocent’. In the view of these extremists Western populations are responsible for their democratically elected governments and for their failure to learn about Islam, even though they simultaneously present Western populations as victims of the media and politicians such as Wilders. Yet, they also argue that not all non-Muslims have an evil character.

The argument is, in summary, that the distinctive criteria for Islamic radicalism and extremism should be 1) a politically activist stance on 2) the basis of fundamentalist Islamic viewpoints. In line with these criteria, moderate Muslims are not radical, because they lack fundamentalist viewpoints and – in case of the respondents – also a politically activist stance. Similarly, orthodox Muslims are not radical, because they stay away from political activism. The difference between radical and extremist concerns principally the use of violence. In sum, legitimating and verbally supporting contemporary battles in certain Muslim

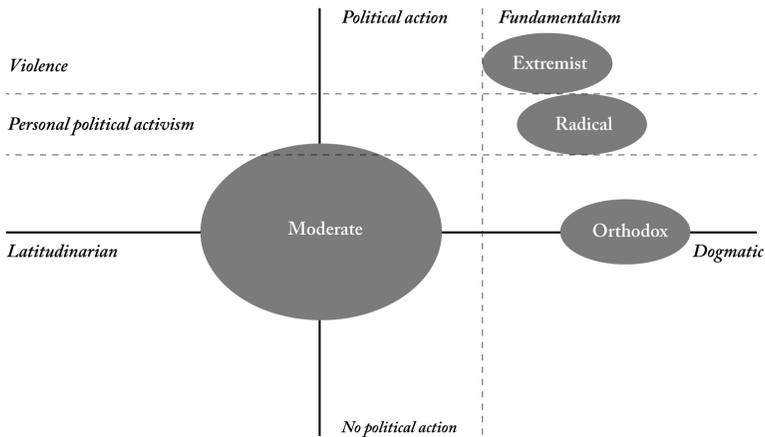
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<sup>40</sup> Yet, there are fewer people that they consider ‘real Muslims’ as a result of their strict interpretation of Islam and the practice of *takfir*. Chapter 5 will elaborate further on this matter.

countries on the basis of common, Western just-war arguments is therefore – in itself – insufficient to apply the label ‘radical’, even when the word *jihad* is used.<sup>41</sup>

Figure 2.2 represents the positions of the four categories in this study. It shows that politically activist or fundamentalist orientations are in themselves insufficient to constitute Islamic radicalism and extremism. On the contrary, they have to be combined. Furthermore, as mentioned before, these positions are not as static and absolute as the figure might suggest. Instead, and of central importance, opinions can demonstrate more nuance and change over time.<sup>42</sup>

FIGURE 2.3 | *Political and religious dimensions of moderate, orthodox, radical and extremist viewpoints*



<sup>41</sup> Based on these definitions one can conclude the following. For one, it is insufficient to call a person radical if this person calls it *jihad* to donate money to an Islamic organization to help Palestinian orphans or believes that the Palestinians or Afghans should get their independent Islamic state. It is equally insufficient for extremism or radicalism if one believes that Palestinians can defend themselves against Israeli soldiers with stones or even guns – in line with just-war arguments – and asks others to pray that their suffering will end. Instead, it would be Islamically radical, for example, to argue that the battle between Islam and its enemies requires financial support for the sake of non-violently realizing a ‘true’ Islamic state in a Muslim country. Similarly, seeing it as a personal duty or calling for others to participate in the violent *jihad* against the enemies of Islam in Iraq or the Netherlands would be examples of Islamic extremism.

<sup>42</sup> The size of the categories in the figure does not represent the number of respondents in this study, but it symbolizes – not on scale – the estimated size of each group in Dutch society. As discussed, research indicates that the largest group is moderate. According to previous studies, only a small group has fundamentalist viewpoints, and even less Dutch Muslims are believed to have adopted radical and extremist beliefs.

## 2.5 Summary

This chapter has clarified how to conceptualize Islamic fundamentalism, what support for Islamic fundamentalist views there is in the Netherlands, and how to categorize the Muslims in this study on the basis of the differences in attitudes.

This chapter has described Islamic fundamentalism as an orientation within Islam that is characterized by scripturalism, traditionalism, dualism, and millenarianism. According to previous studies, only a small minority of Dutch Muslims adopt global fundamentalist ideologies, such as Salafism. Instead of turning to Islamic fundamentalism, the majority of Western Muslims construct hybrid, liberal Islamic identities in interaction with their local context. On the whole, the religiosity of Muslim youngsters in the Netherlands is declining. Moreover, within Islamic fundamentalism there are different orientations. The main categories that I have distinguished among the fundamentalist respondents are orthodox, radical and extremist attitudes. The principal difference between these groups is that the orthodox respondents are not political activists, but focus on strengthening the Muslim *ummah* from the bottom up by trying to improve as individuals. The radicals and extremists, on the contrary, see it as a personal responsibility to become political activists and they want to change society from the top down. The extremists distinguish themselves from the radicals by accepting all means possible in their striving, including terrorist or non-terrorist violence.

Regarding their practice and attitudes toward non-Muslims, *sharia* and *jihad*, I have made several observations. Firstly, also within the three fundamentalist groups there is variety in attitudes. Secondly, attitudes and behaviour do not always correspond. Thirdly, over the course of this study several respondents changed their attitudes and behaviour. Overall, the impression is that their strict belief system is not as 'threatening' as one might expect.

These initial findings raise many questions. For example, how can one explain the differences between some of their words and behaviour? How 'foreign' and hybrid is the Islamic fundamentalist way of life to Western lifestyles? And what attracts young Muslims and converts to Islam? Starting with the latter question it is these questions that the following chapters address.



## CONVERSION AND IDENTITY STRAIN

The idea of identity was born out of the crisis of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the 'ought' and the 'is' and to lift reality to the standards set by the idea – to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea. Identity could only enter the Lebenswelt as a task, as an as-yet-unfulfilled task, a clarion call, a duty, and an urge to act (Bauman, 2004: 20).

Zygmunt Bauman's macro-sociological observation reflects some central elements that help to explain the turn to Islamic fundamentalism of the Muslims in this study. Although Bauman explains the emergence of identity as an idea, the importance he attributes to identity, the desire to belong, and the gap between 'ought' and 'is' appears also applicable at the micro and meso level as this chapter will demonstrate.

Considering the importance of 'identity' in explaining the respondents' processes of conversion and radicalization (from now on radical conversion), the chapter first describes what identity and (radical) conversion are about. Then follows a review of existing explanations of conversion to fundamentalism. The next section considers the circumstances that incited the respondents' religious quest. How did they become interested in Islam? What turning points occur in their development? After a discussion of these questions, the following section reflects on how to explain the choice for either moderate, orthodox, or radical and extremist views. Finally, this chapter reflects on the role of significant others and the strain that the respondents experience concerning their identity.

Obviously, these topics require an in-depth analysis of the religious development of individuals. The online-research and observations did not always allow me to go into such depth. This chapter, consequently, results from the analysis of the interviews with the 40 respondents and from extensive conversations with a little over 25 (mostly orthodox) women during the fieldwork.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.1 Conceptualizing Identity and Radical Conversion: Continuous Processes

As this and the following two chapters will demonstrate, identity plays an important role in the respondents' turn to Islamic fundamentalism. Then what is identity and how do people construct identities? Identity is a controversial term

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<sup>43</sup> The interviews with the moderate respondents have shed light on the distinctive religious development of the fundamentalist respondents. Since the details of the moderate respondents' stories are irrelevant for the purpose of this chapter, the chapter does not contain quotes from their interviews.

and consequently there are many descriptions of identity. This study approaches identity as a process and as something that is always under construction. As a result, this study's definition of identity might contradict people's personal experience of identity, as Erikson indicates in his classic work 'Identity, Youth and Crisis' (1968). In this book he argues that while people tend to perceive their identity as "a subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity" (Erikson, 1968: 19), identity is the result of an interactive process:

We deal with a process 'located' in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities. (...) The process described is always changing and developing: at its best it is a process of increasing differentiation and it becomes ever more inclusive as the individual grows aware of a widening circle of others significant to him, from the maternal person to 'mankind' (Erikson, 1968: 22).

By describing identity as such, he recognizes the inherent instability of identity. Thus identity is a continuous process, even though people might picture there to be a secure and 'authentic' self as final outcome of their personal development. Similarly, Hall (1996) denies the existence of 'authentic' selves and speaks of identities as being continuously re-established through a never-ending process of identification:

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we represent ourselves (Hall, 1996: 4).

Moreover, he clarifies identity further by emphasizing that in this interactive process of identification identities are established in comparison to what is 'other':

Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its 'identity' – can be constructed (Hall, 1996: 4).

In other words, identities only gain meaning thanks to difference, similar to how one knows what 'cold' means because it differs from 'warm', and how one determines the meaning of 'good' by contrasting it with what is 'bad'. When people construct an image of their own identity, they do this in comparison to who/what they consider 'other'. How identity and the process of identification and differentiation relate to Islamic fundamentalism and the respondents' Muslim identities is something that I will return to later in this chapter (and in the next two chapters).

Scholars also describe the turn to Islamic fundamentalism as a process. Recent studies on how and why Dutch Muslims turn to Islamic fundamentalism have dealt with this turn in terms of radicalization. Consequently, when scholars describe the religious transformation of these Muslims, they emphasize literature on the ‘process of radicalization’ while they neglect studies on religious conversion. One could argue, though, that the turn to Islamic fundamentalism – whether orthodox, radical or extremist – concerns a process of conversion, because conversion is a process of “transformation of one’s self concurrent with a transformation of one’s basic meaning system” (McGuire, 2002: 73)<sup>44</sup> and radicalization involves a similar transformation of one’s basic meaning system. In sum, this chapter presents research on both Islamic radicalization and conversion, as their combination is likely to enlarge the understanding of (radical) conversion processes (also see Spalek, 2007). The chapter starts by discussing how the process of radicalization takes place. Even though the fundamentalist respondents are thus all ‘converts’, I refer – as mentioned before – to the respondents from Muslims families as ‘born-again’ Muslims, while I reserve the term ‘converts’ for the respondents that are new to Islam.

In this process, radicalization studies distinguish clear phases, which suggest that radicalization is a linear process that takes considerable time (e.g. Sprinzak, 1991; Moghaddam, 2005). In opposition to this image Buijs et al. (2006) show that radicals can go through various phases within only a few months. Besides, they argue in so many words that radicals can drift<sup>45</sup> in and out of these phases (Buijs et al., 2006: 239, 275). Similarly, converts to contemporary fundamentalist movements have a record of dropping out after

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<sup>44</sup> Conversion can take place in various ways. It occurs if one 1) becomes religious after having been a-religious, 2) changes from one religion to the other, or 3) adopts a different interpretation within the same religion (Paloutzian, 2005). Although broader interpretations of conversion exist that include changes in spirituality instead of solely religion (Park, 2005; Rambo, 1993), the narrower understanding suffices for the purpose of this study.

<sup>45</sup> I use the term drift in this study, unlike Buijs et al. (2006) did. I have opted for this term, because of Matza’s (1964) description of drift. In his view, a delinquent ‘is “an actor neither compelled nor committed to deeds nor freely choosing them; neither different in any simple or fundamental sense from the law abiding, nor the same; conforming to certain traditions (...) while partially unreceptive to other more conventional traditions; and finally, an actor whose motivational system may be explored along lines explicitly commended by classical criminology – his peculiar relation to legal institutions” (Matza, 1964: 28). As a result of this position of delinquents, Matza argues them to ‘drift’ between crime and conventionality, whereby they sometimes take one path and at other times the other. Obviously, my central focus is not on delinquency, but on various forms of fundamentalism. ‘Drift’ is a useful concept, nonetheless, if one exchanges the term ‘delinquent’ for ‘unconventional’. The respondents display ‘drift’ between the conventional (Western and moderate Islamic beliefs and behaviour) and unconventional (Islamic fundamentalist beliefs and behaviour) in two senses. First of all, the respondents in this study drift between the conventional and unconventional over time. They do so most notably by turning their back to fundamentalism, and by adapting or by re-adopting fundamentalist views over time. Second, closer to Matza’s description, those who express commitment to their Islamic fundamentalist position also continue to display some conventional beliefs and behaviour. Hence, the committed fundamentalist respondents also ‘drift’ to some extent between the conventional and unconventional. The following chapters will demonstrate how this ‘drift’ takes shape.

some years (McGuire, 2002: 84, 91-92).<sup>46</sup> This general image of variability and flexibility corresponds with the process of some of the respondents. These respondents went through several turning points, varying from within a year to after several decades. Clear examples of such drift are the converts Aarif, Reza, Ava and Kaleemah. Reza first converted to Islamic extremism, became a moderate Muslim within half a year and a couple of years later he is on the orthodox track. Ava started out by converting to moderate Islam and turned to orthodox Islam after ten years. Kaleemah also largely fit the description of a moderate Muslim for about 25 years until she adopted extremist views. Finally, Aarif initially turned to Islamic extremism before becoming an orthodox Muslim within about a year. This type of drift, however, is not reserved to the converts in this study. Among the born-again Muslims, Moroccan Almahdi had gradually adopted some radical beliefs, but returned to a moderate interpretation of Islam within a couple of years. Moreover, some of the respondents mentioned that they had witnessed some of their orthodox, radical or extremist brothers and sisters 'stray off the right path' over time. The respondents thereby confirm findings of scholars on religious conversion such as Austin-Broos (2003: 9), who describes conversion as "continuing and practised". In this sense, the process of (radical) conversion does not differ from other human action, about which Cohen (1965) says:

Human action, deviant or otherwise, is something that typically develops and grows in a tentative, groping, advancing, backtracking, sounding-out process. People taste and feel their way out. People taste and feel their way along. They begin an act and do not complete it. They start doing one thing and end up by doing another. They extricate themselves from progressive involvement or become further involved to the point of commitment (Cohen, 1965: 8-9).

Despite conversion and radicalization being processes, conversion studies demonstrate that converts make their turn suddenly known by adopting certain symbols or rituals. For Muslim women, for example, this could be taking on an Islamic name and wearing the veil, which most of the female respondents did. For men, it could be by wearing traditional clothes and suddenly going to the mosque. Such turns usually take place after concrete triggering events and in late adolescence or young adulthood (Austin-Broos, 2003; Rambo, 1992, 1993; Erikson, 1968; McGuire, 2002: 83; Ullman, 1989). Two respondents form an exception to the general age, because their conversion did not take place until their late twenties.<sup>47</sup> For approximately a quarter of the respondents there were clearly observable events that stirred up their lives and apparently triggered their conversion process. This is particularly true for the converts. The other three quarters of the respondents sketch an image of a gradual development.

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<sup>46</sup> Disengagement is also a process that takes place through different phases. It takes place either voluntary or forced, individually or collectively (e.g. Bjørgo & Horgan, 2009; Bovenkerk, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> The cases of principally the older respondents confirm, though, that there can be different turning points in a lifetime, sometimes involving a conversion within Islam.

How this development continuously takes shape in their everyday lives is a matter of discussion in the next chapters. This chapter continues with the triggering events and resulting turning points in the respondents' conversion process, which are related to the next topic: explanations of (radical) conversion.

### **3.2 Existing Explanations for Conversion to Orthodox, Radical and Extremist Islam**

What is already known about why Western Muslims adopt Islamic fundamentalist views? What can explain the respondents' (radical) conversion processes? Literature which tries to explain the phenomena of orthodox, radical and extremist Islam demonstrates again that radicalization and conversion studies are separate scholarly fields. Moreover, and possibly as a result, most explanations focus on radicalization and hardly discuss orthodox Islam as a distinct phenomenon. This section discusses the findings of previous studies by first addressing the matters that contribute to the cognitive opening of individuals that makes them want to convert. Subsequently, it discusses the attractions of religious views and fundamentalist views in particular. The final part of this section presents the explanatory models that scholars have developed on the basis of existing explanations.

#### *3.2.1 The Desire to Convert*

Previous research has demonstrated that radicalization and religious conversion require a cognitive opening. For the creation of such a cognitive opening, radicalization and conversion studies mention similar contributing factors. This section presents the factors that scholars have distinguished on the level of individuals, interpersonal relations and the broader social context.

On the individual level previous studies mention two types of factors: either relating to an identity crisis or to personal pathology. Above all terrorism studies have searched for evidence of personal pathologies. However, on the basis of this research scholars criticize the assumption that there are pathological roots of radicalization (Bjørgero, 2005; Crenshaw, 2000; Ellens, 2002; Horgan, 2005; McCauley, 2002; Ruby, 2002; Victoroff, 2005; Weatherston & Moran, 2003). Regarding identity crisis, studies on religious conversion have a different focus from radicalization studies in terms of what constitutes the identity crisis and fosters the cognitive opening. Conversion studies view personal experiences of loss and suffering as responsible for an identity crisis. Examples of such events are the death of relatives and personal failure through 'deviant' behaviour, such as drugs and alcohol abuse. These experiences can lead to an instable, negative self-image and – as a result – an identity crisis (e.g. Buijs et al., 2006; Hamm, 2008; Lifton, 2007; McGuire, 2002: 78, 80-81; Paloutzian, 2005: 336-337; Rambo, 1993; Wohlrab-Sahr, 2006). Since religion is argued to offer a sense of identity (Aldridge, 2007; Hunt, 2005; McGuire, 2002; Meyer & Moors, 2006; and for Islam e.g. LeVine, 2003; Mandaville, 2004; Schmidt, 2004; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001), these scholars see conversion as a response to an identity crisis. Although

some radicalization research also views personal loss and suffering as origins of identity crisis (e.g. Arena & Arrigo, 2006), scholars of radicalization usually frame the identity crisis as being of a 'multicultural' nature. Recent studies in the Netherlands and Europe on radical Islam, for example, focus on second-generation Muslim immigrants and present the crisis as resulting from life in a diasporic community and the generational gap between them and their parents (Abbas, 2005, 2007; Buijs et al., 2006; de Koning, 2008; Lewis, 2007; Lifton, 2007; Mirza et al., 2007; Roy, 2004; Werbner, 2004).

Research findings concerning the interpersonal level show that the desire to belong, and thus to have a social (or group) identity can motivate people to convert or radicalize. Conversion studies argue that membership of a community forms an important motivation for conversion (Jenkins, 2004, chapter 10; Wohlrab-Sahr, 2006). Radicalization studies also pay attention to interpersonal relations, but they emphasize group pressure instead of the group's attraction. For that reason there is a body of literature on network theories to explain the coming into existence and the functioning of radical networks (Sageman, 2004, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005 and in Sageman's footsteps Bakker, 2006; Bokhari, Hegghammer, Lia, Nesser & Tønnessen, 2006; Gartenstein-Ross & Grossman, 2009; Thayer, 2005). In some of these studies the new 'recruits' come across as rather innocent and ignorant victims of indoctrination by – generally foreign – radicals who present themselves as scholars of Islam (van Leeuwen, 2005). This rather deterministic view of the recruits contradicts voluntarist or rational choice assumptions for participation in these movements (e.g. Ross, 1993). Sageman (2004, 2008) argues that there is no support for recruitment in the sense of 'brainwashing' (cf. Yinger, 1982: 241, for the 'recruitment' by religious countercultures and Silke, 2006, for suicide terrorism). Instead of being indoctrinated by these movements, individuals choose to become a member because they have a cognitive opening and start seeking, as Wiktorowicz (2005: chapter 2) puts it. On the interpersonal level this opening relates – according to some – to parental pedagogical failures (van San, Sieckelinck & de Winter, 2010). In line with Sageman's criticism of the brainwashing argument, conversion studies warn against deterministic views (e.g. Hexham & Poewe, 1997; McGuire, 2002). These studies confirm that individuals are not victims of external (or internal) forces, but are active actors in their conversion process.

Explanations on the societal level involve structural factors. These vary from the socio-economic position of religious groups to international politics. Radicalization studies in particular emphasize these factors, but conversion studies also mention structural factors (e.g. Sims Bainbridge, 1992). Radicalization can be fuelled by experiences of structural unemployment, suppression, social exclusion, injustice, discrimination, international wars and the like (Abdullah, 2007; Bin Sayeed, 1995; Bovenkerk, 2009; Devji, 2008; Langman, 2005; Marranci, 2007; Meertens, Prins & Doosje, 2006; Mirza et al., 2007; Nesser, 2006; Oliveti, 2002; Patel, 2007; Shaw, 2002; van den Bos et al., 2009; Young, 2007). In addition, to explain the emergence of Islamic

fundamentalist views, scholars have highlighted global factors such as globalization, capitalism and consumerism (Barber, 1995; Castells, 1997; LeVine, 2003; Mandaville, 2004; Patel, 2007; Roy, 2004; Young, 2007). Furthermore, these modern developments contribute to the difficulties and differences of opinion within Muslim communities that fuel radical Islamic movements (Cottee, 2006: 156; Silvestri, 2007).

According to conversion studies such structural factors make individuals aware of the failure of their current meaning system, which fosters a feeling of crisis (Bailey Gillespie, 1991; McGuire, 2002: 80; Rambo, 1992 and 1993; Sims Bainbridge, 1992). Radicalism research also uses crisis-like terminology, but in relation to what they see as a failing socio-political system. Dutch radicalization studies describe the character of this crisis as principally a loss of confidence in political (and/or religious) structures and eventually a crisis of these structures' legitimacy (most notably Buijs et al., 2006, with reference to Sprinzak, 1991). If the resulting doubt affects one's religious worldview, one could become open to conversion (Paloutzian, 2005: 336). McGuire (2002: 77) emphasizes that one has to take all factors into account without unjustly valuing one over the other.

### *3.2.2 The Temptation of Fundamentalist Interpretations*

The factors mentioned in the above section help to create a cognitive opening for (radical) conversion. But what does Islamic fundamentalism have to offer to individuals with a cognitive opening? To answer this question, this section discusses previous lessons about the attractions of Islamic fundamentalism. To begin with, religion in general is argued to respond to certain human desires and needs. It provides meaning, identity, spiritual experiences and a sense of belonging through rituals and symbols (e.g. McGuire, 2002: 15-22). Further, regarding Islam in particular, some authors argue that it provides an identity for uprooted Muslim youngsters in Western countries who experience alienation and discrimination. Roy contends, for example, that:

Islam might bring happiness, or at least reconcile the believer with himself, by healing a self divided between faith and materialist aspirations, between tradition and modernity, between what sometimes seems a desolate life and the search for dignity and self-esteem. (...) Islamic revivalism goes hand in hand with a modern trend: the culture of self. (...) Islam is presented as a cure for suffering, with the aim of 'finding peace' (Roy, 2004: 187, 193-194).

Even though Roy (2004: 193) links this culture of self to more moderate interpretations of Islam, such as Sufism, research on (the) sociology (of religion) indicates that Islamic fundamentalist movements could especially offer reconciliation for the identity problems that Roy sketches. Almond, Appleby & Sivan (2003) label fundamentalism as 'strong religion' and Hunt (2005) and Aldridge (2007: 122) as 'faiths of certainty' (also see Towler, 1984: 107). Their descriptions point to one of the main attractions of fundamentalism, namely the strong identity it offers (Aldridge, 2007: 136; Castells, 1997: 13; Hunt, 2005,

chapter 7). Moreover, McGuire (2002) explains the magnetism of absolute visions by their dualist and millenarianist character. The appeal of dualism and millenarianism supposedly follows from the anomie that people are confronted with as a consequence of globalization, fluidity and increasing pluralism in modern times (McGuire, 2002: 39-49). Fundamentalist views could especially offer certainty to ethnic groups that have migrated to Western countries. By establishing clear boundaries with other groups, fundamentalist views confirm the identity of immigrants who have to find their way in materialist and liberal Western societies while facing pluralism and secularizing tendencies within their own religious communities. In addition, such views seem to provide Muslim immigrants a way out of the conflicting loyalties of religion, culture and nationality by subordinating these loyalties to loyalty to the global *ummah* (Aldridge, 2007: 122-125; Hamid, 2007b; Hunt, 2005: chapter 7; Roy, 2004; Schwartz, Dunkel & Waterman, 2009; Shaw, 2002: 55).

Previous research on either radicalization or religious conversion does not explain the difference in attraction between orthodox and radical or extremist views. Explanations are limited to fundamentalism in general being attractive for offering a strong religion and identity. Furthermore, previous research suggests that orthodoxy could prevent Muslims from radicalizing (Almond et al., 2003; Awan, 2007).

### *3.2.3 Explanatory Models and Links with (Criminological) Theories*

Altogether, research has brought forward a vast amount of explanatory factors for conversion and radicalization. Various scholars have attempted to put these explanations in perspective, particularly regarding radicalization. Some studies evaluate these factors (e.g. Bjørgo, 2005; Crenshaw, 2000; Precht, 2007; Sageman, 2008; van der Pligt & Koomen, 2009). Other researchers have built integrative models in which they incorporate different types of explanatory factors (e.g. Post, Ruby & Shaw, 2002a and b; Ross, 1993). The model of Post, Ruby and Shaw is probably one of the most inclusive ones, as it integrates psychological, group and socio-structural factors.

Alternatively, scholars have linked the explanatory factors to existing (criminological) theories. Several academics show how extremist groups justify their actions in a way comparable to the neutralization techniques that Sykes and Matza (1957) developed (e.g. Kittrie, 2000; O'Boyle, 2002; Rapoport & Alexander, 1982). Other research focuses on the subcultural qualities of extremist groups and their group dynamics (e.g. Alimi, 2006; Hamm, 1993, 2004; Klatch, 2004; Verkaaik, 2004). Furthermore, scholars have put radicalization in a criminological perspective of conflict, functionalism, Merton's (1938) concept of strain, and social constructionism (Ruggiero, 2006).

Concerning the macro-structural context, religion studies make a clear distinction between theories about 'late modern' times and rational choice theories (Hunt, 2005). Research with a late modernist twist stresses the general crisis of meaning and ontological insecurity. This crisis has, according to these studies, contributed to a desire for more certainty and thus dualist visions of

reality, a stronger identity and a sense of belonging as opposed to the feeling of everything being liquid and adrift (Amir-Moazami & Salvatore, 2003; Eisenstadt, 2000). Spalek (2007) has used these late modernist assumptions to explain radicalization of young British Muslims by combining them with criminological notions of subcultural theory. Rational choice approaches, on the contrary, focus on the religious market place where supply and demand for religious views meet (Finke & Stark, 1988; van Nieuwkerk, 2008).

In sum, previous studies have brought forward multiple explanations of (radical) conversion on the personal, interpersonal, and social-structural level, and both in terms of the creation of a cognitive opening and the attraction of Islamic fundamentalism. This raises the issue of what this study contributes to existing explanations. The remainder of this study discusses to what extent existing explanations in radicalization and conversion studies cover the situations of the respondents. Thereby, this study will consider if different explanations account for the turn to Islamic orthodoxy, radicalism or extremism.

The next step on the search for explanations relates to the individual as the following explanations involve personal factors that seem to have contributed to their cognitive opening to fundamentalism. While discussing these factors this section reflects on the respondents' experience of an identity crisis and the role of significant others.

### 3.3 Multiple Experiences Contributing to Identity Crisis

The respondents' conversion reports will help to determine the relevance of previous explanations. Are there specific experiences that contributed to the respondents' cognitive opening for Islamic fundamentalism? What personal and interpersonal issues become apparent from these experiences? And what indications do these experiences give of structural factors? Answering these questions helps to build a picture of how the respondents developed a cognitive opening to the diverse Islamic fundamentalist views.

The respondents' experiences suggest that factors on all levels – personal, interpersonal, and social-structural – are involved. When considering their conversion reports, several types of experiences become visible. Obviously, the respondents do not distinguish between these types nor do they always consciously present these experiences as contributing to their conversion.<sup>48</sup> All four types contribute to a lack of satisfaction about their lives and/or alienation from society: experiencing 1) to be adrift in life, 2) personal loss and suffering, 3) social exclusion and lack of recognition, and 4) a desire for transcendence. These four types are not isolated from one another. On the contrary, some are closely related. For example, social exclusion could contribute to a sense of depression,

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<sup>48</sup> These experiences often came up when I asked them to describe their life prior to their discovery of 'pure Islam'. Wohlrab-Sahr (2006) mentions similar experiences after having asked German and American converts to Islam for their life stories, though she uses a different categorization and does not mention the desire for transcendence.

and a lack of recognition can foster disappointment in being adrift in life. The following part takes a closer look at each of these four types on the basis of the respondents' reports. To give a more detailed impression of their experiences, Figures 3.1 and 3.2 present the conversion reports of two respondents: Aarif and Anna. At the end of this section follows a reflection on how to value the way in which they retrospectively reconstruct their religious development.

### *3.3.1 Being Adrift*

As Aarif's story shows (see Figure 3.1), he led a deviant lifestyle. He claims that he felt 'he missed something' and that he 'lacked direction'. In his view he did not set himself limits and was concerned with following his own interest, whereby he 'took' instead of 'gave'. He argues that these feelings made him realize that he lacked spirituality. As such, he sketches an image of being adrift in his life and lacking deeper meaning. In retrospect, approximately one third of the respondents share such an image of an 'empty' life without clear direction. Regardless of their current religious orientation and whether converted or raised as Muslim, these respondents feel that they were principally concerned with superficial matters such as their own pleasures. However, while they felt they did not sufficiently abide by moral guidelines only a small minority transgressed like Aarif did (Presdee, 2000; Katz, 1988; Ferrell, Hayward & Young, 2008: 72-73). In total four of the respondents – including a female one – mentioned that they had committed rather serious criminal offences in the past. Two of them were non-Muslim at the time, and two were Muslim. Furthermore, a couple of female respondents, both with Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds, had close relations with men involved in drugs or other crimes.

Thus, most of the respondents who report experiences of being adrift in life stayed within legal boundaries. They felt that they acted like their peers and enjoyed the material joys of modern consumer society without reflecting deeper on life's meaning. There is no indication that the respondents differ from other youngsters in Western society in terms of their lifestyle. For the respondents who grew up as Muslims, though, participating (to some extent) in the normal pleasures in a Western society like the Netherlands led them to deviate from some of their parents' lessons. Clubbing, drinking or flirting and being intimate with members of the opposite sex, for example, is equated in their view with disobedience to Islamic rules. Consequently, they believe that they failed to follow the direction that Islamic rules gave them. Born-again orthodox Layla phrases their common view as: "Boyfriends, going out and doing things that are really not allowed. Then all brakes were gone, let's say. But at a certain moment you think 'o, is this it?'" Even though Layla claims to have respected certain rules, such as not becoming very intimate with boys, she feels that she did trespass on Islamic boundaries. The change of heart that the respondents had confirms previous research that indicates that many young Muslims consider Islam very important in their lives, but see living in accordance with the rules as something for when they grow older (Nabben et al., 2006: 68).

FIGURE 3.1 | *Aarif's conversion story*

Aarif is a son of Irish Catholics who grew up in one of London's most multi-cultural, lower-class boroughs. At the time of the interview, he is in his mid-twenties and is active in his Salafi community. He wears a beard and Western clothes when we meet. He was raised by only his mother without a strong father figure to give him the direction that Aarif says to have longed for. Aarif states that he had never been religious. Spirituality was something that he regarded as weak, like his friends did, despite the Muslim background of many of them. He quit school around age 18 as he lacked a perspective on a bright future. Instead he started to work on and off and formed part of the typical rebellious, masculine street subculture characterized by a strong anti-establishment mentality and involvement in crime. About the period from his 16<sup>th</sup> until he turned approximately 21 years old he says:

I was selling drugs. That was my main source of income. My family did not have money for education. They don't see the benefit of further education and it [drugs] is readily available, all the time. It is the next alternative. (...) In areas like this they are not into work and school, but in selling drugs, robbing or stealing.

He remembers this period as characterized by indulgence, because "you enjoy the benefits of it, but not the process. You enjoy the money, the clothes and the women". (...) "You don't limit yourself". In retrospect he was "always taking" instead of giving.

According to Aarif various triggering events occurred that made him reflect on his situation. First his grandmother died and then he got involved in a violent incident. During a temporary change of environment: "I had a chance to sit down and reflect. I realized I didn't have any direction". Once back in London he lived in another area with his best friend, a guy from a Muslim family he had met in prison. When this friend got interested in Islam, Aarif decided to read some of his Islamic books. When his best friend became a Muslim, Aarif followed his example a few days later. He initially turned to an extremist Islamic ideology that was equally anti-establishment: "that was available to me. I thought 'this is Islam'. You gain trust...you get a lot of trust from them, and they helped me for Ramadan".

At the time of the interview he looks back on his extremist period with disdain for his views. Aarif became aware that the people around him were "not going anywhere" and that they were:

not interested in seeking knowledge. People took one book and gave their own spin to it. I saw people who were ignorant. (...) I was practising Islam not the Salafi way. I met takfiri people. I was kind of up that way until I got married. I saw 'salafi' as negative. I was negative about the [name] mosque.

Within a year and under the influence of his wife and her family he exchanged extremism for an orthodox path.

### *3.3.2 Experiencing Personal Loss and Suffering*

An equal part (one-third) of the respondents report destabilizing events in their personal relations, their physical health and/or (resulting) psychological struggles prior to their turn to Islamic fundamentalism. A few respondents were confronted with the death of a relative or the separation from a parent. Their grief inspired them to ask ontological questions about the meaning of their life. Reza – initially a convert to extremist Islam and after a moderate period to orthodox Islam – who already struggled with his adoptive background, had a near death experience. Conversion studies confirm that near death experiences commonly are followed by conversion (e.g. Rambo, 1993).

Furthermore, approximately one third of these respondents say that they suffered from depression or burn-out. Anna's story, as described in Figure 3.2, demonstrates that there does not have to be a clear cause of the suffering. Usually, though, the suffering of the respondents in this group does have visible external causes. Common causes are separation and fights between parents, or being in a bad relationship oneself. Their stories, however, are with one exception less dramatic than Anna's. Not all of these respondents experienced a serious depression. Instead, they talk of sensations varying from 'emptiness', 'insecurity', 'being useless' to 'depression'. Among the women in the mosque almost half reported such feelings as inspiration to their conversion to orthodox Islam. Although a couple of male respondents also admit to such feelings, it is principally female respondents who report these experiences. While it is possible that the male respondents are less sensitive in this respect, it could very well be that they downplay such sentiments to appear more 'masculine' and tend to develop alternative narratives. Almahdi is one of the exceptions among the men, as he does describe his state of mind in terms of mild feelings of depression. He came to a point at which he felt "this is not why you're here. (...) Somehow I didn't enjoy it anymore, I got a bit depressed".

### *3.3.3 Experiencing Social Exclusion and Lack of Recognition*

Young (2007) suggests that social exclusion is at the cradle of radical Islam in Western countries. About second-generation immigrants in the United Kingdom, and those of Pakistani and Bangladeshi descent in particular, he says: "They suffer both an experience of relative deprivation, materially, and a stigmatised identity. (...) [There is a] variability of cultural identities which evolve out of this (...). But one of these adaptations is fundamentalism" (Young, 2007: 164-165). To evaluate the role of social exclusion and stigmatization in the conversion processes of the respondents several distinctions need to be made. It is necessary to distinguish between 1) the respondents from Muslim families, 2) the native Dutch converts, and 3) ethnically diverse converts. Moreover, there is a difference in the intensity of the exclusion that they experienced, as it varies from being rejected to not feeling sufficiently recognized.

Regarding the first group of those who were raised as Muslims, practically all respondents mention experiences of social exclusion and processes

of othering, regardless of their gender.<sup>49</sup> On the one hand, their experience of social exclusion is related to Western society's public discourse that presents Islam as a threat. On the other hand, their felt lack of belonging results from being treated as an outsider for other reasons. Issues that commonly came up in the conversations are rejection by family or peers, experiencing discrimination and the negative stereotypes in the media. A couple of respondents mentioned a lack of justice in the way their hard-working parents or Muslims in general were treated in the Netherlands or elsewhere in the world (also see Buijs et al., 2006; de Koning, 2008; Slooman, Tillie, Majdy & Buijs, 2009; Korf et al., 2007; Korf et al., 2008). In the case of about two thirds of the interview respondents these experiences appear to have seriously impacted their religious development. For example, extremist born-again Marid argues: "I got more interested in Islam because people were against Islam. At school I was seen as the enemy. Then I thought 'well, then I will be the other, the stranger'. I started to rebel". Furthermore, almost half of the women in the mosque argue that such experiences raised their interest in Islam.

The (respondents who look like) native converts, the second group, usually started to experience social exclusion after their conversion. Aarif and Khadija, an orthodox convert, are exceptions to this general rule, because they already felt outsiders. At the time of his conversion Aarif was an outsider in the sense that he had an anti-establishment attitude and formed part of a rebellious street culture with fellow lower class youngsters. Whether his rebellious attitude resulted from him feeling excluded or whether he copied the narrative from his social group, or both, is of limited relevance. Key is that he formed part of a deviant subculture at the time of his conversion. It appears that while this subculture promoted a self-induced social exclusion, it offered a stronger masculine identity than a non-deviant lifestyle offered him in his situation. Yet, when Aarif came to experience social exclusion and stereotyping through getting the formal label of 'criminal', being imprisoned and literally excluded from his former living area, he reached a turning point. Khadija experienced social exclusion too. She remembers herself as never having fitted in with the group: "Ever since childhood I was spit out by the group. I didn't want to participate. I had my own way of being and dressing". Having been raised by a Christian and a Jewish parent, she turned to Islam at age 18. That is about 20 years prior to the interview and in a time when there were still few Dutch converts to Islam. One could say she confirmed her otherness – and justifies the ground of being othered – by converting.

Finally, the converts with foreign ethnical roots experienced othering as well, with the exception of Anna with her Indonesian-European roots. They report exclusion on the basis of their ethnic or ethnically mixed background. Orthodox convert Summeeyah remembers that the family of her native Dutch parent referred to her as the child of 'a dog', namely her Surinamese parent. The

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<sup>49</sup> This is generally also true for the moderate respondents from Muslim families. Yet, they appear to deal with these experiences in a different way from the fundamentalist respondents, as the next section will show.

other children of mixed marriages and Reza who has Latin-American roots and has been adopted by native Dutch parents have also been treated as the odd man out. Like Summeeyah they felt that they did not belong to either of their parents' ethnic communities (also see Roy, 2004: 317).

In terms of social exclusion and stigmatization for being Muslim, the respondents generally argue that they noticed an increase after 9/11, and even more so after the murder of van Gogh in 2004. They mention different types of experiences. First, they report experiences of social exclusion in their personal interactions. The negative experiences that they talk of usually occur in the street. Some of the women in the mosque, for example, mentioned incidents in which bus drivers made discriminatory remarks or did not stop for a girl with a headscarf. Other experiences that they reported are people spitting on and swearing at them in the street. Being rejected for an internship or a job for being a Muslim is something that only a couple of respondents say they have experienced themselves. The rest of the respondents only reported that they had heard of others this had happened to. The reason that few respondents in this study have experienced rejection on the labour market might relate to their relatively high level of education and the fact that some of them are still studying. Second, as a result of the social upheaval about Islam the respondents who were raised as Muslim received more questions about their religion (also see Nabben et al., 2006: 64-65). In their social environment they regularly encounter non-Muslims who want to know what Islam says exactly, for instance about *jihad* and violence. Even when they did not face such questioning, the public attention for Islam raised their awareness of being Muslim and increased their interest in their religion. This led quite a few of them to feel that they had insufficient knowledge about Islam, which up until then had not occupied a major role in their lives. Third, the respondents believe that the media and politicians misrepresent Islam and thereby are in large part responsible for the stigmatization of Muslims. This appeared to be a particularly sensitive issue, since the respondents talked much about these misrepresentations and brought the subject up on multiple occasions. Orthodox born-again Zarah, for example, sees the media as responsible for "brainwashing" people since 9/11. "They keep repeating it, until people believe it. (...) After 9/11 it really went that way. It didn't use to be that way in the past. Then guest workers were treated well. It is important to respect one another". In her view the media only invite Muslims who have entertainment value, for example, because they 'do not know anything about Islam'. Yet, even when they invite people with knowledge, she argues, the media distort their message. "You try to cooperate, but they twist your words in the newspaper and say that you said that. That is simply bad! We had that here too. Journalists would come and talk to little children who don't know anything yet! Go to people from the mosque! Later on one girl says 'I didn't say that at all! They are here with microphones".

Besides experiencing social exclusion, people also reported a lack of recognition. A lack of recognition is less clearly observable, because it is about 'the positive' that others can deny you, not 'the negative' – of social exclusion –

that they do to you. What is more, recognition is highly subjective as it depends probably even more on individual expectations. Nonetheless, in a couple of conversations respondents expressed that they did not feel fully recognized for their potential and self-expression. Born-again orthodox Jala, for example, used to make and perform hiphop music. She was raised as a Sufi and she was popular; in her own words: “Outside the house, they loved me, because I did what they wanted me to do. I wore skinny jeans and converse shoes”. Although she does not explicitly mention that she felt insufficiently recognized for being herself, this sentiment is present between the lines when she speaks about the changes that a producer suggested to her songs: “I didn’t like that. Then it is not mine anymore, they manipulate it”. Eventually she turned away from the music that she has come to see as un-Islamic, makes critical jokes about fashion victims and has moved on to writing poems about Islam.

While some respondents deny that exclusionary experiences have contributed to their turn to fundamentalism, others admit that negative responses to Islam made them become more interested and search for ‘true Islam’. This is both true for born-again and converted respondents. Extremist convert Kaleemah, for example, had been a convert for a couple of decades, but used to focus on what she calls the ‘peace-loving’ side of Islam. Until the policy responses to 9/11, the rise of Islamophobic sentiments and the Dutch terrorist trials, she trusted that Islam would slowly be accepted in the Netherlands. After witnessing what she sees as unjust responses and limitations of Muslims’ rights she became increasingly convinced that Islam also has a militant side. “It is peace and struggle. I didn’t see that until now. (...) It is only the strong believers who say ‘we go for it, they’re taking away our rights!’” With these strong believers she means the Dutch terrorist suspects. Those who did not report feeling personally affected by social exclusion did regularly argue that the negative attention raises Muslims’ curiosity about ‘pure Islam’ and that Islamophobia thus (ironically) seems to contribute to an increased interest in Islamic fundamentalism. Like orthodox born-again Eva summarizes it “negative PR is PR too”.

#### *3.3.4 A Desire for Transcendence*

The experiences discussed above are all of a ‘negative’ or at least unpleasant nature, resulting in negative realizations or the experience of a void. The fourth type of experience, by contrast, is ‘positive’ in the sense that it concerns the aspirations of the respondents. However, this experience is likely to be related to the other types and might even result in large part from these other ‘negative’ experiences. In a way, each of the respondents reached a point at which they wanted to transcend their former self, as this is a pre-condition for conversion. But this is not the kind of transcendence that this section refers to. This type of experience concerns a more mythical form of transcendence. The conversations with a little over one third of the male and female interview respondents reveal their desire to transcend the ordinary. Some dreamt of the mystical and beautiful world of the orient or of fairytales, like several women in the mosque confessed

to. Others demonstrated a desire to 'be special' in comparison to others,<sup>50</sup> as the following part shows.

In the interviews, the role of orientalist views and elements of fairytales are clearly present in the conversion stories of two women. The first one is Kaleemah, initially a convert to a more moderate interpretation of Islam who later adopted an extremist view. When talking about her original conversion to Islam, she shows signs of orientalism. She mentions the interest that she and her father shared in 'foreign peoples'. The Dutch phrase is '*vreemde volkeren*,' which has the awkward ring of the anthropologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century who studied African tribes from an orientalist perspective. She uses this and similar terms multiple times during our conversation. She says, for example, that as a child she wanted to be a missionary so she could live with 'foreign peoples'. In addition she tells me about how she discovered that she wanted a Muslim husband because "he did things that interested me". She felt more comfortable with "strangers", by which she refers to the first Muslim immigrants. Therefore, contact with these "different peoples made me think outside of the box. (...) I dared to break away from my home". The second person is Naima, an orthodox convert, who likes to read about Arab culture. Although she says she does no longer know exactly what attracted her first, she adds "I liked Aladdin and the music". During our second meeting I ask her about what she liked about Islam. Naima answers in similar terms:

In the beginning it was the culture itself, of the people that I met. I still remember that I got mint tea in one of those little glasses and date cookies. I felt as if I was in the palace of Aladdin.

Besides these romantic images there is also a group of mainly seven respondents who demonstrate a desire to be or be part of something 'special'. For some male respondents this desire is reflected in their focus on oppositional, masculine role models. Two of them – Aarif and radical convert Hujjat – grew up without a father and their life previous to Islam indicates that they were searching for masculinity of a rebellious nature. They did this through their involvement in a male-dominated crime scene and through promiscuous relations with women. The reports of the other five revealed that they did not want to be like anybody else. Instead, they wanted to stand out from the crowd. Maysa, a born-again extremist, is one of the respondents with such heightened ideals. In our conversations she occasionally talks of other people being meek sheep, while she says about herself: "I thought it would be horrible to do the same as everybody else. (...) I wanted something higher. I was interested in mysterious things at the time, like aliens and that's why I watched the X-files, for example".

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<sup>50</sup> The next chapter elaborates on the attraction of transcendence.

FIGURE 3.2 | *Anna's conversion story*

Anna is a child from a mixed marriage of an Indonesian and a Western European parent. Her parents were baptized Christians but did not practise their religion. When we meet she is in her mid-twenties, second wife to her husband and has a young child. She dresses in traditional Islamic clothes. She does not have a job, but has plans to go back to University – that she dropped out of – in one or two years.

Anna's interest in Islam was raised when she was 16 years old. Anna describes herself as a person who had everything that she could wish for. She was popular, had nice friends – both male and female – a job she liked, she studied and she did enjoyable things. She turned towards an orthodox interpretation of Islam a couple of years ago. At that time she considered it important to have:

The right clothes, to say the right things. That's how you valued yourself. It worked out, but I didn't find satisfaction in doing that. I think that's why I was unhappy. I had the right clothes, I did the right things. I think that's why I was frustrated and had a negative self image. (...) I felt empty and unhappy. I've had therapy and went to discussion groups, but it was impossible to find out what was wrong with me. (...) I had a nice life. I felt very bad about myself and even started to mutilate myself. I simply didn't want to go on anymore.

In this period of her life she socialized with Moroccans and started to wonder about their religion. Although this motivated her to read about Islam, she did not convert until a couple of years later. When she was twenty she became more serious about Islam. "I sometimes had those moods in which I felt really bad. Then I would recite the Quran. I didn't know what it meant, but it calmed me". Her motivation to deepen her knowledge about Islam increased as the result of what she describes as a spiritual experience in which she saw Allah's name written in the sky. Subsequently, she became an active visitor to Islamic lectures, where her contact with converts intensified. She says about this group of converts "back then they welcomed me with open arms. (...) Always when they undertook things, it was like 'come along!'".

She still felt reluctant to take the final step and say the *shabada* because she did not wear a headscarf yet and did not yet abide to all Islamic rules that she had been taught. "I thought 'this is really what I should do, but I cannot become a Muslima yet; I still make too many mistakes". While having these doubts another convert, however, told her a story about the Prophet Muhammad that showed her that he considered it better for people to convert first and then gradually become better practising Muslims. After she had heard this, she said the *shabada* that made her conversion to orthodox Islam a fact.

Her conversion also meant the end of the relationship with her – from her view - non-practising Muslim boyfriend at the time. She gave him the choice between no more contact or marrying her, a decision that was complicated by the wish of his parents that he would marry a Moroccan girl. Anna says that she decided to give up on him. "That was a hard step. I loved that boy. Then you make a sacrifice for God, while your faith still has to grow. It turned out for the better".

### 3.3.5 *The Common Factor: Identity Crisis and a Quest for Personal Meaning*

Do these different experiences have a common ground? The principal commonality concerns the struggle with ontological questions that these experiences – either gradually or through triggering events – evoked. The respondents report that they felt an emptiness and meaninglessness. It is remarkable how many respondents talk of ‘a lack of satisfaction’. In response, the respondents came to wonder ‘is this it?’ and became more occupied with questions concerning their role in life such as ‘who am I?’ and ‘what is my place and purpose in this world?’ In short, they started to question their value and purpose as human individuals. Taking a closer look at the four types of experiences, the relation between these experiences and ontological questions becomes obvious. Feeling unsatisfied about drifting along without a clear direction in life could have inspired some of the respondents to search for such direction and such deeper meaning. Aarif literally expresses this:

You enjoy the money, the clothes and the women, but you're never satisfied. It's never enough. Regardless of how much money you made, there was always something missing. (...) My family was Catholic, but...I saw the direction it can give. I saw: I have money, but something is missing. Islam, I saw that that was missing. Something clicked. I had been looking for happiness in the wrong places. That's what I've done.

Experiences of personal loss confronted respondents with death and the end of things, which made them wonder about their personal place in the world and their own existence. Feelings of unhappiness and depression are also related to a sense of self-worth; a couple of the (female) respondents doubted their own worth and – in the words of some – ‘usefulness’ and consequently had a negative self-image. Social exclusion, stigmatization and lack of recognition relate to the value of oneself (status) in the eyes of others, an image that can be internalized in social interaction (Goffman, 1963). The desire for transcendence, finally, indicates the desire to gain a sense of value by being (part of something) special.

It is, therefore, possible to argue that the respondents’ struggle with ontological questions reflects a crisis of meaning, or an identity crisis, because, as Castells (1997: 6) contends, “identity is people’s source of meaning and experience”. And thus, one could argue, the search for personal meaning is closely related to a quest for identity. Erikson (1968) describes an identity crisis as stemming from the process of identity construction. He denies that such a crisis is a cataclysmic event. Instead, he sees it as “a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshalling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation” (Erikson, 1968: 16). Since Erikson describes the crisis simply as a turning point in a person’s evolution, he acknowledges that a crisis can be mild and could be inspired by higher ideals (such as the desire for transcendence) instead of by negative experiences (see for religious conversion also Rambo, 1993). The experiences of the respondents correspond with Erikson’s description of identity crisis: they all

reached a turning point, inspired by ontological questions, at which time they began to move into a fundamentalist direction. As a rule, the respondents do not present this turning point as a crisis, but as a natural development. For example, the respondents from Muslim families usually describe conversion to fundamentalism as part of their natural ageing process in which they start to take their religion seriously.

Thus far, it has become clear that the experiences of the respondents contributed to an identity crisis. Their experiences either stimulated them to feel bad, insecure, unhappy, unsatisfied, rejected, or they felt a desire for transcendence. These experiences challenged their sense of self. Yet, it is still unclear how these experiences relate to their conversion to different fundamentalist views. First of all, the types of experiences that the respondents had are all too common. They are reserved neither for the fundamentalist respondents, nor for Muslims<sup>51</sup> or other believers. On the contrary, many people have such experiences without turning to Islamic fundamentalism. Secondly, not all respondents who have had these experiences and ontological questions converted to or within Islam. As a result, some questions remain: Why did only part of the respondents feel that they had to change direction, that is, to convert? To what extent did their social environment play a role in this change? And more importantly, how do identity crises and significant others relate to the choice for moderate, orthodox, radical or extremist Islam? To clarify these matters the following section deals with how the respondents' social environment and the diverse types of experiences relate to their various fundamentalist orientations.

### **3.4 Different Directions: A Role of Significant Others and 'Identity Strain'?**

This section concerns the factors that might have pushed the fundamentalist respondents to their turning point and the specific direction that they chose. Since radicalization and conversion studies acknowledge that such turning points occur in social interaction, the first issue that this section addresses is the role of significant others. Secondly, it takes a closer look at the nature of the respondents' identity crisis to see if the intensity and type of experiences can clarify the direction that the respondents took at their turning point.

#### ***3.4.1 Significant Others***

Since conversion and radical conversion are social processes that do not take place in isolation, it is important to consider the influence of the respondents' social environment on their turning point. Overall, studies on radicalization and conversion distinguish between two types of converts that could be described as active seekers and followers. Whereas the seekers take the initiative, the followers let peers introduce them to specific religious or ideological interpretations. Yet,

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<sup>51</sup> These kinds of sentiments and questions are common to converts (Rambo, 1992, 1993: 48-55; Sims Bainbridge, 1992; Ullman, 1982) and often emerge in late adolescence or young adulthood (Bailey Gillespie, 1991), such as in the case of the respondents.

since conversion is a continuous process, for either type friends, relatives and role models in the new group draw them closer to the religious or radical group (e.g. McGuire, 2002: 80; Buijs et al., 2006; Wiktorowicz, 2005; de Poot & Sonnenschein, 2009; Sageman, 2004; Ullman, 1989).

Regarding the role of significant others, the converts and the born-again respondents painted a different picture. The converts usually gave Muslim peers a substantial role in their conversion stories. Some of them argued that they already were actively searching for answers and spirituality. Orthodox Naima is an obvious representative of this group. Since she grew up in a little ‘white’ village in the Southern part of the Netherlands, she did not know any Muslims when she became interested in Islam, a couple of months prior to 9/11.<sup>52</sup> On the contrary, she had to ask a classmate in high school to introduce her to a Moroccan girl in another class. This girl took Naima to a mosque where Naima decided to take Arabic classes. Within a year she took the *shabada* on the initiative of her Arabic teacher. Naima sees these two people as important influences, since the Moroccan girl: “was step one, my initiation in Islam. I could ask her all sorts of questions at the start. She mainly taught me the basics. The teacher has guided me to the second step”.

Another part of the converts became interested after other Muslims introduced them to Islam. They generally had Muslim friends or met Muslims through work or school. Orthodox Vanessa, for example, had Moroccan neighbours during her adolescence. They asked her why she didn’t become a Muslim, ‘because she did not smoke or drink anyway’. Vanessa recollects that she then said “give me a book”. Over the years she started to read more about Islam and converted when she reached her twenties.

The reports of the converts differ from the born-again Muslims in the sense that while both emphasize their own initiative, the latter generally present themselves as independent, active seekers. Only a minority of the born-again attributes a significant role to peers. This minority acknowledges that they felt inspired by people in their environment who became ‘more practising’, such as classmates, family members or partners.<sup>53</sup> The majority of the born-again claims to have found likeminded people along the way of a gradual development either by seeking contact, such as on the Internet, or through the mosque and their social network. In some cases they are the only one in their environment to turn to fundamentalist views, which makes it plausible that they are active seekers. In

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<sup>52</sup> It could very well be that – even though she does not recognize this – the events of 9/11 and the social upheaval about Islam have fuelled the interest that she already started to develop. Some converts (and born-again) do acknowledge that these events raised their interest. Later chapters deal with the role of these events.

<sup>53</sup> The clearest example of this attitude is Azmat who has a moderate Muslim background, but has been inspired by his orthodox, born-again and *niqab*-wearing girlfriend and has come to adopt some of her orthodox views. His case shows that women can exert pressure on their men, contrary to the stereotypical image of women being pressured into fundamentalist views. Azmat’s girlfriend made him choose when she decided to take her religion seriously: either he had to get along or they would break up. In Azmat’s view his turn to – still moderate – Islam is because he wanted it himself. His turn is not fully up to her (and his) Islamic standards though. Despite his beard and ‘Islamic mannerisms’, he admits that – a couple of years later – he still does not pray.

other cases they received support from their environment which is likely to have stimulated their (gradual) turn and continued development (see for the importance of significant others also Dericquebourg, 2009; Berzano & Martoglio, 2009). In practice, the line between active seekers and followers is not easy to draw, as the example of orthodox born-again Zarah demonstrates. She presents herself as an active seeker, even though she had a brother who turned to Salafism a couple of years prior to her. Moreover, she admits that her family started to learn more about Islam together, although the other family members opted for a more moderate approach. She argues:

We didn't influence each other. (...) My brother walked on the street with me without headscarf. That's how it should be: as long as you're an example. (...) I was the first one to make the step and ask him.

Thus, while he did not pressure her, he did form an example that inspired her to take the 'initiative'.

The respondents' reports about significant others confirm previous research. The respondents indicate that there are active seekers and followers among them, even though the born-again paint a more independent picture of themselves (e.g. Vroon-Najem, 2007). However, the general tendency of converts to present their conversion as an individual decision could explain why the born-again respondents in particular tend to downplay the role of others: they already formed part of Muslim networks, whereas the converts have to at least acknowledge that others helped to introduce them to such networks.

#### *Others as Obstacles to Conversion?*

Significant others could also try to keep respondents away from certain currents in Islam, which raises the question if the respondents' families had tried to talk them out of converting. Muslim parents could object to the different religious orientation of their born-again children. According to the reports of their children, though, the parents' initial reaction is contentment, because their children start practising (also see de Koning, 2008: 114-122). However, they start objecting when their children want their parents to implement strict Islamic rules (such as no contact between men and women) and when their daughters start wearing the *khimar* and the *niqab*. This generally leads to conflicts between traditional Muslim parents and fundamentalist children, because the parents consider these clothes unnecessary and worry about Islamophobic reactions. The fundamentalist respondents, however, argue that their parents eventually accept their choice, because they show their parents more respect (which they see as an Islamic requirement). Consequently, over time parents and children find a modus in which they give each other room to practise Islam in their own way. For radicals and extremists this can mean that the children refrain from political conversations with their parents.

The parents of converts, on the contrary, are usually strongly opposed to their children becoming Muslims. There are some exceptions to this general rule. Anna's parents, for example, reacted relatively positively. Aarif's mother was

initially worried about him, because of his radicalization. Other converts have similar experiences. Converts generally postpone telling their parents that they have become Muslim. Once the parents find out, they often feel that they have 'lost' their child to Islam and that their child has become a different person. Especially if the children adopt an orthodox interpretation of Islam, this is a common view of converts' parents (McGuire, 2002: 79). In several cases the parents first seemed to accept the conversion but had a change of heart when they realized the conversion was not a fling and their children were visibly turning into Muslims. Altogether, the counter forces of parents seem to have little impact and can only stall the conversion process.

*Significant Others in Relation to Orthodoxy, Radicalism and Extremism*

To say that other Muslims or non-Muslims had an impact on the respondents' religious development does not mean that these people determined the direction taken by the respondents. Thus, the (radical) converts are not 'victims' of group processes involving brainwashing or recruitment.

On their religious quest, whether largely self-initiated or stimulated by others, the respondents became acquainted with various Muslims. Some of these had a moderate view, while others had orthodox, radical or extremist views. Altogether, about half of the respondents report serious discussions with alternatively-minded Muslims, both prior, during and after their conversion. The directions chosen by the respondents do not simply result from the kind of Muslims they meet in their everyday life. The respondents' direction cannot be explained as a matter of priority either. Many of the respondents became interested in Islam through contact with moderate Muslims, for example, but they took a fundamentalist turn later on and lost touch with these initial significant others. Thus, significant others can change over time.

Even though it is likely that the respondents' direction depended to some extent on coincidences such as the people they met and 'clicked' with, it appears that this click requires a cognitive opening from the side of the respondents. This becomes most obvious from the respondents who searched for knowledge and an Islamic community online. The World Wide Web and discussion forums such as MVC offer a wide range of Islamic perspectives that are all accessible from behind one's desk. So why is it that some of the respondents, for example Maysa, opt for an extremist interpretation when they start searching for knowledge? It seems that certain interpretations matched their personal situation, whereas others did not.

To sum up, significant others are important, but one should be careful not to overestimate their role. Significant others cannot explain why the respondents adopt moderate, orthodox, radical or extremist views. Instead, it appears that this turn largely depends on their cognitive opening. Thus, to understand the different orientations of the respondents it is necessary to take a closer look at their identity crisis.

### 3.4.2 Gradations of Identity Crisis and (Radical) Conversion

When reflecting deeper on the respondents' crises, the direction that the respondents took reveals a relation with the intensity of the identity crisis and the type of experiences that they report.

#### *Intensity and Conversion*

Regarding the intensity of the identity crisis, the respondents who did not convert to fundamentalism seem to have had a relatively minor crisis, whereas those who did generally report experiences indicating a serious crisis. Especially the moderate respondents appear to have experienced a minor crisis. In itself this difference between converts and non-converts is to be expected. McGuire (2002) warns against the tendency of converts to present a grim picture of their life before conversion to contrast with their current happiness (McGuire, 2002: 76-77). It could thus be that, in retrospect, the respondents have created an image of a severe crisis. This does not mean, however, that as a researcher one cannot take their word concerning the kinds of experiences they report. On the contrary, the type of experiences can give an impression of the crisis' intensity.

Concerning the respondents' experiences the moderate respondents who did not convert report only one of the four types of experiences (being adrift, personal loss and suffering, social exclusion and lack of recognition, or high ideals), if any. Of the fundamentalist respondents, there are merely a couple of orthodox born-again respondents who also report only one of these experiences. They feel that they have not gone through a religious re-orientation, but instead have continued on the path they were already on. The other fundamentalist respondents all appear to have gone through a more serious crisis, since they report to have had two or more of the four experiences over a longer period of time.

#### *Type of Experience and Conversion*

Moreover, the orthodox respondents on the one hand, and the radical and extremist respondents on the other, report different types of experiences. Whereas all these fundamentalist respondents report multiple experiences, in each group specific types of experiences are overrepresented. Although it is impossible to draw general conclusions from the small number of former and current radical and extremist respondents, these differences are nonetheless striking.

The orthodox respondents more frequently mention experiences of personal loss and suffering than other groups do. Almost two-thirds of them claim to have had such experiences prior to their turn – or in their view 'return' – to Islam. Anna, whose unhappiness drove her to self-harm, is a typical example in this respect. In comparison, about one third of the radical and extremist respondents report such experiences.

Among the radical and extremist respondents two types of experiences stand out that are less common among the other groups, namely social exclusion and a desire for transcendence. However, their stories also point to a difference

between the radical and extremist respondents. The three former or current radical respondents all describe either an intense perception of social exclusion or a desire to be special.<sup>54</sup> In addition, each of them claims to have lived a life without boundaries and direction, sometimes accompanied by feelings of personal loss and suffering. The seven former or current extremist respondents mention both intense experiences of social exclusion – or a lacking sense of belonging – and a desire for personal transcendence. Only extremist born-again Marid does not mention the desire to be special, but he expresses more concern with social exclusion than the others. During the interview he brought the subject back to discrimination and feelings of rejection on multiple occasions, which indicates that these experiences have had a considerable impact on him. In terms of the experiences of social exclusion, the extremist respondents describe themselves as outsiders in relation to peers, with Aarif and again Marid as the exceptions. It could very well be that the desire to stand out and experiences of social rejection are communicating vessels; the respondents who were denied recognition may as a result want to be recognized as somebody special.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the fact that the extremist and some of the radical respondents make more mention of social exclusion, there are no objective clues that they have experienced more exclusion than the orthodox respondents. This might indicate that these radical and extremist respondents are more sensitive to the judgement of others and therefore to social rejection and acceptance.<sup>56</sup> Thus, their reports point to a greater sensitivity to how others value them and – regarding the desire to be special – how they are valued in comparison to other people. However, it is important to realize that this could be a temporary sensitivity and not a description of their personality. As the previous chapter demonstrated, people can drift in and out of various fundamentalist interpretations, which could indicate that the respondents' state of mind also changes. The reports of the ex-radical and ex-extremist respondents seem to

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<sup>54</sup> Among the moderate respondents there was one other person who also clearly wanted to be special: Raid, a moderate with a tendency – in word, not in deeds – to orthodoxy. He seems to have reached his goal by having a job that makes him popular and respected.

<sup>55</sup> Of the orthodox respondents, only convert Khadija reports rejection as a recurrent theme in her life and describes herself as being different from others. She always felt an outsider and became a Muslim over twenty years ago, in a time when conversion to Islam was still a rare phenomenon.

<sup>56</sup> An alternative explanation could be that sensitivity to social exclusion and being special is part of their radical and extremist discourse. Yet, the reports of the respondents contradict this. It is true that the radical and extremist respondents have adopted a discourse about Muslims worldwide as being socially excluded and about the duty of individual Muslims – such as themselves – to stand up heroically for their rights. However, the experiences of social exclusion that most of these respondents report concern personal experiences, such as being looked at or being called names in the street, or having felt the odd one out at school. In their discourse they deny that they care about such personal experiences. Marid too denies that he cares, even though he continuously came back to these experiences and admitted feeling relieved when he did not get any remarks for 'an entire day'. Similarly, the respondents' reports generally indicate that their desire to be special does not originate from their radical and extremist discourse, because these reports suggest that the respondents do not just want to be special as Muslims. For example, extremist born-again Nidal emphasizes that he excelled in both studies and sports at a young age. Another example is radical born-again Fareeha, who mentions that she used to be the person whom other people imitated when it came to clothes.

confirm this, as these respondents argue that they felt more socially excluded and experienced a greater lack of belonging at the time of their turn to radical or extremist views than at the time of the interview.

Considering that the orthodox respondents most often report experiences of personal loss and suffering, whereas the radical and extremist respondents focus on social exclusion and being special, their crises appear to be slightly different. The crisis of the radicals and extremists primarily seems to involve their status,<sup>57</sup> or 'social self', since the crisis reveals a direct concern with how they are valued in the eyes of others. One could argue in Cohen's (1955) words, that these respondents suffer from status frustration.<sup>58</sup> The crisis of the orthodox respondents, on the contrary, could be seen as largely relating to their 'personal self' as the crisis principally reflects an internal or internalized struggle about who they are and what their purpose is. This struggle is internalized in the sense that they fight it not directly with the outside world, but within themselves.

From the above it is possible to conclude that an intense crisis generally coincided with conversion. Furthermore, there is a difference between the various groups of fundamentalist respondents. The orthodox respondents reported more personal loss and suffering, whereas radicals and extremists showed more sensitivity to social exclusion and the desire to stand out from the crowd. Still, this does not explain how these experiences relate to their conversion. Nor does it explain why the respondents – with their differential experiences – turned to different forms of Islamic fundamentalism. It appears that an answer to why they opted for orthodoxy, radicalism or extremism has to be sought in what these different fundamentalist beliefs have to offer. The following two chapters will address this issue. However, before moving to this question the next section deals with the nature of the respondents' identity crisis as a start to explaining how this crisis paved the way for their conversion.

### 3.4.3 *The Nature of the Crisis: Identity Strain*

I was looking for happiness. (...) I had a lot of freedom then, but I wasn't happy. I didn't feel satisfaction. (...) I still felt imprisoned because I couldn't be who I was. – Maysa

It is the final sentence of Maysa's quote that shows how the various converted and born-again fundamentalist respondents with a more intense experience of identity crisis perceive this experience. By saying that she felt imprisoned and that she could not be who she was, she points at a feeling that more

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<sup>57</sup> Cohen (1955: 65) describes status problems as "problems of achieving respect in the eyes of one's fellows".

<sup>58</sup> Cohen (1955) has explained how status frustration comes about. He describes the situation in which individuals feel pressured to strive for personal success and "want to be somebody" according to standards that fall outside their practical reach. He argues that if these individuals conform to these social standards and internalize them, but then lack experiences of success and recognition in practice, this can lead to 'status frustration' (Cohen, 1955: 87-88).

fundamentalist respondents explicitly mention about the moment of their turning point, namely, that they were not their ‘real selves’.<sup>59</sup> In other words, the respondents experienced a discrepancy between what they felt to be their actual, ‘unauthentic’ self and the ideal image of an ‘authentic’ self.

To describe the nature of these respondents’ crisis I use the term ‘identity strain’. This use of ‘strain’ differs from how Merton and other social scientists use it. How this study’s use of strain relates to existing strain theories (and to culture and social structure), is something that Chapter 7 elaborates on. For now, it suffices to explain briefly why I have opted for this term and what I mean by identity strain. In criminology, Merton (1938) introduced ‘strain’ to denote the tension that people experience when the social structure obstructs their attempt to reach cultural goals. In his article Merton demonstrated how the structural limitations of social class cause strain regarding the cultural goal of economic success. When using the concept of strain, scholars in radicalization and conversion studies have commonly followed this traditional, material interpretation (e.g. Gurr, 1970; Hafez, 2003; Young, 2007, 2009a; Sims Bainbridge, 1992).<sup>60</sup> Some academics, though, explicitly recognize that strain could result from other goals. For example, in their study on religious conversion, Lofland and Stark (1965) argue that strain could also result from non-material goals, such as prestige. The converts portrayed in their study all reported the experience of a tension:

This tension is best characterized as a felt discrepancy between some imaginary, ideal state of affairs and the circumstances in which these people saw themselves caught up. (...) Just as tension can have myriad consequences, its sources can also be exceedingly disparate (Lofland & Stark, 1965: 864).

As possible sources they mention among other things: “longing for unrealized wealth, knowledge, fame, and prestige” (Lofland & Stark, 1965: 864). This non-material description of strain reminds of the experiences of the respondents in this study. To fit their experiences, however, I believe it to be necessary to take Lofland and Stark’s interpretation of strain one step further and relate it to one’s identity. In fact, the prestige that Lofland and Stark mention is an essential element in people’s sense of personal worth and thus self-identity. In short, I use the term ‘identity strain’, albeit in an untraditional way, because the respondents experience – partly in Lofland and Stark’s words – a ‘tension best characterized as

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<sup>59</sup> George Herbert Mead and William James already pointed to the desire of people to be their ‘real selves’. Mead (1967: 212) does this by contending that humans “seek certainly for that sort of expression which is self-expression”. James recognized that people want to feel “most deeply and intensely active and alive. At such moments there is a voice inside which speaks and says: ‘This is the real me!’” (Erikson, 1968: 19).

<sup>60</sup> I also use this term in a way that is different from how it has been used in mental health studies (e.g. Hayes & Nutman, 1981; Measham, Guzder, Rousseau & Nadeau, 2010; Soddy, 1961). Hayes & Nutman (1981) for example, point to the impact of identity strain on feelings of self-worth, yet they do not describe a discrepancy between actual and ideal self.

a felt discrepancy between some imaginary, 'ideal' sense of self and their actual self 'in which they saw themselves caught up'.

How does this experience of identity strain relate to the respondents' conversion? It could be that the experience of strain led them to feel an urgency to take the turn that Erikson speaks of and inspired them to convert. In theory, conversion could resolve the identity strain that the respondents experienced, because conversion is, according to James (1985: 189): "the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong, inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right, superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities".<sup>61</sup> One could thus argue that conversion allows people to confront negative experiences of an 'unauthentic' self through creating an 'authentic' identity that promises a positive alternative. What conversion has to offer to the fundamentalist respondents who experienced identity strain, will be addressed in the following two chapters.

Before moving on to these chapters a final reservation needs to be made. This reservation concerns the fact that the kind of identity struggles that the respondents experience are of course not exclusive to the Muslims in this study. Instead, one could argue that many people deal with such issues throughout their lives and religious conversion is obviously not the only possible response to identity strain. More importantly, this chapter does not offer an explanation for why the respondents chose to convert to Islamic fundamentalism instead of, for example, orthodox Protestantism nor for why they did not get involved in alternative non-activist or activist subcultures. Yet, it could be that there are factors other than the individual 'push factors' discussed so far that can help to explain the attraction of Islamic fundamentalism. Thus, what attracts the respondents, or 'pulls' them, to Islamic fundamentalist views remains to be seen in the following chapters.

### **3.5 Summary**

This chapter has explained how the cognitive opening for the respondents' conversion has come about. For that purpose this chapter has reviewed the lessons of previous research about the process of, and reasons and motives for (radical) conversion. Characteristic to the conversion process is its variability, continuity and lack of linearity. Regarding the reasons and motives, radicalization studies and conversion studies offer explanations on the individual, interpersonal and socio-structural level. Explanations vary from experiences of identity crisis on the psychological level to international injustices that feed resentment and the role of social interaction with others. Some explanations concern the attraction of dualist visions, most notably the security that they offer, a point I will return to in the following chapters.

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<sup>61</sup> Almost equally enlightening is the anthropological perspective of Austin-Broos who argues: "Conversion is a type of passage that negotiates a place in the world. Conversion as passage is also quest, a quest to be at home in a world experienced as turbulent or constraining or, in some particular way, as wanting in value" (2003: 2).

In this chapter I also examined what experiences aroused the interest of the respondents in Islamic fundamentalism. The respondents' stories indicate that the respondents experienced an identity crisis as a result of 1) disillusionment with a lack of deeper meaning and direction, 2) emotional suffering, 3) social exclusion and 4) a desire for transcendence. These experiences contributed to their cognitive opening. In terms of their conversion, part of the respondents report sudden turning points, while others claim a gradual development. Over time some drifted in and out of specific interpretations of Islam. Some of the respondents present themselves at the time of their turning point as active seekers, others appear to have followed the example of others. Yet, even though significant others can stimulate or form obstacles to conversion, the influence of such others does not shed sufficient light on why the respondents converted, nor why they opted for orthodox views and others for radical or extremist views. However, it seems that the identity crisis experienced by the respondents can help to understand their conversion. In contrast to the respondents who did not convert, the respondents who converted had a severe identity crisis, with the exception of a few orthodox respondents from Muslim families. I have described this situation as 'identity strain' which refers to a discrepancy between one's actual, 'unauthentic' self and one's (possibly vague or unconscious) image of an ideal, 'authentic' self. In addition, there appears to be a link between the experiences underlying the identity crisis and the respondents' fundamentalist orientation. The orthodox respondents seem to have an inward focus on their 'personal self', whereas the radicals and orthodox respondents express more concern with how others see them, i.e. their 'social self'.

Altogether, the respondents' conversion is a complex, interactive process in which personal experiences of strain and significant others all play a part. Obviously, the religious development of the respondents is an ongoing process, as the examples of respondents who 'drift' from one interpretation to the other have already demonstrated. How their conversion takes shape in everyday life is the topic of Chapter 6. Before turning to this matter, the next two chapters address several important remaining questions concerning the explanation of the turn to Islamic fundamentalism. These are: what is the attraction of Islamic fundamentalism? How do the various Islamic orientations differ in what they have to offer? To what extent does radical or non-radical conversion solve the identity strain experienced by the respondents?

## AN ORTHODOX FOCUS ON POSITIVE SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Inner peace, more than anything. (...) It gives you those limits and it is for everyday life, not just a particular day. You pray every day, it is constantly reminding you where you are in the scheme of things. You're a cog in the works, you don't have to be perfect. It gives me a sense of who I am, an identity, who I really am - Aarif

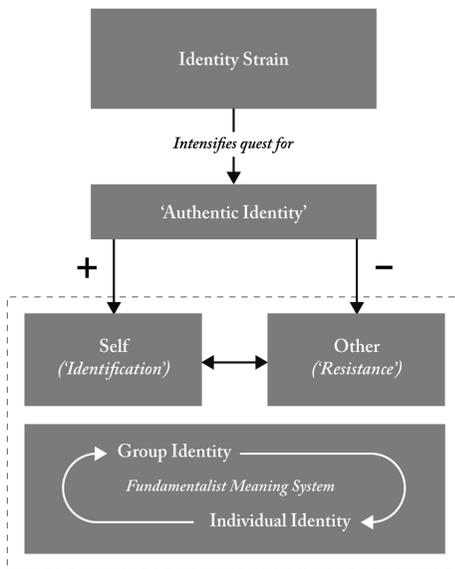
These words of Aarif about what Islam has given him summarize the principal attraction of Islamic fundamentalism to the respondents, namely that it provides them with a secure sense of identity. More specifically, this chapter will show that Islamic fundamentalist discourse gives the respondents a sense of 'authentic' self. After a deeper reflection on what identity entails, this chapter discusses how the fundamentalist respondents develop a sense of 'authentic' self and to what extent there are differences between the orthodox, radical and extremist respondents. The main questions are: How do the respondents construct 'authentic' identities and how do these identities help them cope with identity strain? To answer these questions the first section considers how the respondents' fundamentalist meaning system provides a discursive framework for their group and their self-identities. The next section reflects on how Islamic fundamentalist views contribute to a positive group identity. The third section reviews the fundamentalist models for a positive self-identity. As such, this chapter is concerned with the ideal, 'positive self-identification' of the various fundamentalist respondents. The ways in which the respondents put their ideals into practice will be discussed in Chapter 6.

### 4.1 Identity, Identification and Difference

Identities are constructed through differentiation between 'self' and 'other', as argued in Section 3.1. Islamic fundamentalism offers ultimate difference as a result of its dualism, as discussed in Section 2.1. Fundamentalist meaning systems portray an image of purity as opposed to chaos, of truth as opposed to deception, of good as opposed to evil. As such, fundamentalist meaning systems create strict boundaries within which one can form one's own identity. Regarding group identities it strictly distinguishes between 'good' groups and elements to identify with in society and groups that are 'evil' and/or 'other', which should be resisted. On the individual level, such a dualism assumes an equally strict distinction between a pious, 'authentic' self and a lost, 'unauthentic' self.

The following two chapters will show that the stories of the fundamentalist respondents confirm that they developed a sense of ‘authentic’ self through ‘positive self-identification’ and differentiation. In their process of identity construction it is possible to distinguish two principal paths, as presented in Figure 4.1: the path of positive self-identification and the path of resistance.<sup>62</sup> For each of these paths their fundamentalist meaning system sets clear boundaries on an individual level for their self-identity and on a group level for their group identity: on the one hand, by providing ‘true’, religious sources for identification and on the other, by pointing out the ‘false’ elements that they should distance themselves from, which usually includes the experiences at the heart of their identity crisis. The orthodox, radical, and extremist respondents all follow both these paths. However, as the title of this chapter indicates, they differ in terms of focus. As this chapter and the following one will demonstrate, the orthodox respondents are mostly interested in positive self-identification, whereas the radical and extremist respondents focus largely on ‘resistance’.

FIGURE 4.1 | *Paths to an ‘Authentic’ Identity*



This chapter concerns the path of positive self-identification, although it will also lightly touch upon ‘resistance’ due to these paths being two sides of the same medal in the process of identity construction. For that purpose, it first considers the fundamentalist meaning system as a source of positive self-identification.

<sup>62</sup> Chapter 5 will elaborate on the meaning of resistance. In this study resistance has a meaning that is different from traditional interpretations of resistance.

Subsequently, it discusses how positive self-identification strengthens the fundamentalist respondents' perception of an 'authentic' group and individual identity. Figures 4.2 and 4.4 present a selection of relevant fragments from the interviews held with two fundamentalist respondents, Naima and Nidal, to give an impression of how fundamentalism helps individuals to determine their Muslim identities through positive self-identification.

#### **4.2 Fundamentalist Meaning Systems as a Source of Secure Identities**

[Islam brought me] joy, peace in certain things and hope. As a human you're fully occupied with the world every day. (...) In the Netherlands life is entirely dedicated to work. They even talk about work at home. Islam brought me peace. Before, I thought 'why is it like this?' And then I would start thinking about it. (...) For example, why I don't have a father. In Islam that is predestined, I found peace therein. Why are all those movie stars rich? But they're not happy. It's never enough, they never feel satisfied. (...) This world shouldn't mean everything to humans - Zarrah

Some scholars have argued that (Islamic) fundamentalism can provide a sense of security to people who struggle with the kind of ontological questions that Zarrah reports and that are particularly common in modern times (Herriott, 2009; Roy, 2004; Young, 2007). Furthermore, Young (1999: 49) contends that people who experience ontological insecurity – which is the case for the fundamentalist respondents – become nostalgic for old models that symbolize their lost security. One could argue that fundamentalist interpretations of traditional religions, such as those of Islam, are such models because they represent trust (through century-old traditions) and certainty (through absolute truth claims). To what extent there is a relation between the contemporary social context and the attraction of Islamic fundamentalism to the respondents is elaborated on in Chapter 7. For now, it matters only that all fundamentalist respondents struggle with ontological, identity-related issues and that they argue that Islam gives them a sense of 'security' and/or a sense of 'peace'.<sup>63</sup> Thus, in this sense the orthodox, radical and extremist respondents do not differ. To illustrate this, this section will 1) take a closer look at the respondents' truth claim, and 2) see how their fundamentalist meaning system fosters a sense of security.

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<sup>63</sup> Even though the moderate respondents also reported such a sense of peace, Chapter 2 has shown that their approach to Islam is based on faith, whereas fundamentalists make a claim of certainty. Because of its absolutist claims, fundamentalism thus constructs a more secure and stable image of peace than moderate interpretations of Islam are able to offer.

#### 4.2.1 *Absolute Truth's Promise of Stability*

The truth claim of the fundamentalist Muslims in this study leads to a great focus on 'pure' Islamic knowledge, *ilm*, and its sources.<sup>64</sup> During our conversations the fundamentalists told me that they were striving to return to the 'pure' Islam as practised at the time of the Prophet and to purify it from later cultural pollution.<sup>65</sup>

In addition, the fundamentalist respondents believe that they hold the absolute truth. They can prove that it is the truth, they argue, because of their rational and logical thinking methods that are up to scientific standards, such as the method to get to the most reliable *hadith*.<sup>66</sup> Radical convert Hujjat is a typical example of this way of reasoning. He continuously repeats that there is "100% proof" of his Islamic truth. He says that "Islamic sources determine what has been proven for 100%. The existence of the Creator, for example, has been proven by a thinking method that comes to the right conclusion, 100% certain, always". This seems to ignore the fact that there are different fundamentalist currents in Islam which all claim to rely on such proof, but disagree about what is reliable information and evidence. The fundamentalist respondents resolve this dissonance by arguing that the difference does not concern the essence of Islam. Instead, they argue, the disagreement results from other Islamic currents being wrong and misinformed, while they themselves have 'absolute proof'. Obviously, these other currents say the same. In the mosque, the importance of 'true' knowledge was something the imam and lecturers regularly stressed. In the Brixton mosque, the imam dedicated a Friday sermon to this theme. He warned the listeners against people who say that they are doing *da'wa*, but "don't", such as those in favour of terrorism. The imam emphasized that each Muslim therefore has the obligation to gain as much knowledge as necessary to distinguish the Muslims who don't really do *da'wa* from those who do and to support the latter with their 'real' knowledge.

In sum, the fundamentalist respondents construct an image of ultimate stability by ascribing universal validity to their Islamic knowledge. One could see the importance that they attribute to gaining knowledge as an attempt to safeguard their psychological well-being: it helps them to feel better about themselves because their knowledge of the absolute truth puts them on a higher moral ground than those whom they see as ignorant of this truth (also see Meijer, 2009: 13).

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<sup>64</sup> Truth and evidence also play a large role in the lives of, for example, orthodox Christians (see Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005: 380)

<sup>65</sup> These ideas remind us of Mary Douglas' (1966) theory about the human desire for purity in the face of disorder. Douglas argues that rituals of purification are intended to create unity out of disorder and the dangerous pollution this disorder represents.

<sup>66</sup> Although fundamentalist Muslims claim to adopt the 'scientific approach', Wiktorowicz (2006) argues that the reasoning of Salafis cannot be described as rational or logical from a Western point of view.

FIGURE 4.2 | *Orthodox convert Naima*

Naima is a native Dutch convert to orthodox Islam. She is 19 years old and grew up in a little Dutch village. Despite the Catholic faith of her parents, religion only played a minor part in her upbringing. Naima discovered Islam when she was 12 years old. Although she did not know any Muslims she says that she became interested in Islam through religious classes at school, Arabic music and Disney's Aladdin. Questions about the meaning of life and parental quarrels – eventually leading to divorce – appear to have contributed to her conversion within a year. A couple of years later she started to wear the headscarf and at age 17 she posted a marriage request online and found an equally young and like-minded husband from a traditional Muslim family. At the time of the interview she has a one-year-old child, wears the *khimar* and does not have a job. She plans on doing a University degree when she turns 21 and she wants to become a school teacher.

We talk – among other things – about what Islam has contributed to her life. Naima states:

Security. I know why I live and I know what happens when I die. That gives a sense of peace. (...) I don't know where it comes from. You feel it in your heart...you become totally tranquil, as if everything falls into place. You get a broader view of things.

More than once, she expresses trust in Allah and in her future prospects in this life and the afterlife. She describes the essence of Islam as “God exists and there is only one God who made and created everything. That this life on earth isn't without reason, but that it's all a test to see how you will do.” She expresses the conviction that people must do what God intends them to do, which is worship him, for example, by praying five times a day. Why it is five times a day is something she does not question, because in her view it is God who “made us. He knows best”. She then compares people and God's rules to a DVD-player with instructions: “You know you can't throw it in the water, because it would break. Allah didn't say pray five times without a reason.”

Another area in which she puts her trust in Allah is the afterlife: “When you are a Muslim, no matter how many bad things you've done, you may go to hell but after the punishment you will get into heaven after all. No matter what you've done, God can forgive everything.” Moreover, Naima argues that God has also determined the fate of individuals in worldly life, even though they do not know it themselves: “that is also the essence of Islam. That it doesn't happen without a reason. In the womb it has already been determined whom you will marry and when you will die.” As a result, Naima argues that she no longer thinks ‘why me’ when she has negative experiences. It is her belief that these situations always turn out for the best.

Naima identifies with the Muslim community, but also with Dutch society: “I am Dutch and I feel Dutch”. However, she is particularly positive about the idea of Muslim sisterhood:

It is a feeling of security. You feel happy that you are part of something and that people love you unconditionally.

You feel one and that gives a very powerful, strong sensation. It feels very safe. (...) Would there be a war or an earthquake, then I would hardly be afraid, so strong is the feeling that I have in such a large group. I didn't have that feeling at school with my friends or girlfriends. That really has to do with the belief. (...) It gives a very warm feeling. I know that wherever in this world, if I have to sleep in another country, in another place, that I only have to look for a mosque or somebody with a headscarf and explain the situation so that this person has to help me. In theory, that is.

Initially, she paints an idealized picture of sisterhood: "sisterhood is a bond of faith. That automatically comes with friendship. I also have friends who aren't Muslim. Then it's about the character, that you like each other." Yet, she qualifies the friendship with sisters a minute later: "with one you become real friends, with the other it's less, but you do have a bond for the sake of faith."

Naima believes that she must follow the role model of the Salafis. In her view it is good to "imitate them as purely as possible." The prophet Muhammad is the most important example, she argues, also in dealings with non-Muslims. She refers to the commonly mentioned *hadith* of how Muhammad remained polite and friendly to his Jewish neighbour who had treated him badly. She says the man eventually converted to Islam. "That already shows that we have to treat everybody correctly. Our behaviour is the most important da'wa."

Overall, she sees a positive influence of Islam on her personal life: "I have more confidence and I have become more tranquil. I used to be down more often. Maybe that was because of puberty. I have become more stable."

#### *4.2.2 The Security of Relying on a Higher Power*

Like any religious meaning system, fundamentalism offers a secure identity because it presents human life and individuals as being part of a grand, meaningful scheme (cf. Baumeister, 1991; Park, 2005; Molcar & Stuempfig, 1988). Believers of any religion gain hope and trust through their reliance on a higher power (e.g. Watts Miller, 2008). However, the absolute certainty that the fundamentalist respondents claim promises greater than average security. These respondents describe worshipping as being a servant, or as 'submitting' to Allah, a description that symbolizes the ultimate trust they claim to put in God. This section discusses the ontological security that they derive from two convictions: Islamic predictions, and personal fate.<sup>67</sup> Even though these are theological matters which might seem irrelevant to a criminological study, reviewing them could give insight into how they help the respondents cope with identity strain.

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<sup>67</sup> Evidently, moderate Muslims also mention these matters as a source of security. However, while these moderates derive 'faith' from these sources, fundamentalists argue in terms of 'certainty', thereby denying doubt and alternative truths (Towler, 1984).

*Security through Predictions for the World and the Afterlife*

The respondents derive security from their fundamentalist claim to 'know for certain' what to expect from life and death. According to the fundamentalist respondents, Islamic texts contain exact predictions concerning the world and the afterlife which are reassuring and give their lives meaning.

Although they paint a grim picture of the world, they believe in a positive outcome for true Muslims. From Islamic texts they deduce the millenarianist belief that current suffering, misery, corruption, decadence and the like are signs of the world and Muslim communities falling apart (through *fitna*). They argue that Islamic texts have predicted that the world will end in a war initiated by non-Muslims against Islam.<sup>68</sup> When exactly the world will end, they do not know. Extremist born-again Yelda says about the war: "It means that the end of the world is coming, but it can take years. Think of the Eighty Years' War. It is explained what the end will look like and that will be scary". Several respondents recommended I read a book about the signs of the end of the world. These women claimed that many of the small signs, such as severe earthquakes and old people who want to look young, are already visible. Regardless of this 'scary' picture, the fundamentalist respondents also believe that in the end Muslims will come out victorious. The respondents' arguments suggest that the image of victory fosters a sense of strength, as if they do not have to face the challenges of the world alone, but have the Creator on their side.

The belief in fate also reassures the respondents regarding the negative reactions which they face as Muslims.<sup>69</sup> The fundamentalist respondents adopt the discourse that Muslims have always been seen as the outsiders. They say that the Prophet Muhammad already had to flee Mecca for his convictions and that he has predicted that Muslims will always be considered outsiders. Extremist born-again Marid's words indicate that this discourse provides a sense of empowerment:

We don't feel we are victims. (...) In Islam you do feel like a foreigner. Islam has started as something foreign and it will end as something foreign. That's what the Prophet already said. When I think of that, I already feel better. It was already predicted back then that the ones who really practise, and I hope I may be one of them, Insha'Allah, are seen as foreigners.

The fundamentalist respondents argue that they must follow the Islamic way of life regardless of complaints or Islamophobic reactions. They believe that this is

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<sup>68</sup> The expectation of the collapse of the current state of affairs and the revival of the perfect heavenly order points to a millenarianist view which is also shared by some new age religions (McGuire, 2002: 39).

<sup>69</sup> Ellison, Musick & Henderson (2008: 292) confirm that anxiety can stem from experiencing discrimination. They summarize the impact of discrimination as "threats to one's sense of self, [that] may foster feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness, as well as shame, anger, and other negative emotions". Social exclusion has also been argued to contribute to the anxiety that people feel in modern Western societies (Beck, 1986; Giddens, 1991; Bauman, 2000, 2006; Young, 1999, 2007; Verbrugge, 2004; Elchardus, 1998).

part of the test they have to pass to secure them a lofty place in Paradise. The discourse of Muslim fate thus helps them to deal with the label of ‘outsider’ (Becker, 1963; Goffman, 1963) and to frame suppression, ridicule, social exclusion and discrimination as a test of Allah. In an online discussion Najib112 – whose contributions suggest that he has extremist sympathies – expresses how these predictions offer a reassuring picture in the long run in comparison to the fate of non-Muslims:

Listen, Muhammad, peace be upon him, has already said that our army becomes weaker and the Jewish and Christian armies are becoming strong. You have to see it like this: their heaven is this life, after that they all go to Hell!!! We who are slaughtered and keep our faith in Islam shall inshallah go to Paradise, inshallah alla huma amin my brothers!!!! Salam wa3ekum

As in other religions, fundamentalist beliefs also involve predictions about the afterlife, which help to increase a sense of security. Islamic texts give clear indications of what to expect, indications that the fundamentalist respondents take literally.<sup>70</sup> A well-known example are the predictions regarding martyrs. In the fundamentalist respondents’ view, martyrs are Muslims who die while striving on the path of Allah (doing *jihad*). In their view, martyrs will obtain the highest level in Paradise. However, the orthodox respondents on the one hand, and the radicals and extremists on the other, differ in their description of martyrs. The radical and extremist respondents focus on *jihadis* in battle, violent or otherwise, whereas the orthodox respondents focus on everyday, non-political issues such as women dying while giving birth.<sup>71</sup> Orthodox born-again Zarrah puts forward the general feeling of security about the afterlife as:

I wasn’t at peace when I went to sleep. I thought ‘what will happen hereafter? Why do we die?’ Now I’m not that afraid of death anymore. As Muslim you’re not only allowed to fear, you must also feel joy.

Even though this quote expresses that Zarrah, like the other respondents, still feels fear, her fear is now much reduced. This becomes apparent from the fundamentalist respondents’ belief that as long as they are still Muslims at the time of death, they are guaranteed a place in Paradise, as Naima expresses in Figure 4.2. Their concerns are principally limited to which level they will attain in Paradise, because even in the worst-case scenario a Muslim will eventually get into heaven.

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<sup>70</sup> Islamic fundamentalism provides answers about what happens after death and about how to prepare for death. During the fieldwork these issues proved to be popular topics in lectures and Islamic reading material. What happens between one’s last breath and one’s arrival in heaven was also a prevalent topic in online discussions.

<sup>71</sup> Obviously, as discussed in Chapter 2, the various fundamentalist respondents have different opinions about what is a legitimate violent *jihad*, and consequently they disagree about which fighters are actually *jihadis* and martyrs.

*Trust in Personal Fate and Suffering*

In addition, the fundamentalist respondents find security in their strict belief in personal fate. Personal fate assumes there to be a personal narrative: even though individuals do not know their fate, they trust that there is meaning behind every event. So what narrative does personal fate offer against identity strain?

The accounts of the respondents indicate that their trust in personal fate helps them to cope with, most importantly, negative experiences or challenges that they encounter as individuals. Orthodox convert Bassam offers a typical example of how a belief in personal fate can help in case of disappointing experiences in everyday life.

For example, today I had my driving test and I flunked it big time. At first I thought 'I hate that guy'. (...) But then I thought 'it's fate, let it go'. Before [before Islam] I would have thought 'asshole!' for days. No matter how bad a problem is, it will always turn out right.

What is more, the respondents' belief in fate helps them to deal with rejection by people around them.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, in cases of severe emotional suffering, for instance when a loved one dies, respondents argue that the thought of fate gives them comfort. As orthodox convert Khadija says, who has had several experiences of rejection by others which seems to have contributed to her feeling depressed:

You always get punched in life, which can make you go outside the lines. Islam makes you stay inside. There was a period that I didn't want to live, I was that sad, but as a Muslim you cannot take a life. You learn how to deal with pain and sorrow.

Similar to the other fundamentalist respondents she feels that her views offer her the tools to deal with painful experiences. The main tool emerging from my interviews and conversations in the mosques, is the respondents' belief that there is a reason behind their suffering. Instead of questioning why certain things happen, their discourse is that suffering is a test by Allah. Orthodox convert Sara phrases this common conviction as "everything is a test in this life". She argues that when she encounters a problem, she interprets it as a test which helps "you deal with it and don't feel like how you used to feel". Although they do still admit to suffering – such as the woman in one of the mosques whose new-born baby died – they argue that the thought of a test comforts them. During talks the respondents often argued that God does not let a person endure more than he or she can handle. Thus, from the point of view of the respondents, the more one suffers, the stronger one is in the eyes of God. As a result, suffering could even have a positive effect on people's self-image: they may gain a sense of strength.

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<sup>72</sup> On grounds other than exclusion for being a Muslim as predicted in Islamic texts.

In short, this section has shown how fundamentalism promises the respondents a way out of identity strain: their fundamentalist discourse appears to offer security regarding those aspects that the respondents say they felt insecure about, as discussed in the previous chapter. Against ontological insecurities, it claims to offer an ultimate truth. As opposed to the emptiness of being adrift in life, it points to the absolute certainty of guidance and deeper meaning. As comfort to personal suffering, it creates a positive interpretation of misery. In response to social exclusion, it gives a grand narrative of Muslims as destined to be outsiders. In relation to high ideals, it provides the option of service to a higher power.

### **4.3 The Security of Fundamentalist Boundaries in Everyday Life**

The above has demonstrated how the absolutist grand narrative of Islamic fundamentalism provides the respondents with a sense of secure meaning and personal value. But how do fundamentalist interpretations help to shape their identities in everyday life? The key here is the strict boundaries which Islamic fundamentalism imposes on the identities of the orthodox, radical and extremist respondents alike. Their group identity and self-identities take shape within the boundaries of certain rules, the concept of the global *ummah* and the image of character traits shared by Muslims.

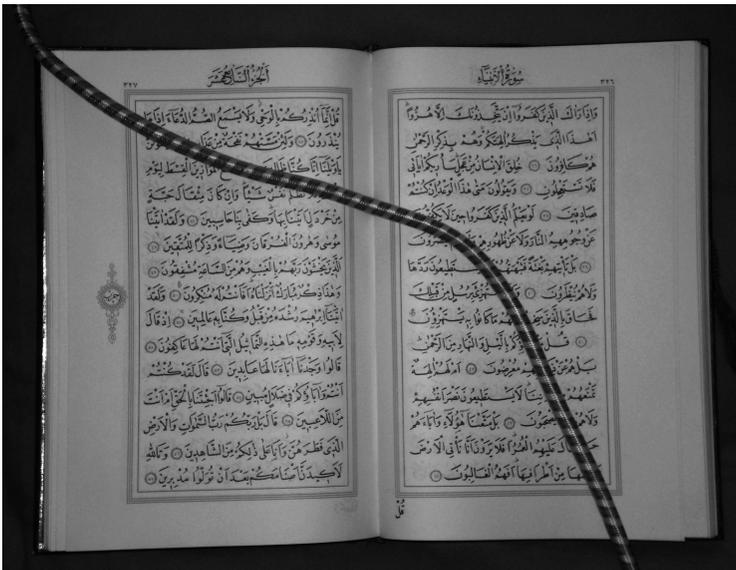
#### *4.3.1 Rules as Protection in the Pluralist Chaos of Modern Life*

What all respondents, including the moderate ones, have in common is that they present Islam as a way of life which provides rules to regulate modes of conduct and other aspects of everyday personal and social life. Köse (1999: 309) received the same kind of response from British converts and explains this by distinguishing Islam from other religions as “a religion in which more aspects of daily life are directly written about or talked about. Also, how one might best behave in society is written about or talked about”. The respondents describe Islam, in so many words, as a circle setting the boundaries within which they move which ‘protects’ them from being led astray in a world full of temptations, as put into words by orthodox born-again Muhammad, who picks up the lid of a jar, follows its circle with his finger and says: “if this is the religion, then I live within it. I try not to cross the boundaries”. Obviously, the fundamentalist respondents draw sharper boundaries because of their absolutist, dualist approach. One could say that whereas Islam sets flexible guidelines for the moderate respondents, it serves as a solid model for the fundamentalist respondents.

The latter group often mentioned that it was the strict rules which attracted them to Islamic fundamentalism, because – as many of them argue – ‘the rules make life easier’. Orthodox convert Natasha is a telling example with her answer to the question what initially attracted her to her interpretation of Islam: “I think the strictness in faith; it is far from loose. (...) It fascinates me that it is so strict”. She contrasts this with the lack of rules in her mother’s interpretation of Catholicism and in her upbringing: “my mother, for example,

was raised a Catholic, but I don't see that at all. I think she is an atheist. (...) I was allowed to do anything, go out and have fun, wear as much make-up as I wanted". She shares the opinion of the other fundamentalist respondents that Islamic rules make life easier, because they provide a guideline which tells her what to do. Orthodox convert Vanessa phrases this shared opinion as follows: "I love the rules. It's a kind of guideline through your entire daily life. I like that. When you sit down, go to the toilet, eat, you say something. By doing those little things, you're already doing ibada, worship. You will be rewarded for your good intentions, such as making a meal for your husband". Figure 4.3 is a picture taken by extremist born-again Maysa which expresses the same feeling. Her commentary on this picture is: "If I try to imagine how I would feel were I not a Muslim, then I feel a sense of unrest and aberration. Islam gives me the opposite: a thread or rope to hold onto; it guides me".

FIGURE 4.3 | *Islam as a Guideline*



As hinted at in Chapter 3 (and in Vanessa's quote above) the rules that the respondents promote are sometimes concerned with rather banal aspects of everyday life. Examples are the hand with which to eat, the number of sips of a drink one is allowed to take in one go, and which part of the arm one has to wash before praying, in which manner and with which number of movements. Most questions I heard people ask in the mosque concerned the interpretations of this type of Islamic rules. In online discussions, the interpretation of Islamic rules is also one of the most popular topics. Questions often start with a phrase like "is it allowed for Muslims to....?" A few examples of such questions are:

‘What is the judgment on praying in a mosque that has been renovated with money from a loan over which interest is being paid?’, ‘Is it allowed to eat fries from a pan in which pork is also fried?’, and ‘Is a mother allowed to pick up her child during prayer when it has a dirty diaper?’ (also see de Koning, 2008: 229-231; Roex et al., 2010: 64-65). Another telling example of this type of banality is a little book of pleas, *du’a*, which a couple of women in the Brixton mosque claimed to carry around with them. One of the girls enthusiastically showed me that “it even has a *du’a* for what to say when an unbeliever sneezes!”

The popularity of such seemingly shallow issues is remarkable in the light of the deep sense of spirituality reported by the respondents. Questions about how to increase one’s awareness of God and other abstract, more fundamental issues were generally entirely absent at these gatherings, even though some of the lectures did address these matters. It is tempting to speculate about the reasons behind the fundamentalist respondents’ interest in banal, everyday issues. Firstly, as Baumeister (1991: 61) argues, people long for meaning, but meaning seems to be absent in the more trivial daily activities. It appears that a strict interpretation and application of Islamic rules can even give meaning to everyday activities, as they all are presented as part of a higher plan and their correct implementation can become a meaningful act of worship. Even so, while this might explain their relevance, it does not explain the importance the respondents attribute to such trivial matters. Therefore, a second possible reason for the popularity of these rules could be their ‘measurability’. Following strict rules governing eating, praying and suchlike, can be used as a measure for religiosity: the more closely one follows the rules, the more one confirms one’s religiosity to others and oneself. Furthermore, it is easier to measure personal progress through following simple rules than it is to measure, for example, an increase in patience. Hence, following trivial rules may contribute to a sense of satisfaction about oneself.

How do rules make the fundamentalist respondents feel protected? Overall, they argue that Islamic rules form an obstacle to following their desires, thereby helping them to stay away from ‘bad’ behaviour. As orthodox convert Anna expresses this general view:

Islam is really safe. It can prevent much evil. When I live in accordance with these things ... when I try to put them into practice, then it can lead to much good and prevent evil. It’s a struggle with yourself against evil.

So, on a personal level, these rules can pave the way for a positive self-image. Yet, also on a social level rules limit the scope within which social life takes place. As discussed in Section 2.3.2, the fundamentalist respondents believe that they should mainly invest in their Islamic group of brothers and sisters. In this way, relations with and social exclusion and negative opinions by other groups become – at least in theory – increasingly irrelevant.

Altogether, it appears that fundamentalist interpretations contribute to a sense of security precisely in some of those areas of life that scholars argue to

fall apart because of increasing freedom of choice (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Young, 2007; Day, 2006: 182). Fundamentalist orientations in Islam limit job options, give a blueprint of the 'ideal' family, and reset gender roles, because they limit the options to more traditional ones. This raises the question what the relation between the secure identity that Islamic fundamentalism offers and modern times could be. Bauman (2006: 113) gives the following clues about this relation:

In the infuriatingly multivocal, confused and confusing world of criss-crossing yet mutually incompatible messages whose main purpose may well seem to be the questioning and sapping of each other's reliability, the monotheistic faiths coupled with Manichean, black-and-white world visions are about the last fortresses of the 'mono': of one truth, one life formula – of adamant and pugnacious certainty and self-confidence; the last shelters for the seekers of clarity, purity and freedom from doubt and indecision. They promise the treasures which the rest of the world blatantly and obstinately denies: self-approval, a clear conscience, the comfort of fearing no error and always being in the right.

In short, it could be that 'pure' Islam is literally attempting to purify and create order in the chaotic, threatening dirt of modern times (cf. Douglas, 1966). In opposition to pluralist chaos and the crumbling of secure models in Western societies and in Islam the respondents turn to fundamentalism could reflect a nostalgic striving for traditional forms of 'purity'. I return to this issue in Chapter 7.

#### *4.3.2 A Sense of Belonging*

Scholars have argued that people want to belong and be part of a community (Bauman, 2001; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg & Schaller, 2010; Maslow, 1943). Hence, the desire to belong is often argued to be the motivating force behind joining religious communities (Baumeister, 1991). Belonging, community, meaning and social identity are closely intertwined. As Delanty (2003: 3) observes: "the term community does in fact designate both an idea about belonging and a particular social phenomenon, such as expressions of longing for community, the search for meaning and solidarity, and collective identities".

There is considerable scholarly work which discusses the concepts of community and belonging for Muslims in the contemporary world. One of the main conclusions of these writings is that the image of the Muslim community is no longer limited to a specific place. Instead, scholars such as Mandaville (2004) and Roy (2004) argue that an increasingly transnational Islam is taking shape, which promises Muslims a global *ummah* to belong to. The remainder of this section confirms that among the fundamentalists both the converts and the respondents from Muslim families have a vivid image of the global Muslim community and feel they belong to this *ummah*. These findings are in line with

previous research on Salafism in the Netherlands (e.g. Buijs et al., 2006; de Koning, 2008, 2009a; Gielen, 2008; Roex et al., 2010). What this study will try to clarify is whether belonging to the *ummah* helps the fundamentalist respondents to deal with identity strain. To unravel the meaning of Islamic brotherhood to the fundamentalist respondents the following part continues with the image that they construct of this brotherhood.

The concept of brotherhood and sisterhood in Islam is of central importance to the Muslims in this study, which is also reflected in the considerable share of online topics dedicated to brotherhood and the *ummah*. All respondents say that they feel connected to other Muslims in the world and see them as their brothers and sisters in Islam, which confirms the transnational belonging that Roy (2004) and Mandaville (2004) describe. When they talk about the global *ummah*, especially the fundamentalist respondents mention that they feel connected to perfect Muslim strangers because they know they share the same worldview. A common way for the respondents to present this global connection between Muslims is by using the metaphor of a body. Orthodox born-again Saaliha formulates the general feeling in a representative way by saying:

The whole Muslim nation is one body. We look after each other. If one part of the body hurts, the whole body hurts. If Somali people are dying, we feel it. It's so beautiful, Fiore, we never even met these people, but by God, we love them in the dearest way.

This quote illustrates that the feeling of connectedness has a double effect. On the one hand, feeling connected leads to positive sentiments of belonging and being accepted. On the other hand, being part of the *ummah* makes the respondents aware of the suffering of brothers and sisters in other parts of the world. This is particularly true for the fundamentalist respondents who put a larger emphasis on the global *ummah* than the moderate respondents.

Despite the pain that the fundamentalist respondents claim to feel, their reports indicate that Islamic belonging primarily gives them a positive sense of security. Since brotherhood comes with rules and obligations between Muslims, the fundamentalist respondents gain 'certainty' about what they should expect in social interactions. Their expectations come down to mutual respect, warmth, and support. The fundamentalist respondents emphasize religious rules, varying from greeting each other with '*salaam aleikum*' to helping each other out.<sup>73</sup> They contrast this feeling of brotherhood to other forms of social connectedness. Orthodox convert Aarif, for example, distinguishes the connection between Muslims from experiences previous to his discovery of Islam:

It was something I had never experienced before, that closeness. I wasn't much of a family person. (...) Brotherhood gave a real sense of

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<sup>73</sup> The moderate respondents focus not as much on rules but on moral conduct and speak of brotherhood in terms of treating other people right and with respect.

community that I never had. People who look after you and who care for your welfare. You feel you can go to them as well. It's like an extended community. You feel more loved, more wanted in your own community. Your own family is doing its own thing in a rush. I wouldn't trust some people [of his biological family] enough to tell certain things. (...) This security you got, it's like an extended family.

When talking about what brotherhood and sisterhood feels like, the respondents, such as orthodox convert Naima, often mention that they felt they were being welcomed into a warm bath, particularly in the mosque. One of the female converts I met in the As-Soannah mosque made this general opinion clear. She described her experience, as other respondents did, as a feeling of warmth that overwhelmed her because of the friendliness of the women in the mosque. She argued that she never felt this warmth with Dutch people and she expressed the belief that this feeling of brother and sisterhood is a main attraction to converts like her. Thus, on the level of their everyday social life belonging to the Muslim community gives the respondents a feeling of being accepted by other people. Some of the respondents mention this attraction consciously, such as the woman in the mosque, whereas others are less aware of this longing, but do show it indirectly in their answers. When I ask orthodox convert Vanessa, for example, what initially attracted her to Islam she first responds "I don't know what attracted me to Islam". Yet, after this remark she continues to talk about never having felt completely at home in the Netherlands or in Suriname, the two countries where her parents originate from. She compares this to an experience she had just after she had become a Muslim – still a moderate one – and went on a holiday to Morocco: "I was immediately accepted. I didn't feel that I didn't belong there. At first sight they thought I was Moroccan. Only when they started to talk to me they realized that I wasn't". When they learned that she was a convert, they responded even more positively, because "they liked that" (...) "I simply liked it that I was just Vanessa there". The feeling of belonging to a transnational, ethnically inclusive Muslim community also formed a major attraction to fundamentalist views for the other fundamentalist respondents from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Although the fundamentalist respondents agree on the importance of brotherhood, the extent and intensity of this sense of connectedness differs in accordance with their religious orientation. The main differences – regardless of previous religious convictions and gender – concern the possibility of alternative belonging and the groups which the respondents include in the Muslim brotherhood.<sup>74</sup> In principle, the orthodox respondents consider all people who say that they are Muslims to be part of the *ummah*. Moreover, they see alternative ways of belonging, such as being Muslim and Dutch or British, as

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<sup>74</sup> The moderate respondents are the least exclusive. They acknowledge most clearly the value of other identities. They consider brotherhood important, but believe friendship and often the relation with their family to be of a deeper nature than the relation with brothers and sisters in Islam, regardless of whether their friends and family are Muslim or non-Muslim. In terms of inclusivity, some moderate respondents even reason that brotherhood encompasses all of humanity.

reconcilable. The orthodox respondents value family and friendship ties usually as equally important or more important than the connection with Muslim brothers and sisters. The radical and extremist respondents, on the other hand, have adopted – intrinsic to their strict religious discourse – a more exclusive notion of brotherhood which is limited to what they see as a very selective group of ‘true believers’. The extremist respondents present themselves as the most exclusive, in line with their most dualist approach.<sup>75</sup> Many of them see no reason to want to belong to non-Muslim groups, such as the Dutch.

In short, the fundamentalist respondents see belonging to the Muslim community as an essential part of their group identity. Although they generally do not make this explicit, their accounts seem to indicate that their quest for community is in part the interactive response to a perceived lack of belonging to other groups (Jenkins, 2004: 4-5; Rose, 1996). By idealizing the global Muslim *ummah* they gain a sense of security about being accepted by fellow Muslims, which they contrast with the lack of warmth that they experienced in relations with other groups. This appears to be particularly true for the radical and extremist respondents. Since chapter 3 has shown that they seem to be more sensitive to experiences of social exclusion, their more exclusive approach and higher valuation of brotherhood could be a coping strategy for their more intense perception of rejection. Belonging could then promise them a way out of experiences of identity strain.

#### *4.3.3 Islam as Master Status Determining Trait: Being Somebody Good*

The respondents see their Muslim identity not only as coming before alternative group identities such as ethnicity and nationality (de Koning, 2009b: 407), but also before other possible sources of self-identities. Orthodox convert Bassam’s remark “the longer you are a Muslim, the more it determines your identity” indicates that – in social interaction – being a Muslim turns into a master status determining trait (Goffman, 1963). The all-pervasive nature of the Muslim identity is one of the reasons why part of society views Islam as a threat. Yet, Section 2.3 has already argued that being a Muslim does not necessarily contradict other aspects of the fundamentalist respondents’ self-identities such as being a parent, child, partner, citizen, and the like (also see Peek, 2005; Duderija, 2007; Hopkins, 2007; Korf et al., 2008). In fact, they believe that Islam makes them better parents, children, et cetera. It is possible to clarify this

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<sup>75</sup> It is not become entirely clear how the radical and extremist respondents differ in terms of opinion. Some extremist respondents appear more prone to openly do *takfir* on especially moderate Muslims. In comparison, the few radical respondents distance themselves from *takfiris* and claim to consider moderate Muslims true Muslims – although less practising ones. Yet, present and former members of both groups argued that they ceased seeing others as Muslims when they openly said or did something contradicting their strict interpretation of Islam, such as expressing support for a non-Muslim government. Although Hiz-ut-Tahrir member Hujjat’s examples do point to a more inclusive approach, the others mention similar examples, which makes the practical results of their slightly differing discourse not all that different. See for the complexities in distinguishing groups on the basis of *takfir* also Roex et al. (2010).

by considering how Islam brings the fundamentalist respondents' image of an 'authentic' self within reach and how it gives them a sense of personal value.<sup>76</sup>

In the view of the fundamentalist respondents, men and women alike and regardless of their orientation, they become better persons by following the 'instructions' of Allah. By fulfilling their task of worshipping servant, they gain a sense of personal value. Several respondents used metaphors to explain this argument. The most common metaphor among the fundamentalist respondents was a comparison of humans to a washing machine that has a function and comes with instructions. Like orthodox born-again Eva argues:

Humankind has created a washing machine with a purpose. The maker writes instructions, so the washing machine works and the purpose is reached. When you use it incorrectly, for example as an oven, you will harm the washing machine and yourself. This is how the Creator has created us. We got the instructions through the messengers. Without knowledge you cannot act.

Human functionality was a recurrent theme that also found expression in the respondents' desire to be useful. Several respondents commented on their increased usefulness and the sense of purpose that they experience through Islam. Orthodox Khadija, for example, calls it an "Islamic mission" when she talks of her wish to "change something in the world in my own way, to do something for humanity. That is my personal mission".

Thus, the fundamentalist respondents believe that they are fulfilling their purpose by following the instructions of what their strict interpretation considers *halal* and *haram* (also see Buijs et al., 2006; de Koning, 2008; Roex et al., 2010). In the words of orthodox convert Anna:

Islam gives you an entire way of life and it fills in a lot of the blanks for you. (...) It's very logical. That gives me a great deal of peace and security. I've got a kind of instruction for how to live and I also get rewarded for that.

Overall, the fundamentalist respondents express the feeling that this makes them better people, even though their strictness also raises fears about not living up to their own standards and despite the fact that they are careful try not to boast, because they believe a Muslim is supposed to be modest. Radical convert Hujjat clearly expresses this ambiguous feeling by first saying "I know I'm a better man now". He then argues that he tries to follow God's guidelines, because:

Then humankind is at its best. I'm not, but I try to be. My feelings about myself are mixed: you think you do well, but you can always do better. I'm happy when I do something right, but I'm aware of my sins.

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<sup>76</sup> Concerning the topics in this section the various fundamentalist respondents and the moderate respondents differ only in what they consider the right way to be a good, practising Muslim. In terms of the importance of their Muslim identity, their arguments are similar.

I know the rules and I'm more careful. I try not to hurt people. I don't commit the gravest sins. I wouldn't steal from my worst enemy.

Consequently, the respondents feel more content about themselves although they generally feel that they should still improve. Older respondents also report this ambivalence between being content and feeling that they have to do more. Yet, even though they argue that their *imaan* fluctuates somewhat over the years, they feel that they are overall becoming better Muslims. Some of them mention the Islamic rules and customs that they have internalized as expressions of their progress. An example is extremist convert Kaleemah when she describes how Islam has become part of her everyday life in her contacts with Muslim sisters.

It happens automatically. (...) It's in the behavioural rules around you, like taking off your shoes before going inside; in 'where did you get that headscarf from'; in what happens 'did you see the media' and 'that Albert Heijn [a Dutch supermarket chain] now has halal products'? (...) And it's not once a week, but your entire life is interwoven with Allah. But look, I do it very naturally, easily, I have become like that. (...) That only occurs when you've processed it entirely, when it has become part of you. It's the same as taking up a study. At the end you don't feel as insecure anymore.

In addition, the respondents argue that since all people are born as Muslims this is in fact their true nature. Discovering their Muslim identity and worshipping as the purpose in life is something that fundamentalist respondents in particular see as a step closer to their 'authentic' selves. Some of the born again and converted respondents explicitly mention that they feel more authentic. For example, radical, born-again Fareeha argues:

I really feel me. Before I had ten different masks, faces. I was any Fareeha. I didn't have an identity, no 'this is me'. I was Fareeha who fitted in and was part of everything. I adapted to anything. I don't do that anymore.

Converts also share this perception, as Sara demonstrates: "Everything that I do, what's in the religion, that's in my nature. For example, not mixing with men and covering myself. (...) Now I'm free".<sup>77</sup> Thus, she even experiences her conversion as a liberation from societal chains and consequently seems to feel free to truly express herself.

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<sup>77</sup> The question as to what exactly she and other respondents feel liberated from will be addressed in Chapters 5 and 7.

FIGURE 4.4 | *Extremist born-again Nidal*

Nidal is one of the first respondents that I met. At the time he was almost twenty years old. Over the years, I followed his development through various levels of extremist beliefs. Nidal comes from a Turkish family. According to him, they practise Islam in a traditional and cultural way. “Fortunately it all turned out well” he says about his development towards ‘pure’ Islam. Nidal initially presents his heightened interest in Islam as a natural development, because “I wanted to improve, I wanted the best, and then you automatically get to Islam.” However, on a later occasion he admits that the American invasion in Afghanistan has aroused his religious interest. This occurred when he was an adolescent. Nidal is convinced that he should strictly follow the Quran and the example of the *al-salaf al-salib*, the pious ancestors. He believes that this includes taking a militant stance. A few years after our initial interview he is still supportive of 9/11, but he no longer believes that violence will help the Islamic cause in the Netherlands. Instead, he believes Muslims should start small, like the Prophet did. Beside his modest beard he is not easily recognizable as a Muslim. Nidal is single at the time of our first meeting and engaged when we repeat the interview. After a University study he starts working in finance.

Nidal argues that Islam has had a great impact on his life. He claims to have both fear and hope and explains the relation between the two by quoting “those who fear Allah the most, are the ones with most knowledge.” As he argues:

Because of fear you live up to your obligations and you do many extra things. During prayer you feel as if you’re really facing Allah. You’ve met Him. That gives hope and peace. (...) That’s the most beautiful thing there is.

In Nidal’s view people should worship Allah, as he explains with reference to the statement ‘the one who confesses that he is My servant, that he is dependent on Me, He shall get what he wants and be guided’. According to him that guidance is “what you feel in prayer”. For the required knowledge he relies on the Quran and the *Sunnab*. He does not have a high regard for Muslims who follow specific Muslim scholars. In his view, these scholars all lack certain knowledge and have made mistakes. He believes that Muslims should take their own responsibility in acquiring knowledge instead.

Nidal believes that practising Islam has not only changed his views, but also changed him as a person: “You become quieter when you get involved with the religion. First I got angry about unimportant matters. You get angry about matters that you value. If you don’t value them, you can’t get angry either.” Since he got more involved with Islam he stopped valuing a good job and success in worldly life. By ‘success’ he used to mean making money and taking good care of one’s parents. “When you read, you notice that the material doesn’t count.” Now he considers success in the afterlife as real success in this life. He has an optimistic image about the afterlife. He believes that true Muslims will end up in Paradise and that their future in Paradise is even more secure if they are prepared to die for the sake of Allah (i.e. as a martyr). Martyrdom is the highest there is according to Nidal. “The Prophet has said that too. ‘I hope I will die as a martyr, come back, and die as a martyr again’. I don’t have that hope. That has to do with our weakness.” He believes the fighters in Kashmir and Chechnya are such martyrs.

I have great admiration for people who leave their family and children behind purely to safeguard Allah's word. I can't do that myself and I don't think I want to do that. (...) Who knows I will go on a later occasion.

His opinion about 9/11 is equally positive:

We didn't even know what Islam was at the time, but when they said 'the Muslims did it', we said 'Allahu Akbar!' That was one of the happiest moments of my life. We saw then, for the first time, that there are still people prepared to die on the path of Allah.

Nidal talks with respect of Osama bin Laden, who was still alive at the time of the interview. He portrays him as a rich man "and still he is in a cave for the sake of Allah." In his view this contradiction made bin Laden extra special. Nidal considers it more important, however, that bin Laden "is a person who is prepared to give his life for Allah. That makes him an awesome person."

Brotherhood is something that Nidal also greatly values. He mentions that on hadj people don't know each other, but still feel as one: "that is brotherhood". Preferably, he would spend the entire day with his Muslim brothers. The group of brothers that he has become part of after our first meeting is mixed:

It seems that there is nothing that binds us. One is already 30, another one has a wife and three kids, another one just got married, one is unemployed. Any other person would say 'they have nothing in common', but in fact we have everything in common: we are concerned with the religion 24/7. (...) I almost love them more than my own brothers.

He believes this has to do with the fact that "you don't have worldly expectations of one another, because you get the reward from Allah." He refers to a saying of the Prophet Muhammad who described Muslims as each others building blocks. He weaves his fingers together as to symbolize their connection "that's what I miss with the Dutch. I don't think people here experience that kind of brotherhood." In his opinion "brother has a larger meaning than 'friend'. Were you to call it 'friendship', you would diminish it." Whereas he feels for suffering brothers in other parts of the world, he does not care about non-Muslims. "If we see somebody, we will proclaim our message, but as long as they're unbelievers, they can die if it's up to me. That's bluntly put, but it's true."

In contrast to his excited reports during our first interview, Nidal confesses at the time of our second interview that the feeling that Islam gives him has changed over the years. Initially, it made him very happy, whereas now he is less happy. He argues that at the start he felt really good about himself whenever he behaved in an Islamic way. He believes that this feeling has changed because Islam has become part of him and he acts as a Muslim more automatically now. Even though he does not feel as happy as he used to, he still feels that Islam makes him a better person.

### *Islamic Role Models and Character Traits*

This brings up the issue of how the Muslims in this study construct a more 'authentic' and 'better' identity. They do this through the identification with an ideal Muslim identity that they derive from Islamic role models. Even though the respondents have different ideas about what 'the Muslim identity' means in

practice, all respondents agree that the most ideal role model is the Prophet Muhammad (also see Korf et al., 2008: 91). The fundamentalist respondents take the companions of the Prophet and – with the exception of non-Salafi oriented radical convert Hujjat – the first three generations after him as additional, literal examples. They consider principally Muhammad and secondly these predecessors as being ‘the best people who ever lived’.<sup>78</sup> The idealized picture that the fundamentalist respondents paint of their role models is captured in a remark made by Saaliha. She compares the status of these first Muslims to the status of contemporary pop idols: “In life there are many role models, for example Jennifer Lopez for girls. As Muslims we also have role models: the Prophet and the predecessors”.

The fundamentalist respondents feel that they should follow the pious predecessors concerning every aspect of life, from the way they dress to how they eat and pray.<sup>79</sup> For example, in an online discussion about the possible prohibition of the *burqa*, Muslimoen, a male participant, says:

The women of the Prophet are examples for the contemporary Muslima (...) To learn how one can reach al djannah one has to learn how these women lived, how they behaved, how they spoke, how they dressed,<sup>80</sup> etc insha’Allah. (...) We are supposed to follow their example and strive to obtain their qualities.

The above-mentioned tendency to idealize is also noticeable in the fundamentalist respondents’ view on the meaning behind the clothing of their female role models. During the conversations and interviews several Dutch respondents, men and women alike, used the metaphor of women as ‘diamonds’ that need to be covered to protect their beauty and value. Some of the female respondents even argue that they feel like ‘princesses’ in Islam and that their husbands treat them accordingly. Several British women presented a different, but equally idealist interpretation of the obligation for women to cover themselves by presenting it as a liberation from the looks and advances of men as well as from the demands of fashion trends in modern consumer society.<sup>81</sup> Orthodox born-again Saaliha refers to a verse from the Quran confirming that covering yourself is liberating, because it says, in her words: “tell your wives and believing daughters to cover, so that they are known as free women and people will not imitate them”. Besides, several women report a romantic, orientalist

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<sup>78</sup> In itself, having mythical role models is something that all religions have in common (Porpora, 1996), but the fundamentalist respondents take these role models very literally.

<sup>79</sup> The principal difference between moderate Muslims and fundamentalist Muslims regarding role models is the detail and strictness with which they try to follow their example and the importance they attribute to these models. Unlike the fundamentalists strict interpretations, moderate Muslims focus on general character traits and rules of good conduct that correspond with common norms and values in Western societies.

<sup>80</sup> Even though none of the fundamentalist respondents consider the *burqa* to be obligatory, most fundamentalist male and female respondents consider it the ideal way of dressing in light of the example set by the wives of the Prophet.

<sup>81</sup> I will return to this matter in Chapter 5.

fascination with the veil that began even before they started wearing one themselves. In their view, the veil conveys the ‘mysteriousness’ of the woman behind it. Orthodox convert Natasha who wears a *khimar* expresses this viewpoint by saying: “when you’re walking on the street with a headscarf there are many people who say ‘there is something mysterious about you’. (...) I also used to think that”. The fundamentalist male respondents agree with these ideal images and appreciate the idea of having their women ‘all to themselves’.

To learn about the lessons delivered by their role models regarding personality and practice, the fundamentalist respondents rely on a variety of Islamic scholars, depending on the Islamic current to which they belong. The character traits attributed by the respondents to their role models are modesty, patience, friendliness, helpfulness, sociability, empathy, understanding, hospitality, respectfulness, contentment, and even humour, among other things. In their own perception, the respondents have become more modest, patient, friendly, helpful, less irritable, more stable, content, et cetera since their turn to Islam.<sup>82</sup> Orthodox convert Natasha, for example, says: “The other day I asked my mother ‘am I still aggressive and impertinent?’” She then continues with the response of her mother, who answered jokingly: “no, absolutely not, but you’re still annoying with that weird sense of humour of yours”.

As a result of the importance of being a good Muslim, the qualities of Muslims are popular reading material and a regular topic of lectures in mosques and in online discussions. Several respondents mentioned that their favourite book was a Dutch translation of ‘The Biography of the Prophet’ by Al-Mubarakpuri (2006), a book which celebrates the life of Muhammad. During my fieldwork in the As-Soennah mosque, our group was assigned to write a paper on the Prophet Muhammad. My responsibility was to describe the personality of the Prophet. This turned out to be a popular subject in Islamic writing and a source of inspiration to many students of Islam (e.g. Hanif, 2004).

The fundamentalist respondents also mention more modern role models. The orthodox respondents express high regard for certain scholars, imams and lecturers with a Salafi orientation. Radicals and extremists generally take politically controversial figures as additional examples. They rely on specific scholars, preferably those who are in prison. In an online discussion Ilaik explains why they consider these men to be reliable scholars: “The scholars that are behind bars, Faka Allahu asrahum! When a scholar speaks the truth, they get arrested by the kufur government!”<sup>83</sup> In addition to these scholars, the extremist respondents use contemporary (and to a lesser extent historic) *jihadis* such as Bin Laden as role models (see Figure 4.4). They speak of these *jihadis* with great respect and emphasize the things that they gave up, such as their families, a good position in society, or even their lives, for the higher purpose of Islam. Orthodox

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<sup>82</sup> This is also true for the moderate respondents.

<sup>83</sup> In their eyes, the fact that a ‘corrupted regime’ is against these scholars, proves the scholars to be right. Despite the respondents’ claim of ‘rational and logical’ thinking methods this argument demonstrates the logical error of affirming the consequent, which leads to an unjustified conclusion: evidently, if the rulers are bad this does not prove that the scholars are good.

convert Aarif expresses this opinion clearly when talking about his past self and his friends:

There were only few of us who grew up with a dad in the house. (...) [A need for] direction and a leader, that's the case for a lot of young people. They need someone to identify with. (...) Bin Laden and Al-Zarqawi are the loudest, they are the father or hero figure for you. (...) If one person is speaking out, it makes you want to do more. A hero figure mobilizes you. You aspire to be like them, to emulate them.

Although the other extremist respondents did have a father figure in real life, it does seem that they felt equally attracted to these fighters' aura of strength and heroism. The sense of strength derived from identification with radical and extremist role models is also noticeable in online discussions. For example, when Sjamil, who expresses extremist opinions, is not taken seriously by other respondents but put away as an adolescent who does not pose a real threat, he responds "that's what you thought of Mohammed B. too when he was hanging around here". By comparing himself to the murderer of Theo van Gogh when confronted with a lack of recognition he reveals that the identification with a notorious extremist strengthens his virtual self-identity.

In brief, the above indicates that whereas the orthodox respondents focus on *da'wa* and on demonstrating 'goodness', the radical and extremist respondents see it as their task to counter anti-Islamic powers in society and become 'heroic'. Radical convert Hujjat expresses this in a way that captures the feeling of the radical and extremist respondents:

Someone would already be happy when...when Obama sends you a letter telling you that he wants to employ you and that you will get a salary of 400,000 annually. Many people would be truly happy. Then what if the Creator of heaven and earth gives you the task to save people from delusion, to save them from suppression, to even save the world? A larger role you can't get.

Overall, it appears that the 'goodness' of the benevolent character and mythical or heroic strength of their role models rub off on the fundamentalist respondents' self-identity and help them to feel more valuable and strong (also see Becker, 1971: chapter 13; Durkheim, 1960; Greenberg, Kosloff, Solomon, Cohen & Landau, 2010; Klapp, 1954; Murshed, 2003; Sullivan and Venter, 2005). One could therefore argue that the mythical image of chosen and/or heroic Muslims can help the respondents to confront identity strain. This might explain why the fundamentalist respondents literally try to follow their role models' example: by doing so they can approach their 'authentic' selves.

In addition, it seems that the type of identity strain and the role models of the orthodox, radical and extremist respondents are linked. As argued in Section 3.4.2, the orthodox respondents' strain appears to be more internal or internalized which implies a focus on their 'personal self', whereas the radicals and extremists seem more concerned with how others perceive them, which

involves their outward, 'social self'. When comparing this to the respondents' role models, the orthodox respondents focus on following role models for personal self-improvement. Consequently, they emphasize the example of the Prophet and his companions in terms of character traits such as patience, modesty, friendliness, and the like. They believe that it is by displaying these character traits and by setting an example to others that non-Muslims will also be convinced of the beauty of Islam. The radical and extremist respondents, however, emphasize identification with the militant side of their role models. Militancy, violent or non-violent, represents opposition to social pressures and symbolizes a lack of caring about what non-group members think of you. One could therefore wonder whether the radical and extremist respondents' focus on militantly changing society from the top-down is a way to cope with a perceived lack of acceptance by society's members. The next chapter elaborates on this question.

#### **4.4 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter has been to show what Islam offers orthodox, radical and extremist respondents who are trying to cope with identity strain. It has become clear that fundamentalist interpretations of Islam form the basis of what the respondents see as their 'authentic' identities. The fundamentalist meaning system offers a sense of stability and security. It does so, first, through its claim on absolute truth and evidence. In addition, fundamentalist beliefs emphasize trust in God by submitting oneself to His will and by accepting one's fate.

The respondents shape their fundamentalist identities by following a number of strict models. The first model involves Islamic rules. The clarity and universal character which they attribute to these rules provides them with – in their view – stable and secure guidelines. It seems that such an image of security neutralizes the lack of security and limits the variety of options available in modern Western societies, an issue that Chapter 7 will explore further. Moreover, the model of the worldwide Muslim *ummah* gives them a sense of belonging and consequently, a secure group identity. Finally, the fundamentalist respondents find a positive self-identity through following idealized Muslim role models. Despite their common pattern, there is a difference between what orthodox views and radical/extremist views offer the respondents. The orthodox respondents have a somewhat more inclusive approach to Muslim brotherhood, followed at some distance by the radicals, whereas the ultimately dualist views of the extremists appear to result in a highly exclusive interpretation of brotherhood.

Furthermore, whereas the orthodox respondents focus on role models for self-improvement, the radical and extremist respondents also opt for oppositional role models that symbolize heroic strength in their ambition to change society. Hence, both the respondents' approach to brotherhood and their role models appear to match the different nature of their identity strain. Orthodox views seem to offer a coping strategy for strain concerning their

personal self. Radical and extremist views provide a self-image of being 'special' (but misunderstood). This view relieves them from the strain of who they are in relation to and in the eyes of other individuals (which concerns their social self).

To summarize, positive self-identification helps the fundamentalist respondents to find coping strategies for different types of identity strain. However, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the construction of a new identity does not only take place through positive identification, but also through differentiation. In the case of the fundamentalist respondents this takes the form of 'resistance'. In what way the fundamentalist respondents construct their identities through resistance will be discussed in the next chapter.



## A RADICAL AND EXTREMIST FOCUS ON RESISTANCE

I wanted to distance myself from everybody, I wanted something higher. (...) I had freedom, but I wasn't happy. I didn't feel satisfaction. In religion there is true happiness ... as if you're taken from the dark. You have a higher purpose to feel useful. Finally I would untie myself of all those people that were following their own desires. (...) Finally I had something higher: business that concerns mankind, not the individual. (...) It was harder, because everybody is against you. It is a type of euphoria, of 'it doesn't matter, it makes me happier'. I still feel that. - Maysa

The previous chapter discussed how Islamic fundamentalist views offer the respondents a secure model for positive self-identification. However, as Maysa's words demonstrate, identities also result from differentiation. Although this is the case for all identities – and thus also for moderate Muslim identities – fundamentalist identities involve ultimate differentiation because of the dualism which characterizes fundamentalism. As mentioned in the previous chapters, it is Islamic fundamentalism's dualist discourse that seems to form a major attraction to the respondents who experienced identity strain, because this discourse provides strict criteria to distinguish Islamic from non-Islamic elements, Muslims from non-Muslims, and Good from Evil. It thus helps the fundamentalist respondents to strictly reject and distance themselves from what they consider 'other' as much as it allows them to vigorously embrace what they identify with as part of their 'authentic' self. Because the fundamentalist respondents' attitudes reveal such a strict differentiation, 'resistance' is an appropriate term to describe how fundamentalism allows the respondents to differentiate (also see Giordan, 2009a on conversion as socio-political opposition).<sup>84</sup> I use resistance to refer to various types of strict differentiation or 'othering,' whether it concerns disagreement, distancing, criticism, opposition, or actual protest and rebellion. The meaning of resistance in this study thus differs from its traditional sociological interpretation in terms of power and domination (e.g. Foucault, 1975; Scott, 1990).

This chapter demonstrates the extent to which a resistance discourse takes shape and what it gives the respondents who experience identity strain. For that purpose this chapter first considers the resistant elements in their discourse.

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<sup>84</sup> I choose to use 'resistance' in a way similar to its use in everyday speech. According to the Collins Cobuild dictionary (2006), for example, resistance "is a refusal to accept" something, as well as politically "fighting back". The concept of resistance implicitly acknowledges that the respondents tend to overstate differences; such overstatements are inherent in dualist views and help the fundamentalist respondents to clarify the contours of their 'authentic' identity.

Since Chapter 2 has already discussed political resistance, the following section of this chapter is limited to the other resistant attitudes which the respondents demonstrate.<sup>85</sup> It subsequently examines how their resistance discourse helps the fundamentalist respondents to strengthen their image of an ‘authentic’ self and cope with identity strain. Finally, it reflects on the difference between the various fundamentalist respondents and the ‘resistance identities’ (Castells, 1997) of the radical and extremist respondents.

## 5.1 Discourses of Resistance

It is possible to deduce various discourses of resistance from the conversations, observations, and internet analysis. Besides politically resistant attitudes these data sources allow for a distinction between resistance to the respondents’ former life, Western culture, other religions, external labels, Muslims with alternative views, and social exclusion. To clarify how the fundamentalist respondents display this resistance, Figures 5.2 to 5.4 present the attitudes of three respondents – orthodox convert Summeeyah, radical convert Hujjat and extremist born-again Maysa – toward each of these matters (their former life, Western culture, et cetera). It will become clear that the fundamentalist respondents show resistance with a differing intensity and variety in focus.

### 5.1.1. *Distancing from Former Life*

An obvious consequence of conversion is that the fundamentalist respondents develop negative feelings about their former life, including certain people and things that they used to value.<sup>86</sup> Overall, this study’s findings are in line with previous research on conversion which demonstrates that new converts and born-again believers reject their old identities and world view. As a result, they tend to distance themselves from people who form part of this old world view and who might argue against their conversion and new world view (McGuire, 2002: 82; Berzano & Martoglio, 2009: 238).

Regarding their previous life and social circle, one can detect some differences in the fundamentalist respondents’ attitudes. A first essential distinction concerns the extent to which they resent their former life. The respondents who present their conversion as a ‘natural development’ and who believe that they were already on the right track when they discovered Salafism hardly express any resentment concerning their previous lifestyle. Orthodox convert Khadija is one of them and claims, for instance: “My position in life and in puberty was very pure. I didn’t like things that could damage me, like sex, drugs, and one-nightstands”. In retrospect, the others present their lives as insufficiently Islamic or un-Islamic and feel that they gave in too much to ‘hedonist’ tendencies. Part of them expresses regret about their former lifestyle, such as extremist born-again Marid. He looks back on the period in which he

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<sup>85</sup> Obviously, attitudes and behaviour can differ. How resistance takes shape in the respondents’ behaviour is the subject of Chapter 6.

<sup>86</sup> The moderate respondents from Muslim families hardly express feelings of resentment.

sometimes skipped prayer and hung out with friends as 'wasted years'. He adds that, even though he considers this as part of his fate, "I'm not proud of it". Another group frames these experiences as having helped them to eventually find 'pure' Islam. Orthodox born-again Alifa expresses their argument as: "I would like to make things undone, but without those mistakes I wouldn't have become who I am now". A final attitude that can be distinguished is the resentment that a couple of former and current radicals and extremist respondents express, such as former extremist and now orthodox convert Aarif: "I feel disgusted about what I have done ... the music, the people, the indulgence. You don't limit yourself. That's negative ... spiritually. There were no barriers, no self-discipline".

The second distinction relates to the fundamentalist respondents' former social circle in their lives prior to 'pure' Islam. Some orthodox respondents stayed friends with moderate Muslims or non-Muslims and believe that 'pure' Islam has improved the relations with their native Dutch or Muslim family. Even though the radical and extremist respondents also still value the contact with their families, only extremist born-again Yelda reports maintaining a friendship with a moderate Muslim woman. Other (orthodox, radical and extremist) respondents argue that their former friendships ended naturally, usually helped by a change of social environment, for example, after leaving high-school. Orthodox convert Bassam represents this group when he argues he largely lost contact with former friends because "back then I was involved in music. That was where many of my friends were from, but then I quit the music". The radical and extremist respondents in particular emphasize that they have hardly anything in common anymore with previous friends. Moreover, the extremist respondents tend to be more negative about their old friends and in one case about their family. Most notably extremist born-again Maysa (see Figure 5.4) disapproves of her former Muslim friends. Extremist convert Kaleemah is most negative about her non-Muslim family. At the time of the interview she no longer believed in a dialogue with non-Muslims and decided to break with her family, because of their negative opinions about her and Islam. However, a couple of years later I meet her in a context where she was once again seeking to enter into a dialogue with non-Muslims. When I confronted her with this paradox she admitted that she had had a light change of heart and that she had also re-established contact with her family.

Overall, most of the fundamentalist respondents come to see their previous lifestyle as insufficiently Islamic. What is more, some of the radical and extremist respondents seem to express somewhat more resentment toward their previous lifestyle than the orthodox ones. The extremist respondents demonstrate the most resistance towards their previous social environment.

### *5.1.2 Resistance to Western, Dutch Culture*

Fundamentalism also provides a discourse of resistance to certain characteristics of the Western societies that the respondents used to feel – to greater or lesser extent – part of. Both converts and born-again fundamentalists mention, for example, that they liked Western music, clothes or indulged in other aspects of

the materialism promoted by consumer society. Yet, Islamic fundamentalist views strongly oppose materialism and following one's desires. It is for this reason that respondents say that they no longer value, or instead even resist, several elements of Western society. The following section discusses those elements that the fundamentalist respondents express most opposition to: materialism, the liberal attitude towards contact between men and women, sexuality and drugs, and individualism.<sup>87</sup>

First of all, while all respondents express the belief that Western citizens value the material elements of this *dunya* (material world) too much, the fundamentalist respondents in particular argue that the Dutch, like other Westerners, go overboard in following their desires by buying things that they do not really need and trying to obtain social status.<sup>88</sup> Extremist born-again Yelda represents their opinion by saying about non-Muslims that "they would give anything to accomplish something in this world. Then you don't really have a life anymore. (...) People love this life too much". The rejection of worldly matters and indulgences are obviously not unique to Islam or Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, such a rejection characterizes religions varying from Buddhism to ascetic currents in Hinduism and Christianity (e.g. Durkheim, 1960; Weber, 1956).<sup>89</sup> Non-religious ideologies have also disseminated criticism of capitalism, most notably Marxism (Marx & Engels, 1969).

FIGURE 5.1 | *'Liberation'*



<sup>87</sup> The respondents tend to equate Dutch or British culture and society with Western culture and society. Thus, when asked for their opinion of their country of residence, they often respond in terms of the West in general.

<sup>88</sup> The extent to which the fundamentalist Muslims in this study display individualism and consumer behaviour themselves will be the topics of further discussion in the following chapters.

<sup>89</sup> In fact, as Weber (1956, 1991) claims, an ascetic attitude and thriftiness are the very essence of the protestant ethic at the basis of modern day capitalism.

The fundamentalist respondents distinguish themselves especially in their criticism of liberal Western attitudes toward sexuality and contact between men and women<sup>90</sup>. They argue that contact between men and women can lead to the grave sin of adultery, which some of them present as wrongfully accepted behaviour in Western societies. In addition, although Western societies worry about women in Islam being suppressed, these respondents have the opposite concern. When the conversations turned to sexual norms, fundamentalist respondents – also female ones – said that nude women on billboards and women wearing mini-skirts illustrate that women in the West have been reduced to sex objects. Consequently, they argue, Western women feel pressured to dress in tight, revealing clothes to get the attention of men. In one of the online discussions that criticized Western culture, for example, an apparently – as is evident from other contributions – radical participant Henkjann concludes:

We have reached a conclusion. The Western woman doesn't get attention without walking around half naked and Western men use this. (...) Look at Western films. Look at music stations. Even at bus stops Dutch women are used as advertising to lure men.

During several conversations in the mosque the women contrasted this with the value that they believe a woman has in Islam. When I asked some women to take pictures of what Islam meant to them, a woman in the Brixton mosque took a picture of a woman in *khimar* and *niqab* (see Figure 5.1) and explained that it represented 'liberation' from the suppression of sexuality and the focus on looks in the West.<sup>91</sup>

Another fierce objection of the fundamentalist respondents concerns certain consequences of individualism. Especially respondents from Muslim families were likely to argue that Dutch children show insufficient concern for family life and the wellbeing of their parents due to individualism. These respondents criticize Dutch people who visit their parents as little as once every few weeks or even months. On a couple of occasions, they illustrated their argument with news stories about old people found dead in their apartments weeks or months after they had died, like orthodox born-again Muhammad who argues:

I don't think it can go on like this. Society will destroy itself through individualism. In the 1950s grandfather and grandmother were still part of the family here. Then it became parents and children, and now even that is torn apart. Sometimes you hear stories about somebody who was lying dead in the house for about 10 days. That isn't right. (...) You don't only need each other financially.

A couple of differences become apparent between the orthodox respondents and the radical and extremist respondents. When asked about their opinion of Dutch

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<sup>90</sup> Unlike the moderate respondents who do not object to mixed contact.

<sup>91</sup> Chapter 7 returns to this argument to consider it in the broader context of modern societies.

society the orthodox respondents had no problem in thinking of several examples that they considered to be good about its culture, such as human rights and the focus on education. The radicals and the extremists usually declared that there was ‘nothing positive at all’ about Dutch culture. Extremist convert Kaleemah represents the general negative opinion by contrasting the current situation to the past: “Now they are talking about a lot of norms and values, but there is nothing left of these things. (...) I grew up in a good period with norms and values, but it’s now a society in decay”. The discourse of the fundamentalist respondents thus involves a distancing from Dutch culture although the radical and extremist respondents demonstrate distancing in a more resistant form.

### *5.1.3 Superiority to Other Religions*

Another sense in which the fundamentalist respondents differentiate strongly is in relation to other religions. The dualist approach and the belief in absolute proof of the fundamentalist respondents involve an absolutist claim that other religions are inferior to Islam. Their general narrative is that monotheist religions are superior to other religions, because Judaism, Christianity and Islam share the same basis and Prophets. Consequently, the Quran calls them the three ‘peoples of the book’. During the conversations in the mosques, the women explained to me that they consider Islam to be the best of the monotheist religions because they regard Mohammed as the last Prophet and the Quran as God’s only uncorrupted and last message<sup>92</sup>. Radical born-again Fareeha formulates this conviction as follows:

The Torah has been sent down by God and has been falsified. Then God reacted with Indjir [the Bible], but that has also been falsified. That’s why God sent a new Prophet and a book that cannot be falsified. If you change one word, then the sentences and verses don’t make sense anymore.

Although the respondents share this basic argument, there is a major difference between, on the one hand, the orthodox respondents and, on the other hand, the radical and extremist ones. Even though the orthodox respondents claim Islam to be superior, most of them explicitly acknowledge that they have certain things in common with believers of other religions, such as certain norms, values and outlook on the world. A couple of orthodox respondents have Christian or even Buddhist friends and some of them say that they vote for the Christian Democrats. By acknowledging the basis that they share with other religious people, they appear to distinguish different types of non-Muslims, ranging from religious people who have gone astray to total unbelievers. In contrast, the extremist respondents often talk only of Muslims and unbelievers or non-Muslims, and when they talk about alternatively-minded people the extremist

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<sup>92</sup> The fundamentalist respondents share these arguments with the moderate respondents who also believe this. Yet, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, the fundamentalist respondents commonly phrase their beliefs in terms of absolute truth, whereas the moderate respondents speak more in terms of ‘for me that is the truth’.

respondents stress the differences. Extremist convert Kaleemah does this, for example. She does not refute that the monotheist religions share the same basis, but then emphasizes that Judaism and Christianity have become so corrupted, that there is not much left of this basis anymore. Kaleemah thus presents true Christianity as something from the past. In her view Christian norms have disappeared and “Christianity has failed, Islam is the final stage”. The two radical respondents at the time of the interview appear to take a middle position between the orthodox and extremist respondents. Similar to radical convert Hujjat (see Figure 5.3), radical born-again Fareeha emphasizes the differences between other religions as opposed to Islam, but also mentions similarities. Besides, she talks positively about a meeting with some Israeli Jews who she considered to be sympathetic.

In line with their views, the various fundamentalist respondents occasionally emphasize the inferiority of other religions. They appeared most concerned with the monotheist religions, possibly because these are closest to Islam. The fundamentalist respondents are particularly critical of Judaism, which seems to be for both religious and political reasons. The religious argument is that the Jews fail to recognize Jesus and Muhammad as Prophets, while Christians at least recognize Jesus. The political reason is that most of them consider Israel and Jews as principally being responsible for the suffering of Muslims in Palestine and some of them regard them as the lobby behind the ‘war against Islam’. Yet, the orthodox respondents demonstrated special concern about the differences between Islam and Christianity. In the Salafi mosques, for example, books are spread about what the role of Jesus is in the Quran and how the existence of Muhammad had been predicted in the Bible. Furthermore, at a conference we watched a video, which provided arguments against Christianity’s claim to the truth. In the video an Islamic scholar reports about what happened when a Christian was questioned about Jesus being the son of God. The Christian did not have any convincing answers to any of the questions according to the scholar, such as ‘so if God likes children, why did he only have one?’. In the light of this kind of ridicule it is no surprise that the former Christian converts in this study shared the narrative that they ‘had never really understood the Holy Trinity’ (also see Wohlrab-Sahr, 2006).

In sum, the viewpoints of the orthodox respondents and those of the radical and extremist respondents reveal a different attitude toward non-Muslims. The orthodox respondents pay attention to what distinguishes them from other beliefs, as well as – to a lesser extent – to what they have in common. The discourse of the extremist respondents, on the contrary, is more resistant since they focus almost solely on what distinguishes them from people from other religions. The few radical respondents seem to take a middle position.

FIGURE 5.2 | *Orthodox convert Summeeyah*

Summeeyah is 20 years old when we meet. She converted to orthodox Islam approximately one and a half years ago. She wears a long *khimar*, which completely obliterates the shape of her body. Her parents have different ethnic backgrounds, one parent being Dutch and the other being of Surinamese descent. She says that her Dutch parent's family never fully accepted them and called her the 'child of a dog'. In her youth she had several problematic experiences, particularly with men who treated her badly. She dropped out of school and at her deepest point of depression she started to wonder about the afterlife. In part because of a – in her eyes non-practising – Muslim boyfriend this question stimulated her interest in Islam. After she had decided to become a Muslim she ended the relationship with the boy. At present she is married to a hard-working Muslim from a traditional Muslim family who shares her orthodox interpretation of Islam. She has a blue collar job which enables her to be in a men-free working environment.

Summeeyah expresses feelings of regret regarding her previous life before Islam. She says "when I found the truth, I felt so guilty, particularly regarding Allah. I had been so ungrateful and I didn't believe before." Now she wants to forget about her past and her past suffering, as she describes with a metaphor: "Somebody who lives in the past is like a woodcarver who continues to saw up sawdust".

Concerning Western culture, there is one thing in particular that Summeeyah objects to which distinguishes it from Islam. In reference to evening television programmes she says: "in the Netherlands and in the West women are seen as sex objects. That bothers me. (...) We have shame."

Other religions are not a great concern to Summeeyah. When they come up in the conversation, she only says that these other religions simply did not attract her. She indirectly elaborates on her opinion about other religions by differentiating them from Islam. Islam did attract her, she argues because it does not make life "more beautiful than it is. Life is tough and you have to go on. That's what I felt such a strong connection with. I felt understood by Islam."

Summeeyah does vigorously oppose to the use of the term 'radicalism' for Muslims who try to follow the example of the Salafis, like herself:

What is radical about that? Because we live in accordance with Islam? We don't do anything wrong. (...) It's a shame people judge you so quickly on the way you look. (...) You're already a radical when you wear a beard. How many professors have beards? It radiates wisdom, it's manly. But they don't regard professors as being radical. They make a mountain out of a molehill, maybe even two.

She believes that "what my husband and I believe, that is true Islam. That's free of culture. Islam is the *Sunnah*." She contrasts this with the cultural Islam that some other Muslims settle for, such as her in-laws. Yet, even though she considers cultural Islam not as 'true' Islam, she is careful not to be judgemental of moderate Muslims.

In response to a hypothetical situation of a person who does not pray five times a day she contends that she is certain that a person who does not say the *shabada* is no Muslim. “Further it is between Allah and that person. I don’t dare to say anything about that.”

Negative opinions about Islam do bother her. She argues “I understand that they are afraid of terrorism”, but she does not understand why media and politicians generalize about Islam. In her view:

It’s mostly the media and politics that make a fuss and cause trouble. That can irritate me enormously. When a Moroccan has committed a robbery, they immediately say ‘Moroccan’ and ‘rotten Muslim’, but if a Moroccan has saved a dog, then they say ‘Dutch guy’. They only use it the way it suits them. I don’t like the media. I don’t like watching it either. It makes me sick. Every day it’s the same tune: Muslim, Muslims.

In particular Wilders’ words get to her: “We are continuously confronted with things that we don’t do. He generalizes. That does make me sad.” Also comments that Muslims should return to their countries of origin offend her, as indicated by her starting to talk faster and faster. “But where to? (...) We work. My husband works double as many hours as an average Dutchman. I’m social, I adhere to Dutch laws but I still would not be sufficiently integrated, because I wear a headscarf!”

#### *5.1.4 Resistance to External Labels*

Another observable element of resistance concerns the rejection of labels. Labels are a sensitive issue, especially to the fundamentalist respondents (also see Roex et al., 2010). They are mainly allergic to external labels, whether these are applied by non-Muslims or other Muslims. Among the labels that the respondents – regardless whether they are orthodox, radical or extremist – generally reject are the labels used in this study (fundamentalist, orthodox, radical, extremist), apolitical, political and *jihadi* Salafi, *televi*, and *takfiri*. How does their resistant attitude then take shape?

The respondents use several arguments for their rejection of labels. The principal argument is of a religious nature. In their view the divides between Muslims undermine the ideal of a worldwide Muslim community. This *fitna*, as they refer to the divides, should be avoided. Consequently, the fundamentalist respondents do not want to confirm *fitna* by using labels for different currents. In addition, the fundamentalist respondents contend that certain labels are too easily applied to Muslims, such as the label ‘radical’. Another argument is that many of these labels are not their own, but are invented by other social groups (thus etc), such as the radical born-again Hujjat points out (Figure 5.3) when he refers to radicalism as a label of the West.

Nonetheless, the fundamentalist respondents are positive about the meanings of certain external labels. Several orthodox Muslims regard it as

flattering to be called ‘fundamentalist’. Orthodox born-again Layla says, for example:

Fundamentalists are people who want to hold on to the foundations of a religion. That is what a practising person wants, so (...) then it is a compliment. (...) Because what you are actually saying is that: you’re somebody who persistently holds on to the foundations of Islam. Well thank you, there’s nothing wrong with that.

Similarly, some of the radical and extremist respondents, such as extremist born-again Nidal, say that it is a compliment to be called ‘radical’ if it means living strictly in accordance with (his interpretation of) Islam.

Sometimes, moreover, the respondents attribute an alternative meaning to labels. When asked about what they consider radicalism and extremism to be, the fundamentalist respondents often gave a theological interpretation. In opposition to the political interpretation of these terms in Western societies, they argue that Muslims should follow the ‘middle way’. In their view this means not becoming ‘overly religious’ or extremist. As examples of ‘overly religious’, several fundamentalist respondents mentioned praying all night or fasting all year. In their own view they do not take Islam to the extreme.

The only emic label, which all respondents accept is that of Muslim and Sunni, sometimes with ‘practising’ as an addition. One exception is formed by the group that scholars commonly refer to as apolitical Salafis. Although these orthodox respondents reject the addition ‘apolitical’<sup>93</sup> they do apply the label Salafi to themselves. In this sense they differ from the respondents who I met in the Dutch Salafi centres. In their view other ‘Salafi’ currents have polluted the label. Furthermore, they argue that also this label supports *fitna*. Instead, the Muslims in these centres prefer to call themselves Muslims (or Sunnis) who follow the example of the *Salaf al-salib*, the pious ancestors.

A final remark about the resistance to labels concerns the use of humour. During a conversation with orthodox women in a mosque, one of the women asked me what the dictionary entry for ‘radical’ is. Another woman responded on my behalf, in a joking manner “probably: Muslim” as a result of which the other women started laughing. This incident illustrates that despite the fact that negative external labels offend the fundamentalist respondents, some are capable of joking about it. Such humour is a form of resistance as previous research has demonstrated (e.g. ‘t Hart, 2007).

Online this kind of humorous resistance is very common and is apparent, for example, in the virtual names that the participants adopt. One – apparently Moroccan Muslim – presents himself as ‘Goatherd007’. Goatherd is a common word which native Dutch non-Muslims use to call Moroccan Muslims

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<sup>93</sup> The explanation that the respondents gave me was that Islam is inherently political: they only have a different, less public approach to politics.

names.<sup>94</sup> The person adopting this virtual identity turns the criticism around by linking the goatherd to James Bond, thereby transforming it into a Western hero in Islamic disguise. By doing this he resists the negative label in a humorous way. By ascribing a positive meaning to the label (which implicitly contradicts the clash of civilization thesis) Goatherd007 empowers himself to determine how he is defined.

In sum, the orthodox, radical, and extremist respondents all commonly resist the external labels, which are applied to them, sometimes through the use of humour. At times, however, they adopt these labels by attributing a positive meaning to them. By refuting or changing the meaning of external labels, the Muslims in this study claim the power to determine on which grounds they want to exclude themselves from other groups. Thus, a resistant attitude can provide a sense of empowerment.

**FIGURE 5.3** | *Radical convert Hujjat*

Hujjat is 27 years old when we meet. He wears a suit and shaves his beard. He has been raised by his mother alone, who is from Surinamese descent. Although Hujjat was raised as a Christian, he says he never paid it much attention, because he used to think “nobody holds the truth, belief remains an assumption.” At a later age he became involved in crime, just like his older brother, and ‘always had girlfriends’ who he cheated on. This caused his mother considerable concern. Hujjat became interested in Islam through a Muslim colleague who told him about the connection between Jewish, Christian and Muslim Prophets. Because of this interest in Islam, Hujjat feared that he would have to account for all his actions. He started reading and asking questions about Islam and within half a year he had converted to the religion when he came to the realization that “this is 100% the truth”. It took him almost another two years and a reprimand by another Muslim to abandon his old lifestyle. During the years to follow he became acquainted with Hizb-ut-Tahrir and became an active member of the movement. Hujjat is married to a woman from a Muslim family and has a child. He has a job at a University of Applied Sciences level, even though he did not finish his degree.

Hujjat is critical of his life prior to his conversion. He regards it as only evolving around money and girls: “there wasn’t anything else...well yes, my Mum”. When he really started practising his religion he distanced himself from his previous behaviour, because “a Muslim isn’t free. (...) Before a Muslim acts, he has to know what the Creator’s judgement of this act is.” While gaining knowledge of these judgements, he gradually abandoned aspects of his previous lifestyle. He reconstructs his thought process to explain this, starting with his discovery that drinking alcohol was not allowed: “Then we have to stop with alcohol. Oh, blowing joints is not allowed either, then I have to quit. (...) Then you change almost totally”.

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<sup>94</sup> This label is derived from the Prophet Muhammad having been a goatherd and from the primitiveness that critics of Islam attribute to Islam and Moroccan culture. Theo van Gogh, the filmmaker who was murdered in November 2004, was one of the people who used this term.

Hujjat speaks of a “personal renaissance” that he went through, but his friends did not:

Then there are two options: either my friends stop drinking when I’m there or you don’t go out with them anymore. Eventually it resulted in me not hanging out with them anymore like I used to. I still speak to them every now and then, but they are no longer friends. They have become acquaintances.

Hujjat’s fiercest criticism regards Western culture. As an apparent result from his membership of Hizb he talks not of Western culture, but of what he considers to be the Western ideology: Capitalism. In line with his focus on Capitalism he also expresses his criticism of Islamophobia and non-Muslims as a critique of Capitalism: “It is a conspiracy against Western people. Fear is being spread about Islam, as if it is Barbarian”. He says “the majority of the population is good”. He sketches a Huntington-like picture of a clash of ideologies by arguing that “there are only three ideologies in the world: Communism, Capitalism and Islam”.

He believes that the advocates of the capitalist ideology have engaged a battle against the Islam because it is gaining power, particularly since Communism has failed. According to him, the 9/11 attacks and some other terrorist acts are also part of the conspiracy and were not committed by Muslims. Of other Islamic extremist violence he says that these are only incidents: “It is clear what Muhammad B. did, but Western countries use violence all the time to spread their ideology”.

Since he links Western culture with the Dutch State and a capitalist conspiracy, he fails to see anything positive about the Netherlands: “There are no things in the Netherlands that go well. What is good? Being aware of the truth, that’s good. Not to be fooled. At least, that’s what it is from a religious perspective”. In Hujjat’s view the supporters of the Capitalist system, such as national governments and intellectuals are afraid of Islam and keep the populations ignorant because:

Islam can convince [people] of the truth. I can convince anybody within 10 minutes of the truth of Islam, whether they become Muslim or not. A down-to-earth Dutchman will become a Muslim immediately, because it is not airy-fairy, but there is proof. (...) That is also the essential difference with other religions. That is the difference with Christianity.

He refers to Western philosophers who said that Christianity is “a religion of ‘certainty without proof.’”

Finally, Hujjat also rejects Western labels. He says “moderate and radical, they are only Western labels. There is only a distinction in living or not living in accordance to the law (...) I don’t accept these terms”. In his following explanation of when somebody still lives in accordance with the law and can be called a Muslim he argues that a Muslim who accepts the capitalist ideology can still be a Muslim, because he distinguishes between having a conviction and acting on that conviction:

For example, a Muslim can think ‘homosexuality is forbidden and I accept that, but I am weak’. That person is a Muslim. When you say ‘it is allowed’, then you’re no Muslim. It has been proven for 100% and if you deny it, then you’re an unbeliever.

### *5.1.5 Criticism of Other Muslims*

The fundamentalist respondents also resist other currents in Islam. The Muslim respondents regularly warned me against other currents, particularly the radical ones. They expressed four types of criticism: 1) of moderates, 2) against orthodox interpretations, 3) between different orthodox currents, and 4) regarding radical and extremist viewpoints. The four types of criticism clearly show the *fitna*, which exists among and within the various currents in Islam. While differentiating the various currents, the fundamentalist respondents regularly applied labels to other groups of Muslims, even though they reject labels being applied to themselves.

#### *Criticism of Moderateness*

Firstly, all fundamentalist respondents criticize moderate Muslims because they believe that their 'cultural' Islam is full of innovations and thus far removed from 'pure' Islam. Fundamentalist respondents also criticize their parents' interpretation of Islam, an interpretation that they attribute to a lack of knowledge (also see Hamid, 2009: 391; Buijs et al., 2006; Roex et al., 2010). Converts also reject the 'cultural' Islam in which Muslim parents raise their children in the Netherlands. The respondents who follow the example of the Salafis are critical of Sufis in particular. In their view Sufis focus too much on the heart and too little on the rules.

Moderate representatives of Islam who are frequently in the news, such as Moroccan and Turkish politicians, are also subject to criticism. Layla openly expresses her, somewhat emotional, disapproval of these Muslims:

I find those 'cuddle-immigrants' really horrible, real theatre, really horrible that they are continuously in the media allegedly speaking for me. Really disgusting. They think that they will make the government and Dutch people content by behaving like that. (...) Those guys don't speak for me at all, those polder immigrants. In fact, I think they are worse than Wilders. I'd rather have 1,000 Wilders than them, because they really ridicule Islam and they ridicule practising Muslims in particular.

Thus, like the other fundamentalist respondents, Layla views these public figures as advocates of moderate viewpoints who are against fundamentalist interpretations of Islam.

#### *Criticism of Orthodox Interpretations*

The second type of criticism is that against orthodox interpretations.<sup>95</sup> Radical and extremist respondents believe that orthodox Muslims rely on the wrong scholars. They argue that the most reliable scholars are imprisoned (as discussed

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<sup>95</sup> Obviously, the moderate respondents also express criticism of orthodox Islam, with the exception of the few moderate respondents who are interested in Salafism. Overall, the moderate Muslims feel that orthodox Muslims in the Netherlands take Islamic sources too literally and fail to view the message of Islam in its socio-historic context.

in Section 4.3.3) and that one should not ‘blindly’ follow lecturers or Imams in the Netherlands who do not take a fierce stance against the ‘*kufi*’ government. Further, the extremist respondents emphasize that orthodox Muslims follow scholars uncritically and fail to take their own responsibility. They therefore generally talk of Dutch lecturers, imams, orthodox scholars and their students in a condescending tone, such as Maysa does (see Figure 5.4). Online this argument against orthodox Muslims is also present, such as in a discussion where topic initiator NaasihunAmien criticizes Abu Ismaiel, a popular youth lecturer at the As-Soennah mosque, with reference to a *jihadi* scholar:

What would Soufian Ath-Thawry have said about the fact that nowadays there are people who claim to be Muslim, but work as ICT soldier in the army of the crusaders. Thereby fighting the Muslims in the east and in the west who have been abandoned by the Ummah!

Fallujah<sup>20</sup> gives the answer to this rhetorical question: “I think that he would not consider him a Muslim wallahu’allah”.

All in all, both the radical and extremist respondents believe that orthodox Muslims are misguided and that their lack of knowledge prevents the orthodox currents of the religion from becoming activists who may be violently inclined.

#### *Disagreement amongst the Orthodox Currents*

Thirdly, there is disagreement between the different orthodox currents. To the non-Muslim outsider their disagreement would appear to consist of mostly minor details. However, these details are very important for the respondents. When explaining their difference in opinion they refer to disagreement about scholars whom they consider to be knowledgeable and the type of evidence that they consider sufficient for a *hadith* to be trustworthy. Moreover, a couple of the Dutch respondents and those from the Brixton mosque are more supportive of Muslim governments than the other orthodox respondents. The former respondents suggest that scholars should only give written (and thus private) advice in the case of un-Islamic policies, while the latter believe that one is allowed to publicly criticize regimes in Muslim countries. As a result of these differences, the orthodox Muslims in this study claim to share the same *aqeeda* (creed) but follow a different *manhadj* (methodology). They consider that the others have strayed from the right path. Orthodox convert Bassam is part of the former group (and does call himself Salafi). He puts this group’s argument as follows when he criticizes Fawaz, the Imam at the As-Soennah mosque:

Fawaz has taken lessons in Syria. He was sent away from there, because he allegedly spoke out against the government. You can’t be critical like that in an Islamic state. If you do have criticism you have to be patient or you have to put it neatly in a letter, but you shouldn’t shout it out in public. (...) There is a hadith that says ‘who dies at one hand span from the group, that person has strayed and dies in ignorance’.

Similarly, Imams and lecturers warn their flocks about the mistakes made by other currents in Islam and discussions regarding these quarrels flourish on the Internet.<sup>96</sup>

**FIGURE 5.4** | *Extremist born-again Maysa*

Maysa is in the second half of her twenties at the time of our first interview. She wears an *abaya* and a *hijab*. She has been raised by Muslim parents, one of them of Moroccan descent and the other a Dutch convert to Islam. Her parents always emphasized the importance of Islam and practised it in a traditional way. Her father in particular wanted her to perform well at school and study Islam. As a child from an ethnically mixed marriage Maysa used to feel the odd one out and was bullied at school. Later on she became slightly more popular, she argues, because she started to rebel against her teachers. She also felt drawn to 'bad' boyfriends, because she wanted something out of the ordinary. She describes herself as 'not being like a sheep'. At the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intifadah she became more interested in political issues. This interest grew after the events of 9/11 and inspired her to adopt an extremist interpretation of Islam. About this time she expresses a desire to be 'useful'. She quit her studies at a University of Applied Sciences and eventually quit her job. She is married and has children. Her husband has viewpoints similar to hers.

Maysa developed a negative attitude towards her former lifestyle. Even though she says that she has always practised Islam, she also enjoyed herself by having coffee with friends and having relatively innocent relationships with 'bad' boyfriends. In line with what she considers to be Islamic rules she did not drink alcohol, did not go out and always wore her headscarf. It took her till 2001-2002 to become interested in radical and extremist views. She describes herself at that time as having a tendency to think negatively, feel depressed and be influenced by the images of suffering of Muslims in countries such as Palestine and Afghanistan. As she says:

I entered into a very grim world and I couldn't feel enjoyment anymore. I would be sitting at an outdoor café, but I was thinking 'look at us!'. My friends didn't want to talk about it. I would then think 'you're so selfish!'. I couldn't enjoy myself while another person is suffering.

In contrast with the suffering of others she came to see her life as full of petty concerns, such as having love affairs: "I thought my life was pathetic. How could I care about a boy that I couldn't get and have sleepless nights when this was happening on the other side of the world?" Her resistance to friends, however, does not end after her adoption of extremist Islam. On the contrary, at the time of the second interview she felt depressed again because of memories of extremist friends with whom she had had fights and who had abandoned her.

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<sup>96</sup> Respondents in their twenties and older criticize the participants in these discussions. In their view they are only adolescents who have recently discovered Islam and still have limited knowledge who are criticizing others online, thereby increasing *fitna*. Older orthodox respondents also disagree with other currents in Islam, but say that they are not in a position to make judgements.

She expresses her disappointment in their lack of support by distinguishing herself from them in a positive manner. She argues that the Islamic practice of these women shows that they are “trying to be something ... for me it is very different.”

Maysa also distances herself from aspects of Western culture, such as going out and drinking alcohol. She argues that for her “it isn’t freedom to drink yourself into a coma” or to “let go” in a discotheque. Furthermore, she is very critical of Jews and Christians. She talks of Jews in the time of the Prophet as “terrorists”. For modern Christians she also expresses little esteem by contrasting their practice of going to church once a week with the large impact that the Islamic lifestyle has on the everyday life of Muslims.

In line with her religious convictions, she calls herself a Muslim and a ‘*muwahideen*’ (a monotheist) at the time of our first interview. Three years later, she argues that she never applied that label at her own initiative, but that the sisters that formed her social circle at the time used this term. At the time of the second interview she says about labels “I want to get rid of those. It makes me totally sick. I’m simply a Muslim.”

Besides the women who she used to consider sisters, there are other Muslims whom Maysa criticizes. For example, she criticizes her father because in her view he does not know what true monotheism is about and does therefore not abide by the basic requirement of tawheed. During the years, Maysa has maintained an equally negative opinion of Muslims who go to lectures at Salafi mosques. She regularly uses the term *zustersjes*, which means ‘little sisters’ in Dutch, in a condescending tone. She suggests that their outward appearance of ‘pure’ Muslims is in fact a thin layer to cover religious superficiality. She repeatedly expresses disdain about their study circles. She says about Islamic lectures:

I’m no fan of lectures. I don’t like them at all. I’ve been to some occasionally, but they mostly discuss basic issues. Usually somebody reads a book and then talks about it. (...) It is mostly about being interesting. (...) I think it is more for the sake of being together. (...) The audience is generally rather simple-minded. Those people know little of Islam.

There are also some nuances detectable in her views. Firstly, regarding the Dutch negative opinions about Muslims she does not blame the entire population and even sees a point of agreement between her and Wilders’ thinking, namely that Muslims “don’t belong here”. In her view it is the people involved in politics who are responsible for the negative opinions about Islam: “The people are manipulated by the government. I think that is rubbish, barbarian even. The people are simply used by the government”. Secondly, Maysa becomes more careful in practising *takfir* in the course of time. Whereas she had a strict conviction about who is and who is not a Muslim at our first meeting, she says during our second interview:

A couple of years ago I was so afraid to be with the wrong people that I judged too quickly. You can’t judge people to be Muslims or non-Muslims that easily. You can destroy a lot like that. (...) The ummah and family bonds. (...) I’m not so worked up about it anymore. In the past I thought ‘I have to practise takfir or I won’t be a Muslim myself anymore’.

### *Opposition to Radical and Extremist Opinions*

Finally, the orthodox respondents resist radical and extremist currents in Islam principally concerning two issues.<sup>97</sup> Firstly, they oppose the practice of *takfir*, which is declaring other Muslims unbelievers (*kafir*). In the opinion of the orthodox respondents Muslim radicals and extremists are too quick to call someone a *kafir*, for example, because this person votes.<sup>98</sup> The orthodox respondents commonly argue that such acts do not automatically mean that someone is an unbeliever and that it is not up to Muslims to make this judgement. Some of the radical and extremist respondents agree with this criticism and distinguish themselves from the eagerness of others to practise *takfir*, but they disagree with the argument that they cannot make such judgements at all. They argue that when they see Muslims commit *shirk*, they will have sufficient proof to call them non-Muslim. Online there are quite a number of topics where discussions about *takfir* are taking place. One example is the above-mentioned discussion in which NaasihunAmien questions Abu Ismaiel's Muslimhood. In another discussion an opponent expresses his concerns regarding *takfir* as follows:

But people make mistakes... that is the essence (...) Takfir is quite something ... How do you know you won't make a mistake? If Muslims could label each other as kafir ... everybody could independently start murdering and robbing like the khariji's did ☹. What do you do if fake Muslims start to accuse real Muslims?

Secondly, the orthodox respondents criticize the politically activist approach of radicals and extremists. They are most critical of the extremists' support of violence to realize an Islamic state and the legitimization of terrorism and suicide bombing in the name of Allah. They believe that these differences of opinion stem from the lack of knowledge that radicals and extremists have and their consequential misinterpretation of Islamic texts. Orthodox convert Naima represents this common opinion when she discusses how the knowledge that she has gained over the years could help to refute the image of Muslims as supporting terrorism: "When the media would say 'the terrorists rely on those verses,' then I could say that they have been taken out of their context, because their revelation took place in that and that period".

Even though the radicals do not consider that violence should be endorsed, they dedicate little time to refuting the arguments for it. Radical convert Hujjat (see Figure 5.3) either dismisses terrorist attacks as part of anti-Islamic propaganda or presents them as mere incidents in comparison to grand-scale Western violence. Radical born-again Fareeha only expresses the opinion that she does not believe that terrorist acts are permitted. There are no clear indications of criticism from the extremist Muslims in this study toward radical

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<sup>97</sup> Clearly, the moderate respondents also criticize the radicals and extremists. They share the criticism of the orthodox respondents, but add criticism of the radicals' and extremists' scripturalist approach.

<sup>98</sup> The '*takfir*' regard voting as an act of *shirk*, or worshipping something else than Allah.

Muslims specifically. They appear to be more concerned with criticizing other, non-activist currents in Islam.

Thus, amongst the fundamentalists the orthodox respondents are the principal critics of both radical and extremist Islamic views. They contend that extremists in particular, but also radicals, take the verses from the Quran out of context. They commonly attribute this misinterpretation to the radicals' and extremists' failure to rely on real Islamic scholars.

### 5.1.6 *Criticism of Islamophobia*

The final resistance discourse that can be deduced from the data is resistance to Islamophobia. Some of the former sections also indirectly concern this type of resistance. For example, the respondents who resist external labels indirectly resist negative opinions. Yet, they also express direct opposition to Islamophobia and exclusion, which are a common cause for frustration among the respondents.

First of all, the respondents object to the negative opinions about fundamentalist Muslims on religious grounds.<sup>99</sup> The orthodox respondents acknowledge that some Muslims provide a bad example, but oppose the image that 'truly practising' Muslims such as themselves are bad. In this they refer to the possibilities they see for living and functioning in Western societies as long as they are granted sufficient religious freedom. Besides, both orthodox and radical and extremist respondents argue occasionally that their critics are ignorant of the truth and therefore cannot see that their fundamentalist views are in fact right. In the online context, heated discussions between the critics of Islam and Muslim participants in which these arguments find expression are the order of the day. In one discussion, for example, a non-Muslim and supposed native Dutch participant @bracadaver criticizes a Muslim girl, Majdolina, by saying "congratulations you are with right the weakest link in our society! All backwardness of the followers of Muhammad united in one person, how did you manage that?". Majdolina's response is of a similar level and reflects the stereotypical names that the participants use to insult each other:

Ah, get lost cancer patient, your picture says it all. I'm not a follower of Muhammad or whatever you call it. I'm simply a Muslim who believes that our prophet Muhammad was the messenger of Allah swt [short for 'peace be upon him' in Arabic] and I believe in all the other prophets too. Now my question to you is how do you know that I'm the weakest link? I wouldn't bet on it if I were you. You think you can trap me but who do you think will end up trapped????????????? Ai bye dirty cheese-head and make sure you never turn into a rat, because you never know with all these ignorant Hollanders [a word for Dutchmen] 🇳🇱.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> Again, obviously the moderate respondents make this argument too. Their main argument is that their Islam is not the Islam of fundamentalist Muslims.

<sup>100</sup> A commonality of online discussions that this interaction demonstrates concerns the name-calling in this quote which serves othering. The term cheese-head refers to the Dutch cheese tradition and is used online both as a term of abuse by the Muslim participants and as a label that some non-Muslims apply to themselves to express their Dutch origins with apparent pride. The term *Hollander* has a

With her suggestion that @bracadaver will prove the weakest link she refers to the Islamic discourse that the Muslims have the ultimate truth and will thus end up as the 'strongest link' on Judgement Day. This discourse thus helps her to resist @bracadaver's Islamophobic attitude.<sup>101</sup>

A second way in which the fundamentalist respondents resist Islamophobia is by criticizing attitudes and behaviour that they see as discriminatory and signs of double standards. They principally object to the inequality of how they are treated in comparison to other citizens. Interestingly, they focus on discrimination on religious grounds and do not object as much to their socio-economic position per se. Amongst the various fundamentalist respondents the arguments differ slightly in line with their religious view of the extent to which they are part of Western society.<sup>102</sup> The orthodox respondents, converts and children from Muslim migrants alike, contend that they are Dutch (or British) besides being Muslim. Consequently, in opposition to societal fears that Muslims do not adjust to Dutch or British culture, the orthodox respondents present Islamophobic responses as the real threat to the possibility of living in a Western country. In their view it is anti-Islamic policies and limitations to the constitutional right of freedom of religion that make it increasingly hard for them to obey to both Islamic and Western rules. They argue that it is to a great extent due to these social developments that their ultimate ideal to migrate.<sup>103</sup> In short, the orthodox respondents wish to have their constitutional rights as common citizens to be respected. Contrary to general images Islamic fundamentalism, the expectations of being given equal treatment and opportunities are indicative of the respondents' liberal Western values.<sup>104</sup>

The radical and extremist respondents also appear to have internalized these Western values. This becomes apparent in their strong indignation when actual practice does not meet the expectations that these rights give rise to. Yet,

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similar connotation. Instead of using the word 'Dutchman', which is *Nederlander*, the participants use the term '*Hollander*', which traditionally refers to Dutchmen only from North and South Holland. It seems that this word is making a comeback in the Netherlands, because it allows the Dutch to distinguish between people with the Dutch nationality, which includes first and later generation immigrants, and the native population.

<sup>101</sup> However, it also becomes clear here that the attitudes of the Muslims in this study are not static. Majdolina commented on her contributions a couple of years later when somebody else re-activates the discussion. She makes fun of herself for her aggressiveness and swearing. It would thus seem that the passage of time has helped her to put things into a different perspective.

<sup>102</sup> The moderate respondents in this study, regardless of their ethnic and religious background, stress that they have been raised in the Netherlands (or Great Britain) and are therefore to a great extent Dutch (or British). Their resistance to Islamophobia is based on the argument that Islam and life in Western society can be reconciled and that they demonstrate this by their conformity to the society that they live in.

<sup>103</sup> In the course of this study, two female respondents acted on their intention to move from the Netherlands to a Muslim community in Great Britain. They believed that orthodox Muslims in Great Britain have more liberties to practise their religion. The British orthodox Muslims share the impression that they have more freedom than Muslims in other European countries.

<sup>104</sup> The Western character of the religious orientation of the respondents is something that will be considered in Chapter 7.

they do not try to convince the critics of being wrong through dialogue like the orthodox respondents do. Instead, they argue that the unjust exclusion and humiliation of Muslims de-legitimizes the powerful groups that they consider responsible. They frame Islamophobic sentiments in terms of a ‘war against Islam’ that is taking place and believe that they have to stand up to the enemies of Islam. Former radical and born-again Almahdi clearly summarizes how Islamophobia can inspire a discourse of rebellion. He claims that the words of some of the harshest critics of Islam in the Netherlands at the time of his radicalization – Pim Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Theo van Gogh, made him feel humiliated. He claims that, in response, he developed an image of the Netherlands and non-responding Arabic countries as enemies and then states about his animosity:

It was also a bit out of pride, like ‘we can strike back, fight back. Maybe the time will come that we come to power and strike back’. That time has been there in the past. (...) The result would be that we are not weak. That we don’t accept it. That they let us be the way we want to be.

In brief, unlike the orthodox respondents who aim at convincing their critics that they are wrong, the radical and extremist respondents adopt a discourse of rebellion against the groups in power to end anti-Islamic practices. As Almahdi’s words indicate, this discourse offers them a sense of empowerment and can help to re-establish their pride. That leads to the next topic of this chapter, namely how the various discourses of resistance can help the fundamentalist respondents cope with identity strain.

## **5.2 Resistance as Coping Strategy for Identity Strain?**

The principal question of this chapter is what attracted the respondents to different Islamic fundamentalist interpretations. This chapter has therefore reviewed the discourses of resistance that fundamentalist views offer, based on theological argumentations and in-group processes. For example, in the case of resistance to external labels the religious grounds are that *fitna* is not allowed, but the use of humour to deal with labels is shaped in social interaction amongst group members. But how does resistance contribute to identity formation?<sup>105</sup> As discussed above, the process of identification requires differentiation. Islamic fundamentalist views offer discourses for strict differentiation that are based on dualist distinctions between the Islamic and un-Islamic. Such strict differentiation is a prerequisite for secure fundamentalist identities, because the claim to have the absolute truth transforms alternative truth claims into threats: threats to the stability and security of the meaning system and, consequently, identity (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1966). To secure their truth, fundamentalists

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<sup>105</sup> The idea that resistance and protest can contribute to identity formation is confirmed in studies on social movements for the group level (see Klandermans, 1997: 204; Polletta & Jasper, 2001).

thus have to discard and resist other visions as ‘deceptions’. This type of resistance is visible in the respondents’ criticism of other religions and alternative currents within Islam. Through resistance to other beliefs they eradicate doubt and without doubt the way to certainty is paved: the fundamentalist respondents can aim for the highest pinnacle in Heaven while others are destined for its lower levels and Hell. Similarly, their resistance secures their individual and group identity: by viewing non-Muslim groups and individuals as religiously inferior they strengthen their sense of belonging to the superior social group and of having the right guidelines to become a better person in everyday practice.<sup>106</sup> In short, it appears that these discourses are attractive because they help the respondents to forcefully distance themselves from non-Muslim identities, stereotyping and insecurities. Considering the way identities come into being, this type of distancing, or resistance, could thus – in turn – help them to approach their ‘authentic’ identities.

Besides this apparent common ground, however, the various fundamentalist respondents demonstrated different levels of resistance. So could there be a relation between the respondents’ experience of identity strain and the discourse of resistance that they choose? Unsurprisingly, the respondents do not present their resistance as a reaction to subjective experiences. From their perspective their resistance is based on objective facts. Nonetheless, throughout the interviews and conversations it became clear that their resistance corresponds to some extent with personal experiences and thus appears to be – at least in part – reactionary. As mentioned in Section 3.4.2, the orthodox respondents’ identity strain appears to be more inward and hence to principally concern their ‘personal self’, whereas the identity strain of the radical and extremist respondents seems to relate to their ‘social self’, that is how they relate to and are perceived by other people. To see what the relation is between these types of strain and the various discourses, the following sections review the differential attraction of orthodox, radical and extremist views by discussing Summeeyah’s, Hujjat’s and Maysa’s illustrative stories as presented in this chapter’s Figures 5.2-5.4. In this, these sections will consider how resistance forms a coping strategy for their different kinds of identity strain.

### *5.2.1 The Orthodox Respondents: An Inward Focus*

Considering that the orthodox respondents principally experience identity strain concerning their personal selves, how does this relate to their discourse of resistance? They generally distance themselves from their former lifestyle and attitudes, but do not always let go of former friends. Moreover, while they reject certain aspects of Western culture, they also express appreciation for some of its other cultural aspects. Furthermore, even though they consider Islam superior to other religions, they still see some commonalities with other monotheist

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<sup>106</sup> Thus while the idea behind the submission to Allah’s judgement, rules and role models seems to be that one should not want to know the unknowable and not judge other people too easily, the claim to be the one true religion and the judging of others in line with this claim is the order of the day amongst different currents in Islam and towards non-Muslims in this study.

believers. They are critical of other currents in Islam and argue that they have gone astray, but are wary of practising *takfir* and therefore prefer not to call other Muslim groups unbelievers. Finally, they resist Islamophobic sentiments and negative labels, but do this by trying to convince those who have negative opinions and labels that they are wrong through dialogue. Altogether, it is possible to summarize their approach as resistance to alternative meaning systems, negative opinions and aspects of their own life, and a milder approach to the people involved. A closer look at Summeeyah's case can help to clarify what this implies for the relation with the identity strain that the orthodox respondents experienced.

Summeeyah's story indicates that multiple significant men in her life deprived her of respect and love, which seems to have contributed to a low sense of self-esteem. She also experienced social exclusion from her native Dutch family, which – as her report indicates – confirmed her feelings of self-doubt. Her story is thus representative for the orthodox respondents as it points to an identity strain of primarily a personal nature. In comparison to her resistance, she mainly distances herself from three things. Firstly, she distances herself from her former lifestyle. She expresses feelings of guilt about her life and stresses the need to let the past go. Through the discourse of guilt she confirms that she wants to start with a clean slate and by arguing to 'stop sawing sawdust' she tries to leave painful experiences behind. Secondly, she objects to sexual norms in Western culture. In her view Western culture reduces women to sex objects. This objection demonstrates a parallel with the lack of respect and abuse that she has experienced from men. It thus seems that by attributing such a lack of respect to Western culture and turning her back to this culture she feels protected from such experiences in the future. Thirdly, she refutes negative opinions and labels about Muslims. In her view these are unjustified and she therefore opposes to being excluded on religious grounds. It could be that her opposition is a defence mechanism to prevent negative judgements by others from threatening the positive feelings she has about her newly found Muslim identity. In short, each of these three discourses of 'resistance' seem to help Summeeyah to construct a new, positive identity.

Altogether, Summeeyah's example shows how the resistant discourses of the orthodox respondents – against alternative meaning systems, negative opinions and their former life – could provide a coping strategy for the type of identity strain that they experienced. The fact that they display limited resistance to other people also strengthens the impression that their resistance serves to cope with identity strain concerning their personal selves: it reflects their inward concern. This could explain why the orthodox respondents do not adopt a discourse of social activism, but focus on improving their position within their social context. They argue that they have the right to disagree with ('resist' the views of) others and still be accepted. Besides showing that they want to be accepted, their emphasis on *da'wa* reflects that they adopt a constructive approach – at least from their viewpoint. They believe that ignorant non-

Muslims could eventually come to see the light, which implies a less harsh rejection, more patience and a willingness to 'help'.

### *5.2.2 The Radical and Extremist Respondents: Resistance Identities*

Just as the previous section has demonstrated for the orthodox respondents, this section considers how the identity strain of the radical and extremist respondents relates to their resistance discourse. Their discourses are all in all more resistant than those of the orthodox respondents. Regarding their former life they generally distance themselves more forcefully from their previous activities and/or social circle than the orthodox respondents do. Their criticism of Western culture is also more far-reaching as they can find hardly anything positive to say about it. Likewise, the extremists in particular focus more on the differences between themselves and believers from other religions and make a stricter distinction between Muslims and non-Muslims. The latter group includes, in their view, Muslims from other currents in Islam who commit *shirk*. While they resist negative external labels in a similar manner to the orthodox respondents, their resistance to Islamophobia takes a different shape. Unlike the orthodox respondents they see their claim to universal truth as a legitimation for political activism against exclusionary practices and the people that they hold responsible for them.

While the radical and extremist respondents have this more resistant attitude in common, they differ in terms of the matters they resist most. The radicals mainly 'resist' their previous lifestyles, and alternative meaning systems and out-group behaviour, which they perceive as oppression. The resistance of the extremists, on the contrary, is more personalized, which becomes especially clear in their rejection of unbelievers. Their previously discussed views on *jihad* are also more personalized. Even though they consider the general public to be victims of their governments, they believe that non-Muslims should not be pardoned for their ignorance, because they have a personal responsibility to learn about Islam, a religion that they know exists. In contrast, the radical respondents present the population largely as ignorant victims of the government. The remainder of this section presents Hujjat's and Maysa's case in order to clarify the relation between radical and extremist resistance and identity strain.

Hujjat's story in Figure 5.3 reveals an interest in oppositional, masculine identities, which radiate strength, as indicated by the criminal scene he became part of and his promiscuous behaviour. Yet, at a certain moment he became occupied with ontological questions under the influence of two Muslim men whom he met. According to his reading, these questions and the prospect of having to account for his deeds inspired him to seek a new direction. His mother supported this at that time, because after his conversion "my mother was no longer afraid that the police would come, that I would knock up a girl or end up in prison". All in all, the role of others in his conversion to Islam, as well as his particular attraction to oppositional masculinity, appear to reveal that Hujjat is sensitive to the opinions of significant others and is concerned with how strong he appears to these others. This sensitivity seems to point to identity strain

concerning his 'social self'. So how does his experience of this strain relate to his discourse of resistance?

Hujjat expresses resistance on every level, but only to a certain extent. His fiercest criticism concerns Western culture, external labels and Islamophobia. He equates Western culture with the Capitalist ideology in which he sees nothing good, because it opposes to the truth that he believes the Islamic ideology provides. Labels and Islamophobia are in his view all the result of a Capitalist conspiracy against Islam. He displays a more nuanced view in his attitude toward his former life, and toward alternatively minded people and Muslims, as he disapproves of his former lifestyle but does not hold a grudge against his former friends. What is more, he is critical of alternative ideologies (more than of other religions), but he considers most people to be victims of a conspiracy who could be convinced of the truth of Islam within 10 minutes. Towards followers of other currents in Islam he hardly expresses any criticism: in his view they are all Muslim brothers or sisters, some of whom are more and others less seriously 'practising'. He places all un-Islamic elements and criticism of Islam under the banner of a single counter-ideology, thus creating a dualist image of a single major threat to his claim to the ultimate truth, which he can then target. It would seem therefore that his focus on the Capitalist ideology helps him to maintain the positive meaning of the new Islamic direction that he has been searching for. In addition, this image of an enemy and the oppositional discourse of Hizb-ut-Tahrir allow him to take up the masculine, even heroic, role of a fighter for the eternal truth. It could be that Hujjat hardly expresses resistance to individuals, because negative experiences with individuals are absent in his account as a result of which he might not feel the need to personalize his resistant attitude.

Maysa's accounts mainly indicate two things. On the one hand, the judgements of her by others seem to have had a serious impact on her in her youth, because she experienced a lack of acceptance in the outside world (because she was bullied) and felt pressured by high parental expectations at home (since her father strictly ensured that she studied and followed Islamic rules). On the other hand, Maysa expresses a desire for transcendence: to be imbued with special meaning. She repeatedly presents herself as somebody who does not follow the crowd and who seeks to be part of something special (such as being a rebel at school, initially having 'bad' boyfriends and by wanting to become more 'useful' at a later age). She attributes her feelings of depression to experiencing a lack of 'usefulness'. As argued in Section 3.4.2 for the radical and extremist respondents in general, her experiences relate primarily to her 'social self', because of the concern she expresses about who she is in the eyes of or in comparison with others. To what extent then does her extremist resistance discourse match her experience of identity strain?

Maysa has adopted each of the discourses of resistance discussed in the former section. In short, Maysa distances herself fiercely from her former friends who she now considers 'superficial' or hypocritical, her father who does not practise 'real' Islam and a society which offers fake liberties and whose population

are 'like sheep' and who have a negative opinion of her and other Muslims. All in all, Maysa's discourse allows her to disqualify – and thus distance herself from – the people by whom she feels judged and excluded. By adopting such resistant discourses she seemingly finds religious grounds to turn the painful experience of being criticized and judged into the conviction that she is a member of a group of misunderstood true believers. As such she ends up on a higher moral ground, which confirms that she is in fact special. Maysa's extremist discourse thus appears to offer a coping strategy for the identity strain that she experienced. Thus, Maysa's example could also mean that the extremist respondents' resistance is linked to their more outward identity strain. Their resistant discourses allow them to neutralize the strain concerning their social selves – such as the one which stems from social exclusion – by a 'rejection of the rejecters' (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Instead of acknowledging the power that others exert by excluding them, they contend that they do not even want to belong to these others and that in fact these others do not belong to them (also see Castells, 1997: 9). Thus rejecting Western culture and excluding alternatively minded people who criticize them from their lives and the Muslim brotherhood, could help them to feel better about themselves.

This logic might explain why resistant discourses play such an important part in the construction of the 'authentic' identities of those respondents who experience the greatest degree of identity strain concerning their social selves. The radical and extremist respondents appear to manifest themselves principally in 'opposition to' an enemy. As Christie (1986) has demonstrated, an enemy can contribute to a sense of unity and stability<sup>107</sup> by directing attention away from inner threats towards outer threats. In this case these are threats to a positive identity. The radical and extremist respondents' fierce resistant discourses thus seemingly indicate that they direct their inner struggles outward and make the 'Other' into an enemy. The radical and extremist respondents could thus be argued to form the 'resistance identities' which Castells (1997) describes as:

generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society (Castells, 1997: 8).<sup>108</sup>

Even though Christie's and Castells' ideas concern the societal level and involve group identities, their thoughts could equally apply to the individual level. To

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<sup>107</sup> Christie (1986) says about enemies: "Enemies are not always just threats, they may also be useful. They unite the other side, make it possible to change priorities, to focus all attention on certain phenomena, and to forget about others" (Christie, 1986: 42).

<sup>108</sup> There is one aspect to this definition which could be questioned. By speaking of 'actors' who are 'devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination' he appears to suggest that resistance identities come into being in reaction to domination, whereas they are likely to result from a complex interaction which I try to capture in my concept of 'identity strain'.

clarify this, Cohen's (1955) ideas on the relation between status frustration and reaction-formation are useful. Cohen has argued that people who suffer from status frustration can seek a solution in an alternative moral order, such as that of a religious group.<sup>109</sup> This solution, however, has a downside according to Cohen. Cohen refers to psychological studies to explain that once a moral order is internalized, it is hard to get rid of. Instead of this order being put aside it "usually continues to press for recognition" and thereby forms a threat to the new moral order (Cohen, 1955: 133). To counter the tensions of the resulting internal struggle, he argues, a process of 'reaction-formation' comes into being. Through reaction-formation people try to create a defence to their inner struggle by becoming disproportionately hostile to an external enemy: the moral order that they are fighting against or its representatives. When applying these ideas to the radical and especially the extremist respondents, one could argue that their discourse of resistance might serve to hide from themselves and others that they still value the moral order and its representatives that they are resisting. Following this line of reasoning, they are still likely to care about their recognition by its representatives. In sum, it could thus be that to build a mental defence to their inner struggle, the radical and extremist respondents lash out disproportionately at their enemy: the moral order involved and – in the case of the extremists – its representatives to whose negative opinions they were particularly sensitive. Whether this theoretical assumption applies to the radical and extremist respondents in this study has become insufficiently clear. An apparent exception are the stories of the one former radical and two former extremists. In retrospect these respondents say, in so many words, that radical and extremist views helped them to compensate for a sense of personal weakness. Former extremist convert Reza says that he believes that he was – and other extremists are – "fighting their own mirror-image" or "alterego".

Reaction-formation or not, there are some indications of radical and extremist respondents still caring about the opinions of others. As such, it could be that radical or extremist resistance identities only form a coping strategy for identity strain. Extremist born-again Marid is a telling example in this respect. While he acknowledges that he "wanted to belong" in his youth, he claims that now he has become 'the stranger' he does not want to be regarded as a victim and does not care about negative opinions anymore. Throughout the interview he seems to contradict himself though. He idealizes brotherhood and continuously expresses disappointment about his experiences of social rejection so that he seems to confirm that he still desires to be accepted.

In brief, if it is the goal of the Muslims in this study to have a positive and stable identity, then resistance is a way to neutralize the opposite feelings. Resistance thus helps the respondents to approach their image of an 'authentic' self within a secure and stable meaning system. As such, the processes of resistance, on the

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<sup>109</sup> Previous research confirms that belonging to a religious community can offer a powerful, sublimated way of protest against experienced injustices such as lack of social acceptance (e.g. Kurien, 2005; Ho, 2005; Kamans, Gordijn, Oldenhuis & Otten, 2009; Radwan, 2006).

one hand, and identification with an 'ideal', on the other hand, are communicating vessels. The extent to which reaction-formation could be taking place is a question that requires more research.

### **5.3 Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated how the resistance to what is 'other' is an essential element in the creation of the 'authentic' identity for the Muslims in this study. In constructing their new identity the respondents resist what they do not or do no longer want to identify with. The discourses of resistance, which have been discussed in this chapter are their former lives and social circles, Western culture, other religions, external labels, other currents in Islam and Islamophobic sentiments and practices. The focus of resistance differs, however, for the orthodox respondents and the radical and the extremist respondents. It appears that the different discourses of the respondents match the differences in their identity strains. On the one hand, the less resistant and less condemning discourses of the orthodox respondents reflect their more inward focus. On the other hand, the discourses of the radical and extremist respondents are more resistant and directed at individuals, which seems to match their greater concern about the judgements of others. It appears that they form resistance identities to arm themselves against the internal struggles concerning feelings of exclusion and a sense of self-worth.

To summarize, the respondents' discourses of resistance help them to secure their self-image. Their dualist approach helps them to create a more positive Muslim identity, not only through identification, but also – or mainly in the case of the radical and extremist respondents – by resisting un-Islamic elements. There are still many questions, which remain unanswered, however. As mentioned before, this study has so far only discussed the respondents' discourses about their conversion and their processes of identification and differentiation. The principal issues which still need to be addressed here are how the Muslims in this study shape their Muslim identities in practice which will be addressed in Chapter 6 and how the choice for Islamic fundamentalism can be understood in the broader perspective of the contemporary social context which will be the subject of Chapter 7.



## REPRESENTING PURIFICATION AND RESISTANCE

I'm a representative of Islam. (...) That is constantly in my head. All Muslims think of this. We have a task to do. - Saaliha

That they are representatives of Islam is something that all the respondents try to express in their behaviour, as Saaliha's words indicate. But how do the fundamentalist respondents give form to their self-identification with 'pure Islam', the global *ummah* and the Muslim personality in everyday life? And in what sense does their behaviour display resistance, regarding the topics discussed in the previous chapter? These are questions that will be dealt with in this chapter. The aim of this chapter – in relation to the previous ones – is thus to show how the fundamentalist respondents commit themselves to their fundamentalist self and group identity. By shedding light on their commitment I hope to find out what fundamentalism offers the respondents. To achieve this aim, this chapter consists of four sections. The first concerns how the fundamentalist respondents express their Muslim identities and as such represent Islam. The second section discusses the role of social control and impression management in the religious commitment to the group. The section then reflects on how the various ways of representing Islam, social control and impression management contribute to the internalization of the respondents' Muslim identity. The final section considers the merits of representing Islam and commitment to the group in terms of respect and status.

### 6.1 Becoming a Fundamentalist Representative of Islam

How do the fundamentalist respondents represent their Muslim selves in everyday life (Goffman, 1959)? In this study several practices became apparent which seem to serve as ways to represent Islam. These practices involve 1) the use of names, 2) language, 3) physical appearance and personal environment, and 4) behaviour and activities.

#### 6.1.1 Presentation of Self through Names

One way in which the respondents represent their religious affiliation is through their names. The respondents who were raised as Muslims usually already had Muslim names. For converts it is common to adopt an Islamic name, regardless of their Islamic orientation. Although some respondents adopted names that fellow members of their new group thought appropriate for them, many of them chose their own Islamic names. The orthodox converts commonly chose a name of one of their role models, such as Muhammad or for the women, the name of one of the Prophet Muhammad's wives. As there are many *hadith* revealing the

character and behaviour of these role models, the names seems to reflect what the respondents want to be like and how they wish to be regarded. Yet, approximately half of the converted respondents still used their Dutch names, even though they also have Islamic names. This could indicate that they do not consider their names as the most important way to express their Muslimhood. Moreover, some of the extremist respondents adopted new Islamic names that they use among their Muslim brothers and sisters and with me so they did not have to reveal their real names. The name of one extremist respondent clearly represented his resistant attitude as it originated from a popular *jibadi* martyr.

As every participant in online discussions has to create a virtual identity, online names offer an important opportunity to present oneself in the way that one wants to be perceived. In the virtual context participants can invent names that do not have to resemble real-life names. Consequently, online names can more easily present an ethnic background, and religious or political orientations. Online names that reflect ethnic backgrounds include the names of countries as an element, such as MocoRoosje, which means something like ‘Moroccan Rose’, or ethnic groups, such as in the case of a participant called ‘Berber2’. Several participants expressed their religious orientation in their names, for example in the case of a participant who calls himself ‘Muwa7eed’, which means ‘monotheist’. Names can also represent religious role models, such as ‘Abu\_Bakr’, after a companion of the Prophet. Names that express resistance, for example, include words such as ‘Palestine’, such as in the case of just\_palestine, to show their support for the Palestinians and there were various variations of ‘Umm Osama’ or ‘Abu Khattab’. Umm means mother in Arabic and this is a word that several of the women that I met put before their name, even if they were not yet mothers. So a woman using ‘Umm Osama’ would appear to present herself as an admirer of Bin Laden. Abu means father and Abu Khattab was the name of a Chechnyan *jibadi* who became a martyr. So it appears that by adopting this name they are showing that this fighter is a role model.

In sum, both in ‘real’ life and online the Muslims in this study use names to demonstrate affiliation with certain groups and thereby influence how others perceive them. These names thus indicate whom they wish to identify with and what the areas of their resistance are.

### *6.1.2 Linguistic Expression*

In group settings the fundamentalist respondents also continuously affirm their Muslim identity through language: most notably through the use of Arabic, shared narratives and elevated language. Regarding the Arabic language, they frequently use expressions such as ‘*alhamdulillah*’ (praise to Allah), ‘*bismillah*’ (in name of Allah) or ‘*insha’Allah*’ (if Allah wants it). Some of the respondents explained that these expressions are little acts of worship, because by saying these words, they acknowledge God’s existence and power. The respondents scattered these words throughout their Dutch conversations in the mosques. In addition to the use of Arabic words, Islam is a common topic for conversation. During the observations they usually talked about ordinary issues, such as raising and

educating their children, study, work, vacations and clothes. Yet, the fundamentalist respondents had a tendency to bring up Islam sooner or later, for example, by discussing the Islamic rules for raising children.

Online, language seems an even more important way to present oneself as a Muslim. On the Islamic forum participants use Arabic much more extensively than the respondents did in conversations in the mosques. Several online participants even submit purely Arabic contributions to a discussion, whereas others use some recurrent Arabic sentences, for example the wish that another participant will be blessed by Allah. Arabic phrases and quotes from *hadiths* or Quranic verses also make popular signature texts, which accompany the participants' postings. The signature texts are very diverse in terms of content and often reflect the attitude of the participant towards Islam and society. For example, some use a quote that presents Islam as peaceful, whereas others add texts that present Islam as source of power and resistance. Amatoe\_Rahmaan who adds as subtitle 'lioness' to her profile has such a signature text, which she derives from a *hadith*, as the text between brackets indicates:

He, who equips a warrior on the path of Allah, is like a fighter himself, and he who takes good care of the family of a warrior on the path of Allah, is like a fighter himself [narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim, rahimahum Allah].

Despite this love of Arabic phrases, only a minority of the participants seemed capable of fully understanding large Arabic texts, let alone speak Arabic. For instance, it regularly occurred that another participant would ask for a translation. In most cases, however, the respondents would translate English texts into Dutch – including texts of a radical or extremist nature – that had originally been published in Arabic. Similarly, few of the women in the mosque and the respondents of the interviews mastered classic Arabic. Instead, the respondents from Muslim families spoke their parents' tongue and usually had only some basic knowledge of classic Arabic. The ones who do understand classic Arabic also generally read Islamic texts in Dutch, such as extremist born-again Yelda who says: "I read the books that I can buy, simple ones that are translated into Dutch. I can read Arabic and understand it, but still Dutch is easier". Obviously, converts in particular lacked knowledge of the language, which some of them tried to remedy by attending Arabic classes in the mosque.

Besides the use of Arabic language, the respondents share narratives varying from metaphors about Islam to stories about conversion and their Islamic role models. Examples of metaphors are the comparison of humans with washing machines and of women with diamonds. Online the participants share stories about themselves and their role models. Several of the female respondents in the Salafi mosques enjoyed reading people's conversion stories online and recommended that I read such 'miraculous' stories. Others recommended that I watch a documentary about Dutch female converts to Islam or read specific books with autobiographical reports of conversion (such as Robert, 2005). One of the respondents, extremist born-again Marid, said that he had also put his

autobiographical conversion report online for others to read. Regarding their role models, the participants share stories reflecting their remarkable character traits such as friendliness or strength. Responses to these postings indicate that the online participants find such stories stimulating, even though the extent to which they actually want to emulate their role models remains unclear. This is particularly the case for the *jihadi* role models of those participants who appear to have extremist sympathies. In a particular discussion about martyrdom, for example, the online participants express admiration for those who are prepared to die as a violent *jihadi*, such as a female participant Juwayriyah. She says about a Palestinian woman who stimulated her son to become a violent jihadi: “Masha’Allah, that is a real woman!”. Yet, besides this admiration, the participants hardly say anything about whether they want to follow the example of their role models. As such it appears that the Muslims in this study principally share such narratives to confirm their religious affiliation and thereby to confirm their group identity.

The elevated language that some use – mainly in online discussions, but also in certain lectures – is a further linguistic aspect, which is worthy of note. Such elevated language is used, on the one hand, in lectures and online discussions about the personality of the Prophet or the good behaviour of the first generations of Muslims. On the other hand, such language is present in online discussions about the heroism of individual Muslims and militancy of Islam, for example, through presenting battle stories. A discussion of the merits of martyrdom in Islam offers several typical examples. The first concerns a translated text that the participant Ibn firnas 23 posts of extremist Al-Zarqawi which criticizes Muslims for not taking action against humiliation by non-Muslims:

Beware my nation. Your honour is in the hands of the Cross Worshipers. They tinker with it, but you do not stir. Each victor liberate his slaves, but our women are still in captivity. The whips of humiliation drip with blood and I can see the flesh of our prisoners on these whips. We have so much fear for death by the sword, now death even despises us.

Another representative example is the contribution by a participant called Redouan17. In response to Ibn firnas 23’s post he expresses his agreement while somewhat mimicking Zarqawi’s elevated language:

I love you brothers and sisters who take it on for and defend the mujahideen against the hypocrites and unbelievers who contend falsehood and call them irhab. Truly it is them who preserve the ummah together with the ulama. May Allah reward you with djanat al Firdaus. Victory or Paradise.

It seems that this kind of language helps the participants to identify with the transcendental, mythical character that they attribute to Islam and their heroic

role models, while it simultaneously distances them from the ‘ordinary’ and ‘non-Islamic’.

Altogether, considering the limited knowledge of Arabic, which is none of the Muslims in this study’s first language (that is for the main part Dutch), it seems likely that their use of Arabic phrases helps them to remind themselves and others of their Muslimhood and their connectedness. As the same time their use of Arabic confirms their group’s boundaries as it distances them from out-group members who do not understand Arabic at all. The use of elevated language, in addition, seems to strengthen the perception of their role models’ transcendent character, or – in the case of the radical and extremist respondents – of the mythical dimension of their heroic struggle. As such, the elevated language confirms their distance from non-Islamic ordinary and non-heroic realities.

### 6.1.3 Physical Appearances

Previous research has pointed out that one of the principal instruments to show one’s religious conviction to the outside world is through one’s body (Winchester, 2008). The respondents also use embodied expressions to confirm their membership to local Dutch and British Muslim communities and to help them internalize their Muslim identity (cf. Klein, 2003). The principal way in which the respondents use their body is through clothing (also see de Koning, 2009a). The female fundamentalist respondents in particular dress in a way which makes them recognizable as Muslims. While this seems logical considering the stricter rules for covering for women, it also is a choice that they make. As orthodox born-again Saaliha says about her choice to cover all her bodily features despite her family’s protest: “I wanted to be closer to the wives of the Prophet. (...) I wanted that identity, that I am a Muslim woman in the street”. Contrary to the dominant public image that principally radical Muslims cover themselves, the orthodox respondents dressed more traditionally than the radical and extremist respondents did.

Yet, even though the respondents who use the Salafi as role models have rather stern rules for clothing, there are only a few who wear what they consider ideal garments. The ideal that the orthodox women mentioned is a *khimar* and a *niqab*, a combination that is commonly referred to as the *burqa*. Consequently, the British orthodox respondents usually wear both when they go outside. With a couple of exceptions the orthodox Dutch women generally opt for only a long *khimar*. During Dutch Salafi lectures an equal number of the women wore an *abaya* and a *hijab*, which conceal the body somewhat less. The male Muslim respondents are overall less recognizable as fundamentalists. Despite the ideal of a beard and trousers, which leave the ankles bare, the orthodox men are generally only recognizable by their – mostly short – beards. Like the women, they tend to dress more traditionally when they go to the mosque. Moreover, on average the converts in the orthodox mosques dressed more traditionally than the children of Muslim parents.

The radical and extremist respondents dress less traditionally than the orthodox ones. With the exception of one male respondent who wears a long beard and trousers to just above the ankles, the other men generally only grow modest beards and wear regular Western clothes in their everyday lives. Moreover, of the radical and extremist female respondents only radical born-again Fareeha wears a *khimar*. Of the three extremist female respondents, two dress themselves in a traditional *abaya* and a *hijab*. One, born-again Yelda, wears a regular headscarf with rather tight, Western clothes, even though she believes that she should not wear such revealing clothes. A year after our initial interview she was still wearing them and argues that she simply likes them and that they are comfortable. As Groen and Kranenberg (2006) have shown there are of course female supporters of extremism who wear the *niqab* and the *khimar*. Yet, the fact remains that some do not and this might be surprising, since one might expect that the most resistant groups would adopt the most resistant style.

Several female and the more traditionally dressed male respondents described their clothing as a ‘protection’ against ‘un-Islamic’ behaviour. They explained this by the fact that their Islamic looks remind them that they have to represent Islam and thus have to behave like a good Muslim. Extremist born-again Marid, for example, says that his beard makes him feel like a “calling card” for Islam. Similarly, some of the women that I met in the mosques said that their Islamic clothes, particularly the *niqab* that they are continuously aware of, remind them of being a Muslim.

### *Pragmatic Choices*

It seems that the differences in appearances largely result from a pragmatic attitude. A major indication of such pragmatism is that the choice for traditional Islamic clothes depends on the social context. The male and female respondents usually dress more traditionally when they go to the mosque and when they are at home than at other occasions (also see Roex et al., 2010). Despite the orthodox women’s greater focus on clothes, many of them admitted that they compromise, mostly at work. This appears to be especially the case in the Netherlands. The women who do not always wear their ideal garment give two types of reasons. Some of them claim not to feel sufficiently strong to express their Muslim identity through clothing. One of the women in a Salafi mosque explained, for example, that she does not dare to wear a headscarf at work, because she fears the negative reactions. Others say that they compromise not because they feel weak, but for the sake of expectations of non-Muslims at work or at home. Some female converts therefore choose to wear a regular *hijab* when they visit their parents. Orthodox convert Ava also represents this group as she adapts her clothing to her work environment. While she believes that women should cover themselves thoroughly, she says:

Maybe if I lived in another country I would wear the *niqab* too, because I think it is recommended at the very least. And here in the Netherlands I can’t do that, I can’t make others accept it either, I think. (...) At work I wear the *hijab* and at home I wear the *khimar*.

Overall, the female respondents in London appeared to have less trouble showing their Muslim pride in clothing. It seems that even though they struggle with negative responses, they find support in the fact that traditional Islamic garments are relatively common in large British cities like London. Yet, also in the British context, women make pragmatic choices. Orthodox born-again Jala, for example, normally wears the *niqab*. During our interview in a restaurant she took it off in a private corner, but self-consciously pulled it up every single time a waiter passed by. In this way she prevented him from even catching a glimpse of her face. Yet she chooses to take it off at work, despite the presence of male colleagues. Although these women cover themselves in accordance with the minimum of their standards, the choice to cover less at work and more in leisure time – in the Dutch case often in the presence of their husband if they have one, because with him they feel more secure – seems at odds with one of the principal ideas behind covering themselves. They believe that showing their beauty to men could lead to adultery which they consider to be a very great sin. One would think, therefore, that it is particularly important to cover themselves at work, because in most of their work settings they have regular contact with men and thus there is a greater ‘risk’ of inappropriate feelings than by simply seeing unfamiliar men on the streets, especially when their husband is around.

Similarly, the less traditional clothing style of the radical and extremist respondents could reflect pragmatism. Two male extremist respondents mentioned that they do not wear traditional clothes and a long beard because of the attention they would attract from the criminal justice system, which already had them under observation. Alternatively, radical convert Hujjat argues:

The reason that I shaved off my beard is that 1) the evidence shows me that it is recommended and not obligatory and 2) the beard has been projected as an image of terrorism. A non-Muslim, therefore, will not dare to listen to you if you have a beard and then I wouldn't be able to propagate the message. They would immediately think 'is that one of them?'. There are certain priorities and it shouldn't form an obstacle.

Hujjat stresses that he is not allowed to shave off his beard for the sake of his job but that he shaved it off for these two reasons. So, according to these radical and extremist respondents' accounts, the reason for dressing less conspicuously and shaving off their beards is to be able to realize their tasks as activists.

#### *Ambivalence in Resistance to Western Fashion*

The fundamentalist respondents' attitude and practice regarding their physical appearance is ambivalent. On the one hand, traditional clothes for women and a beard for men reflect not only identification with the first 'pure' Muslims, but also opposition to the glorification of the body in Western societies such as the Netherlands. Instead of showing or flaunting one's body these respondents choose to cover it. In addition, opting for traditional clothing implies that they ignore the materialist and consumer attitude of modern fashion. So, while in Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia traditional clothes represent conformity to

mainstream dressing norms, in a Western country such as the Netherlands such clothing could be seen as a form of ‘resistance’.

On the other hand, however, many of the orthodox respondents in particular admit in words or behaviour that Western gadgets, clothes, brands, accessories and make-up continue to play a role in their lives. For example, some women in the mosque wore designer items to accompany their Islamic outfits. Headscarves with names such as Chanel, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana and Calvin Klein and Louis Vuitton bags were an exception, yet some were present in the Salafi centres. Similarly, some of these women still wear make-up on their eyes even though the dominant opinion was that women should not beautify themselves, especially if they do not cover their face.<sup>110</sup>

FIGURE 6.1 | ‘Red Light Fashion Tour’



Another remarkable observation in the As-Soannah mosque was a baby of about six months who I once saw dressed in Tommy Hilfiger and another time in McGregor designer clothes. His mother explained that she dressed him like this, because she likes brands. In addition, several women – orthodox, radical and extremist alike – admitted, for example, that they still like Western or sexy clothes and wanted to wear them. These respondents say that they wear them at home or under their Islamic outfits. Orthodox born-again Layla is the most notable fashion lover who I met. While dressing in a *hijab* and an *abaya* herself, she is a walking fashion encyclopaedia who keeps up to date through reading

<sup>110</sup> In some Islamic shops women could also buy ‘Islamic’ make-up, such as kohl pencils. Some fundamentalist respondents argued that this make-up is in itself Islamic, because the wives of the Prophet used this type of make-up.

international fashion magazines. To be able to see the work of some famous Dutch designers, she even went on a 'red light fashion tour' with a designer friend of mine and a moderate Muslim friend of hers. The tour was so-called because the designers work was displayed amidst the red lit windows in Amsterdam's red light district (see Figure 6.1).

It even seems that Islamic clothes have become fashion objects in their own right, as women frequently complimented each other on the colour, fabric or design of an *abaya* or *kbimar*. Besides, the women also appeared to develop their own 'Islamic' trends, such as the nose piercings of many and the coloured lenses worn by some women in the Brixton mosque, even though they did not consider that they were allowed. In sum, fashion and trends stay relevant despite fundamentalist interpretations of Islam. The argument that some of them gave for their continued appreciation of Western style fashion is that they can enjoy it as long as they do not value it too much and if they wear it in private.

### *Online Appearances*

People physically express their belonging both in the material and the virtual world (Miller, 1995; Shapiro & Shapiro, 1997; Lövheim, 2004; Lövheim & Linderman, 2005). Thus the participants to online discussion forums also 'physically' express their convictions. They create a 'virtual veil' or add pictures to their profile. By a virtual veil I mean that certain women, but also some men, translate the prohibition for men and women to mingle in the material world to the virtual world. A regular subscription which participants use is therefore 'no pm [personal message] please'.

The most obvious virtual expression of self, though, occurs through the pictures that the participants, men and women alike, add to their profiles. On the news forum non-religious pictures are most common. Participants on the sub-forum about Islam, however, often add Islamic pictures to their profile.<sup>111</sup> The images include, for example, pictures of a veiled woman, which would seem to reflect what participants look like in real life. Other examples are romantic, dreamlike images of the Quran, which flies through the air above the Ka'ba in Mecca or a Muslim warrior with an Islamic flag. Participants also use photoshopped pictures of coloured landscapes and sunsets. During the fieldwork the women explained that this kind of image reminds them of the magnificence of Allah's creation. These pictures thus give the participants considerable possibilities of expressing their Islamic orientation.

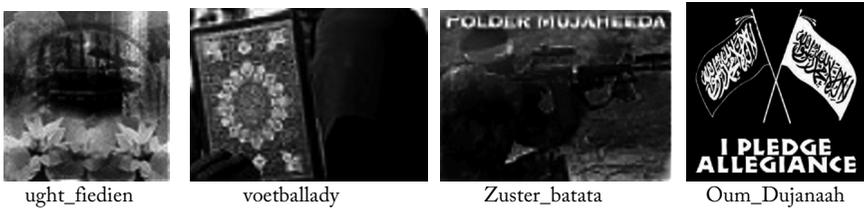
Ught\_fiedien, which means 'sister in belief', is a typical example of somebody who presents herself in a romantic way (see Figure 6.2), similar to male participant Abyad (in Figure 6.3). While Abyad represents himself with a picture of the beauty of creation, Ught\_fiedien combines the beauty of flowers with an image of the Ka'ba in Mecca and an Islamic text in the background. Voetballady (football lady) and Rassoel (messenger) are examples of participants who present themselves as devout Muslims. Rassoel's image of a praying Muslim

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<sup>111</sup> Online the communities are relatively segregated: the participants generally only participate in one of the two forums, not in both.

suggests that he submits to Allah’s will. Voetballady’s picture seems to reflect her intention of presenting herself as a covered woman who follows Quranic guidelines.

FIGURE 6.2 | *Female Presentations of Self*



The profile pictures of the remaining participants emphasize resistance. Zuster\_batata (sister sweet potato) presents herself as a fighter for Allah (*mujahida*) in the Dutch ‘polder’ context. The flags of Oum-Dujanaah’s<sup>112</sup> profile picture show support of *jihad* in the name of Allah. Zaraqawi anna’s<sup>113</sup> name and the pointing finger suggest that he regards it as a personal responsibility for every Muslim to participate in Al Qaeda’s battle.<sup>114</sup> Finally, DEMO, who is active on the less religiously inclined news forum, presents himself in terms of non-Islamic ‘graffiti’ subcultures. Moreover, his picture seemingly reflects the opinion that the Jewish Anne Frank would support the Palestinian cause if she were alive today.

FIGURE 6.3 | *Male Presentations of Self*



### *Creating an Islamic Home*

The respondents do not only represent Islam in their personal appearance, but also in their home environment. Ideally, the fundamentalist respondents do not watch television. Consequently, a couple of them mentioned that they banned the television from their living room or the house, though sometimes only for a

<sup>112</sup> This name refers to the mother of a martyr called Abu Dujanaah. She stimulated her son to fight *jihad* in Kashmir. After his death in battle she is said to have kept supporting the fight.

<sup>113</sup> Al-Zaraqawi used to be one of the principal figures in Al Qaeda.

<sup>114</sup> The pointing finger recalls that on the posters for American army recruitment.

while. Another example is that they generally avoid pictures of living beings in their house, because they consider such pictures un-Islamic. Instead they put up prints of Islamic texts or ornaments that remind them of Islam. Other expressions that were observable during the interviews are bookshelves covered with Islamic literature, the Quran and the apparent absence of alternative reading material.

#### *6.1.4 Islamic Behaviour and Activities*

The Muslim respondents also express their Muslim identity through Islamic behaviour such as rituals, expressing Muslim character traits in their behaviour and Islamic activities, such as gaining religious knowledge (also see de Koning, 2009a). Similarly, avoiding un-Islamic behaviour confirms their Muslimhood.

#### *Adopting Religious Rituals*

One of the principal conditions for being a good Muslim is to fulfil what Muslims regard as their religious obligations. The principal obligatory activities are saying the *shahada*, praying, fasting, going on pilgrimage and paying the *zakaat*. All fundamentalist respondents claim to behave in accordance with these obligations. Yet, the extent to which they follow these rules in practice remains unclear, because not all of these activities were observable.

In the mosques, however, it was possible to witness the practice of prayer. Prayer is a ritual that clearly fosters a local sense of connectedness and demonstrates commitment. In prayer, the women are shoulder to shoulder, foot to foot – ‘so as not to let the devil, *sjaitaan*, get in between’ – for certain periods of time. The respondents admit that performing this ritual in such a literally and symbolically connected way does make them feel connected. Thus, through prayer the respondents confirm to themselves and others that they belong to the Muslim community.

#### *Showing Muslim Character Traits: Brotherly Behaviour and Da’wa*

Section 4.3.3 has shown that the respondents’ consider it their obligation to adopt character traits that are suitable for good Muslims, such as being helpful, patient, friendly and modest. Research has indicated that religious people form an image of themselves as having adopted these traits and having put them into practice (Maclean, Walker & Matsuba, 2004). As mentioned in Chapter 4, the respondents in this study also report that they feel that they have become more friendly, patient, helpful and modest since they have become practising Muslims. The most commonly mentioned examples of improved behaviour are showing respect for other people, including parents and helping out those in need – both Muslim and in the case of the orthodox respondents, also non-Muslims. In addition, several women that I met in the mosques do volunteer work or shop for groceries and prepare meals for non-Muslim elderly neighbours, to give some examples. When talking about the reasons for such behaviour the respondents made a distinction – in so many words – between being friendly et cetera towards fellow Muslims and towards non-Muslims. Towards Muslims the

fundamentalist respondents believe that such behaviour is a religious obligation for the sake of brotherhood. In terms of non-Muslims, the orthodox respondents said that such behaviour is an important way of inviting them to Islam, because they feel that it gives non-Muslims a positive impression of Islam.

In terms of in-group behaviour, the emails that I regularly received through mailing lists of female respondents offer a main indication of the respondents' desire to help fellow Muslims. In these emails the sender asked other women to help out their brothers and sisters in Islam. In some cases the request for help was limited to carrying out an act of supplication or *du'a*, for example, for the Muslims in Palestine who are suffering from violence. In other cases the emails were accompanied, for example, by photos or stories of sick little children with a request to send money for an expensive operation, or to visit somebody in the hospital.<sup>115</sup> Although more research is required to determine the exact meaning of such emails, my impression is that they help to raise awareness of the suffering of the respondents' Muslim brothers and sisters. Specific emails that request acts of supplication are not intended to produce practical help. By the very fact of forwarding such emails the respondents demonstrate that they care about other Muslims and as such they confirm that they feel connected to the Muslim community. Another in-group practice are the interactions between women who entered the mosques. After greeting each other with *salaam 'aleikum* they often shook each other's hands, even if they did not know each other. When they had become better acquainted they generally embraced each other. Through this way of greeting they seemed to confirm each other's membership and make each other feel welcome in the community.

### *Becoming Knowledgeable*

Since the fundamentalist respondents emphasize the importance of Islamic rules, they see it as an essential Islamic activity to gain knowledge about their religion and its rules.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, a large number of the fundamentalist respondents, regardless of gender, attend Islamic lectures and conferences or form little study circles at home, called *halaqa*, or had done so in the past.<sup>117</sup> On the occasion of the popular conferences in the Salafi mosques sometimes hundreds of women gathered and listened to the messages of the lecturers. Lectures at conferences concerned, for example, the deplorable state of the *ummah* (ascribed to a lack of knowledge about Islam) and the failure to obey religious obligations. Other

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<sup>115</sup> How many of the women actually respond to financial aid requests (and how many of them are honest requests) I do not know.

<sup>116</sup> When this topic came up in interviews and conversations the respondents explained that they derive this obligation from the first word of the archangel Gabriel to Muhammad, namely *'ikra'* which means 'read'. Because the respondents interpret this instruction broadly, most also make an effort to graduate from school or get a university degree. In this sense they do not distinguish themselves from the moderate respondents. The distinction concerns their absolutist claim that fundamentalists make on true knowledge.

<sup>117</sup> Also Mohammed B. used to form part of such a study group. The Dutch Intelligence Service is therefore suspicious of what they came to label as *'huiskamerbijeenkomsten'*, which translates as 'living room gatherings'.

topics were the necessity of being a good Muslim, warnings of punishments in the afterlife, the qualities of the first Muslims, and suchlike. The Friday afternoon sermons that I attended had similar topics. The speakers there also issued warnings and gave general directions for a greater level of Islamic behaviour. In terms of Islamic knowledge the conferences were generally of a very basic level. This might explain the fact that women frequently chatted away and were at times too occupied with each other or their children to pay attention to what was being said. Some of the women did not take notes either. When asked about the value of the conferences the women generally claimed that they learned some new things but said that the main value of being there was to strengthen their *imaan* and motivate them to become more devout. A couple of the respondents in Islamic study groups confirmed that their *imaan* increases when they attend meetings (and can decrease when they do not), which they attribute to the support of their Muslim brothers and sisters. It appears that an important if not the main value of conferences and sermons is therefore to enhance the commitment to the Muslim community. The weekly lectures in the Salafi mosques generally dealt with more specific topics, which were discussed in more depth. The students in these classes had to study specific literature that they were tested on. For example, in the As-Soannah mosque the women had to study *fiqh*, Islamic jurisprudence, and were examined at the end of the lecture cycle. In these classes there appeared to be a greater focus on gaining knowledge than in the other sermons and conferences.

In addition to attending lectures and study circles, Islamic books and the Internet are essential sources of knowledge for the fundamentalist respondents (for the importance of Internet see Angkor & Mo\_nl, 2001; de Koning, 2008). The fundamentalist respondents also search for answers to their questions online and read books from Islamic bookstores. Especially the extremist respondents rely on the Internet and electronic or regular books, because – as discussed in Section 5.1.5 – they show less regard for lectures and conventional scholars and Imams. In terms of gathering online information, the fundamentalist respondents use international and national websites, which correspond with their religious orientation. Overall the respondents mentioned various sites, although there were a few that came up regularly. Some of the orthodox respondents, for example, consider [www.salafipublications.com](http://www.salafipublications.com) a reliable source of information. In addition, [www.al-yaqeen.com](http://www.al-yaqeen.com), the website of the As-Soannah mosque, proved to be a popular source of information for some orthodox respondents. The Islamic forum [Morocco.nl](http://Morocco.nl) also discusses topics related to Islam, from the detailed rules about rituals such as the washing ritual and prayers, to what is considered *halal* and *haram*, et cetera. Some of the participants to online discussions share their knowledge by copying texts from other sites. At times they simply post the link, while on other occasions they translate texts into Dutch. Since their opinions and their choice of texts often give indications of their religious (and political) orientation, the online participants' contributions express which current in Islam they feel to belong to and which they resist.

*Avoiding Un-Islamic Activities*

The fundamentalist respondents try to distance themselves from what they consider un-Islamic activities, such as drinking alcohol, listening to non-Islamic music,<sup>118</sup> watching un-Islamic programmes on television, and the mingling of men and women. Consequently the respondents say that they do not join non-Muslim colleagues, fellow students or friends when they go to bars, because they believe it is prohibited to be with people who are drinking alcohol. However, they believe that they can be present in a bar if there is 'no alternative', as long as there is no alcohol on their table. As a result of this escape route, I occasionally met with orthodox, radical and extremist respondents in bars. For example, a conversation with radical convert Hujjat took place in a bar with people on the table next to us drinking alcohol. Moreover, while we were talking the song 'I'm so horny' was played. He did not consider this an inappropriate place because he argued there was not a good alternative.

In terms of music, the fundamentalist respondents say that they ban un-Islamic music from their collections. For example, orthodox convert Ava threw out all her CDs to confirm her Salafi conversion a few weeks after a party at her home where she had still played popular Western music. Although she admits that she misses the music, some other respondents argue that they do no longer like this music anyway, because 'all the lyrics are the same or superficial', or because the music 'disturbs their sense of peacefulness'. Similarly, fundamentalist respondents try to avoid un-Islamic television shows, particularly ones in which images of nudity and promiscuity are expected to occur.

The fundamentalist respondents also try to refrain from contact between men and women. To live up to their strict interpretation of rules, they generally spend their leisure time in the company of members of their own gender. Furthermore, a limited number of the fundamentalist respondents found a working environment without the opposite gender. Orthodox convert Bassam is a representative example as he refrains from contact with women outside work and stays away from what he sees as inappropriate public hobbies. He says that he stopped hanging out with women in part because he does not want to provide a bad example to younger boys who are being raised as Muslim. Similarly, he argues that he no longer goes to football games, despite his love of football and tries to behave like a Muslim:

Look, imagine ... you're watching Ajax on television and suddenly you see a man with a beard on screen. That's simply ... if I hadn't had a beard, I might have gone, I'll be honest. (...) It simply attracts the attention ... I think in that sense you're a signboard for Islam. That's the advantage of having a beard: that whilst you're in public you limit your sins in terms of bad language and yes, shouting. (...) Because you don't want to contribute to the bad image. (...) To give an example, when a woman walks on the street, haha, in the past you would have followed her with your eyes. You would even turn around. But if you

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<sup>118</sup> The only music that the respondents see as Islamic is music with the *duff* (a traditional drum) as instrument.

have a beard and you turn around, that isn't possible, is it? So it stops you. Well, by now it's second nature, but in the beginning it was really something that stopped me.

As pointed out in Section 2.3.1, avoiding un-Islamic behaviour does not mean that the fundamentalist respondents stop undertaking non-Islamic activities. On the contrary, they believe that if Islam does not explicitly forbid an activity they can adapt it to Islamic standards. For example, extremist born-again Marid likes martial arts and describes how such sports can be adapted: "People who do martial arts, cannot hit another person in the face, for example, and they cannot bow, because you don't bow for anyone but Allah". Similarly, one of orthodox convert Vanessa's social groups organizes aerobics classes. These are only admissible to women and as such they are not forbidden under Islamic rules. Some orthodox women in the mosques even play football or do kickboxing with other Muslim women.

#### *Drifting between Islamic and Western Lifestyles*

As the above-mentioned meeting in a bar with radical convert Hujjat illustrates, the practice of the fundamentalist respondents is not as black and white as it would seem from some of their discourses and behavioural ideals. Throughout this study multiple nuances emerged with regard to Islamic behaviour and the activities of the respondents.

Firstly, considering the high demands dictated by their Islamic fundamentalist views, it is hard to always live up to these standards in practice. Some main examples of such difficulties concern behavioural norms, such as not listening to music and not watching inappropriate television shows. In terms of music, I regularly heard orthodox women's' ringtones, usually Arabic songs, but using other instruments than the *duff*. With regard to television programmes several female respondents – including extremist born-again Maysa – told me that their favourite shows are 'CSI Miami', '24', and/or 'As the World Turns'. When asked about the music in these shows a number of them said that they turned the sound off, but others leave it on. In the case of un-Islamic scenes, such as romantic moments, they claimed to change channels for a while. It seems to be even harder, though, to adopt Islamic character traits. A telling example is the criticism that the fundamentalist respondents have about like-minded Muslims who fail to live up to these standards. Some of the respondents criticized their Muslim brothers and sisters for failing to offer help in practice. Regarding character traits, they particularly present modesty as a pitfall in others. Several of the respondents therefore criticized fellow Muslims for showing off to others, for instance, about the extent to which they practise their faith, know the Quran by heart and speak Arabic. The critics argue that the ones who look and seem to act most like Muslims could in fact be practising their religion less, because they should not act as a Muslim for the sake of others, but for the sake of Allah. An example of such a contradiction took place right after a lecture in the El Tawheed mosque on the humility that Muslims are supposed to display. On this occasion one of the students demonstrated a competitive attitude in a

conversation with another girl. Both of them were married to men who had a different ethnic background than they had. The competitive girl slightly condescendingly expressed surprise about the other girl still not having mastered the language of her husband's family whereas she had made an effort and was already very good at it. She thus implicitly placed herself above the other girl with seemingly no regard for the lesson that she had just received. Other incidents during lectures in the mosques concern women who flaunted their knowledge. I witnessed some converts in particular doing this (although other converts did clearly demonstrate modesty because they felt they lacked knowledge). Furthermore, online some participants overwhelmed others with Islamic texts that they had translated. Although sharing knowledge is obviously a brotherly thing to do, the way and extent to which the sharing takes place – namely by assuming the attitude of a teacher – created the impression that some of the fundamentalist respondents were trying to show off their knowledge. So by trying to make an impression it appeared that they cared about how others view them, despite their conviction that they should only care about how Allah views them.

Secondly, the fundamentalist respondents sometimes engage in behaviour and activities, which seemingly contradict their strict interpretation of Islam. With regard to gender roles, for example, one might expect that their traditional views would mean that they marry at a young age and that – in line with common images of traditional gender roles – the women would take care of the children and household chores while men provide for the family. In practice, however, about half of the female fundamentalist respondents (with an average age of early to mid-twenties) were single at the time of our conversations.<sup>119</sup> The women complained about the reason for not being married on multiple occasions: there was a lack of good, practising Muslim men and they themselves were picky. A common argument was that they wanted a man who respects their female rights and liberties in Islam, such as the right to follow an education, and help them in the household and raising the children.<sup>120</sup> So most women were opposed to what they present as the practice in traditional Moroccan families that women carry out all the chores and men do nothing. Instead, the fundamentalist respondents argued that the Prophet Muhammad helped his wives with the household and the children, and that Muslim men should follow his example. In the case of a woman I met in the As-Soennah mosque this led to a particularly untraditional everyday practice. She told me that she studied in a different city and so has to travel a lot. According to her account, her husband had already put their child to bed and had prepared her a meal when she came home at night. Overall, the fundamentalist female respondents emphasize that

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<sup>119</sup> This includes women in the mosques. More of the older women were married, but among them there were also quite a number who were divorced, remarried or divorced again. With a couple of exceptions, the fundamentalist men taking part in the interviews were all married, see Appendix I.

<sup>120</sup> Several of the fundamentalist respondents explained that they negotiate all mutual expectations before getting married. When potential partners disagree about issues such as how many children they want and how many days a week the woman can have a certain job, the marriage is unlikely to follow through.

they want to be treated as an equal by their husbands even though they have different gender roles. The fundamentalist male respondents say they agree with this female viewpoint.

Another apparent tension concerns activities for which Islamic rules are less clear. This is particularly the case for activities that did not exist at the time of the Prophet, such as playing computer games. A couple of the orthodox respondents and an extremist one said that they liked to play computer games. Extremist born-again Marid, for example, told me a couple years after our first interview that until recently he had played a 'Call of Duty' game in which he was – in his own description – a Western soldier who 'had to shoot terrorists'. In his view it was better to not play computer games as a Muslim, but he did not see a particular problem with this game, because "it is just a game".

Thirdly, the fundamentalist respondents sometimes make exceptions to their common practice because of contextual factors. Most importantly, the fact that they live in the Netherlands requires them to compromise. The majority of the fundamentalist respondents study or work in what they consider to be an insufficiently Islamic environment because in this environment both men and women are present. Considering the fact that they choose to live in the Netherlands, they do not see this as a major issue, although some of them argue that they would prefer an environment that is in accordance with their Islamic rules. The wife of orthodox born-again Naqeeb, for instance, works in a company with men. Naqeeb says about this situation "as long as there is no trespassing of borders, she can work with men. Though, it is better to work with groups of women". One of the borders that he mentions is shaking hands. Opinions differ about the limits to compromising, however. Like some of the other fundamentalist respondents, orthodox convert Ava also prefers an Islamic work environment, but she does shake hands, because her job position requires her to meet with men on a regular basis. Another apparent compromise concerns the rules regarding female liberties. According to the respondents' fundamentalist views, women should be accompanied by a *mabram*, a male close relative, when they go out or on trips. Yet, whether they were from traditional Muslim or non-Muslim families, the female fundamentalist respondents were generally used to move around freely. Even though some of them mentioned that they would prefer to go out with a *mabram*, most of them simply went their own way. Orthodox born-again Saaliha, for example, goes around without male company. She is unmarried, does not have like-minded brothers and instead regards her *khimar* and *nigab* as protection. Some of the orthodox women that I met even planned trips abroad by themselves or with female family members. It thus appears that these women compromise on the rules concerning a *mabram*, because they are not willing to give up on their freedom (also see Bartkowski & Read, 2003; Bhimji, 2009).

Besides these exceptions for the sake of compromise, the fundamentalist respondents occasionally (and temporarily) put aside some of their ideals for the sake of specific events or circumstances. For example, orthodox convert Bassam, who said he would not go to football matches, started watching the 2010 World

Cup dressed in orange and with a Malt beer on the couch. Yet, when the Dutch team's success became apparent, he and his wife watched the matches in public places in the midst of non-Muslim, alcohol drinking football fans. Another typical example is extremist born-again Maysa, who put aside the rule of not listening to music. Because she was feeling down and wanted to take classes, which involved Western music she searched for rulings online that "allow it under certain conditions. It simply is good (...) I feel good. With many things that I have doubts about, I immediately feel uncomfortable". Thus, Maysa believes that she is able to feel the difference between good and bad behaviour and has found a legitimization for her behaviour by 'shopping' online.

Finally, on some occasions fundamentalist respondents were seemingly unaware of tensions between their viewpoints. Orthodox convert Natasha constitutes a representative example of these respondents. While her ultimate ideal is – like that of most other fundamentalist respondents – to live in an Islamic country, she also argues that she would like to live in New York although she has never been there:

I would like to live in New York, I'm totally in love with it. It's so big, everything is possible there. (...) New York isn't Islamic, but there are many Muslims living there and there are mosques. Anything is possible there as long as you have money. I would go shopping there. I'm not so fashionable anymore, but my [non-Muslim] sister is totally in love with designer clothing.

With these words she expresses the classic image of the American Dream that seems at odds with her anti-materialist Islamic vision and the critical opinion that she has of American politics.

In short, as Dutch citizens the fundamentalist Muslims in this study develop various lifestyles that reflect both their Islamic ideals and the Western society that they are part of. Thus, it would seem that they 'drift' between practices and activities, which are more and less Islamic.

## **6.2 Keeping the Community Together: Social Control and Impression Management**

The former section discussed the ways in which the fundamentalist respondents try to represent Islam, also in group contexts. This section elaborates on the group context by discussing those fundamentalist group processes, which serve to keep the group together, as became apparent in live group interaction in the mosques and on the Internet. After a brief reflection on the characteristics of the fundamentalist groups of the Muslims in this study this section will take a closer look at social control – on the positive side through confirmation and stimulation and on the negative side through critique – and impression management (Goffman, 1959) within their communities.

### *6.2.1 Introducing the Fundamentalist Communities*

So what are the basic characteristics of the communities that the fundamentalist Muslims in this study are part of? Naturally, the fundamentalist respondents are also part of non-fundamentalist groups through close bonds with moderate family members, former friends or moderate Muslims and non-Muslims at work, in their hobbies and at school.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, the strength of the bonds with either moderate or fundamentalist groups seemingly varied amongst the fundamentalist respondents, regardless of whether they had orthodox, radical or extremist viewpoints. Since this study aims at understanding the motives and reasons for becoming part of fundamentalist groups, its focus is limited to these fundamentalist communities. To gain insight in what the respondents' fundamentalist communities are like, it is necessary to distinguish between the 'real-life' communities – and their inner and outer circle – and the virtual communities.

The following sketch of the fundamentalist respondents' real life communities is a result of, on the one hand, their own accounts, and on the other hand, from the observations in the mosques and a couple of activities which female respondents organized.<sup>122</sup> On the basis of the accounts and observations the general impression is that the respondents form part of an inner circle of Muslim brothers or sisters with whom they feel a deep connection and friendship. They undertake social activities with these friends in their leisure time. The women commonly reported that they went shopping, organized dinner or lunch parties, went out for a coffee, participated in events in one or more mosques and chatted on MSN. The men principally mentioned activities such as playing sports with their closest friends besides going to the mosque and staying in touch through MSN. According to several fundamentalist respondents their group of friends is mixed in terms of ethnic background. A couple of converts, on the contrary, reported having native Dutch converts as closest friends, because they felt that they had more in common with them. In addition, while some mentioned that their peers were of a similar age and religious orientation, others said that there was a 'great variety' in age (between about 20 and 35 years of age) within their inner circle, whereas the orthodox respondents in particular also mentioned having Muslim brothers or sisters who practised less as their friends. Typically, and despite their contact with more moderate Muslims, the fundamentalist respondents did not have close relations with fundamentalist Muslims from other currents in Islam. For example, orthodox convert Bassam made it explicitly clear that he stays away from alternatively-minded fundamentalists, such as members from Hizb-ut-Tahrir and those in favour of terrorism.

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<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, I have been present at several social activities that some female orthodox and extremist respondents undertook with female moderate Muslims and occasionally non-Muslims. Yet, the focus of this study was on settings where fundamentalist Muslims met like-minded people: either in the mosque or online.

<sup>122</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, the observations were limited to female communities as I am a female researcher.

Besides this core group, the respondents formed part of what one could refer to as their outer circle of Muslim brothers and sisters. This group they seemed to principally (or only) meet in the mosques for lectures (also see Roex et al., 2010). It is hard to estimate the size of these groups, because in some of the mosques there were different students each week. In the case of weekly classes, such as in the As-Soannah mosque and the Brixton mosque, however, there were groups of between 15 and 30 regular students. In the El-Tawheed mosque the observations took place when the classes had just started again and this might have led to a more mobile group of on average approximately 15 students. In the case of conferences, students from the various Salafi centres came from one city to another. However, the community in the mosque was not limited to the groups who attended the weekly lectures. The Friday sermons that I observed in some mosques attracted many more women and the various conferences even attracted several hundreds of visitors. Although the participants at such conferences obviously did not know everybody, many did become acquainted over time. Since several participants and their lecturers travelled between the various Salafi mosques, many of the women that I met in one city I later encountered in another and it regularly occurred that they already knew others whom I had met. It appears that as a result of this local movement the respondents have shaped a community, which exists between different Dutch cities. The respondents in the Brixton mosque reported a similar situation for the orthodox 'Salafi' community in the United Kingdom. Whereas several of these respondents attended classes and lectures in diverse mosques and public places in London, some of them also occasionally went to conferences in other British cities, such as Birmingham, which they regard as the Salafi capital of the country.

The students at the various gatherings in the mosques were, with a few exceptions, between 15 and 45 years old, with the majority of the women being in their early twenties. In terms of ethnicity the groups were mixed. While the majority in the Dutch mosques seemed of Moroccan decent, there were generally also Indonesian, Turkish and Somali Muslims. Further, there were a considerable number of converts present. At some conferences up to 20 percent of the students seemed to be native Dutch converts. The exact number of converts is hard to estimate though, because there were also converts with a different or mixed ethnic background who were less distinguishable as converts. Several times I therefore discovered that someone was a convert when engaging in conversation with them. On another occasion a woman appeared to be a convert but turned out to be a child from a mixed marriage who was raised as a Muslim.

The fundamentalist respondents also formed online groups as the virtual world offers the opportunity to create virtual communities, also for fundamentalist Muslims in the Netherlands (Benschop, 2006; Bunt, 2003; Chayko, 2002; Campbell, 2004; Dawson, 2004; de Koning, 2008; Kahn & Kellner, 2003; Kim, 2005; Laney, 2005; Lee & Leets, 2002; Miller & Slater, 2003; Morley & Robins, 1995; NCTb, 2006; Stahl, 2003; Sudweeks, McLaughlin & Rafaeli, 1998; Tsfaty & Weimann, 2002; Rogan, 2006; Watts,

2001; Williams, 2006a). Despite the large number of members to the MVC website – that the two forums studied form a part of – like-minded members formed cliques in relatively small subgroups.<sup>123</sup> They did this first of all by usually only participating in discussions on one of the two sub-forums analyzed. As a result the news forum attracted a seemingly more diverse group of participants ranging from anti-Islamic Dutch participants, Muslims with moderate opinions to occasionally participants who expressed fundamentalist viewpoints. In the discussions analyzed fundamentalist opinions were primarily present at the Islamic forum, although the majority of this forum's participants seemed to be moderate Muslims. Within these sub-forums the participants also appeared to form cliques. When selecting and analyzing the discussions on the Islamic forum I came across multiple discussions which largely took place between like-minded participants and which hardly contained any divergent opinions. This was the case, for example, in a discussion, which glorified violent *jihad*, whereas in other discussions in the same period other participants expressed opposition to such an extremist interpretation. Moreover, in the discussions on each of the discussion forums I regularly encountered the same group of core participants. All in all, I received the impression that the participants select discussions to participate in not only on the basis of the topics which interest them, but also – and maybe more importantly – because they already know and share ideas with the person initiating the topic and other participants.

Before continuing with the processes within these groups, the relation between the online and 'real life' fundamentalist communities demands some attention. The majority of the respondents to the interviews and in the mosques was rather critical of MVC and said they stayed away from the fruitless discussions they believed were engaged in by online participants. Orthodox convert Vanessa said representatively: "I find them annoying, it's yes-no all the time. (...) There is an oral tradition that says 'there is a place in Paradise for the person who stops discussing'. I'd rather not even start". Nonetheless, several of the respondents did admit that they participated in online discussions. At a conference an orthodox woman in the As-Soannah mosque introduced me to a native Dutch convert who she had met on MVC and had invited to the mosque. The extent to which such 'real life' contacts follow from online interactions, however, remains unclear.

In sum, the fundamentalist respondents form communities of like-minded people in the mosque and online. These communities include Muslims of different ages, ethnicities and from various cities. Within these communities the respondents develop friendships with some Muslim brothers and sisters that they feel closer to. The interviews, observations and internet analysis offer hardly any clues of close transnational contacts. Despite the global image of the *ummah*, the Muslims in this study thus principally seem to connect on a local and regional level.

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<sup>123</sup> Because of the relatively small number of discussions analyzed it is not possible to draw any conclusions on the size of these subgroups. It is only possible to say that the average number of participants in the discussions analyzed was about 20 per discussion.

### 6.2.2 Confirmation and Stimulation

The first aspect of the fundamentalist group processes concerns the social control that the members of these groups exert on one another through confirmation and stimulation. This confirmation and stimulation takes the shape of paying compliments to each other for having the correct Islamic look and activities, and motivating each other to do better. It appears that the respondents receive more respect from group members when these group members notice that they try to act in accordance with Islamic rules.<sup>124</sup>

The observations in the mosque offer numerous examples of such forms of positive confirmation. The most common form of confirmation is through words such as '*masha'Allah*' and '*alhamdulillah*' in response to stories by women who show that they are striving to be good Muslims, for example, telling each other about how they summoned up the mental strength to wear the *khimar* in public or their defiance of Muslim or non-Muslim parents. The most notable confirmations were observable in the interactions with converts. In particular when the women had not yet met the converts or when they came to do the *shabada* the women praised these new Muslims and stressed that they were welcome in the group. For instance, on one Friday afternoon after prayer two women entered the Brixton mosque and told the women present that one of them wanted to say the *shabada*. The response of the Brixton women was remarkable as their faces lightened up immediately and they started an animated conversation about what the *shabada* meant and how this would change the woman's life. They tried to stimulate the woman to gradually practise her faith more and to take classes in the mosque to gain knowledge about Islam from the 'right sources'. After the *shabada* had taken place and the woman had left – even though she had been invited to stay for the class – the women explained that they responded so enthusiastically because it made them sincerely happy to see somebody become a Muslim. They argued that it was beautiful that another person had found the truth.

In online discussions, a similar type of confirmation takes place. This is particularly the case on the Islamic forum where the participants form more like-minded groups and where less non-Muslim outsiders are present than on the forum about news and actualities. The main way to confirm one's belonging appears to be by complimenting another participant on the topic that this person initiated or by thanking him or her for the knowledge, which the person shares. The following quote provides an impression of such responses. It is a response to a topic that Hmmz20 starts about the deplorable state of the Muslim *ummah*. He argues that the spirit of brotherhood is crumbling because of gossip amongst Muslims, lack of honesty and internal hatred. In his opinion the solution has to be found among the Muslims themselves who should make efforts to improve.

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<sup>124</sup> Obviously this kind of interaction occurs within any social group when members confirm each other's group membership.

In response, Mocro\_girl says:

Salaam 'aleikum. Jazak Allah u gairan for making this comment brother. Really very beautiful masha'Allah, I'm happy that many brothers and sisters open topics about Islam alhamdulillah. I think it is very good, instead of looking for somebody or opening nonsense topics.<sup>125</sup>

Besides complimenting each other for 'correctly' expressing Islam, the respondents also motivate each other to practise their faith more. As far as clothing was concerned, for example, the fear of Islamophobic expressions in the Netherlands and to a lesser extent in London kept some women from wearing a *khimar* or a *niqab*, which they resolved by giving each other words of encouragement or by starting to wear these traditional clothes together to give each other mutual support. Moreover, in the mosque I regularly witnessed women stimulating each other to gain knowledge, exchanging Islamic books and inviting each other to other Islamic lectures or social gatherings with sisters. Online the principal way of stimulating each other is by opening a topic and posting information about how to be a better Muslim. Examples are topics such as: "How are we supposed to deal with unbelievers?" and "Everything about Tawhid" which present the participants with answers to the implications of Islam in the Western context of their everyday life.

Finally, the interview with extremist born-again Nidal provides an interesting example of how respondents confirm their spirit of brotherhood. Because I was a female interviewer initially Nidal and Marid only agreed to an interview with the three of us, as a result of which it became possible to witness some brotherly interaction. When Nidal says "I'm grateful that I'm seeing Marid today. He's my brother and I love him for the sake of Allah and I hope that this is mutual", Marid responds with "of course". The exchange of these words was, moreover, accompanied with looks of affection and emotion, which came across as a deeply felt demonstration of connectedness. However, despite their sense of connection at the time, they did loose touch with each other within a year.

Altogether, it appears that the respondents focus on the experiences that confirm their sense of connectedness and tend to ignore those that contradict it. Besides the example of Marid and Nidal who lost touch with each other, I regularly heard the women talking about 'all the converts' who came to take the *shabada* in their mosque. Yet, it appeared that some of them did not show their faces again (or in the case of the above-mentioned woman in the Brixton mosque at least not in the months when I conducted my fieldwork, despite the invitation to come to lectures). The respondents' tendency to ignore this gave me the impression that one of the principal functions of confirming and stimulating others is to strengthen their own convictions and sense of being a Muslim and a member of the Muslim community.

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<sup>125</sup> By 'looking for somebody' she hints that certain online participants are looking for a partner.

### 6.2.3 Critique

Other than critique of alternative truths which the fundamentalist respondents generally accepted, personal critique proved to be a much more sensitive topic. As Section 5.1.5 has shown, it is especially the orthodox respondents who believe that they should be careful not to judge others too quickly. Orthodox convert Vanessa explained why one should be reticent to criticize others: “if you point a finger, you should know that there will be three pointing at you”. This does not mean, however, that the respondents refrained from voicing critique of their own group members. On the contrary, such critique proved to be rather common among the various fundamentalist respondents. Those who mentioned having been confronted with ‘un-Islamic’ behaviour said that they did or wanted to reprimand the Muslims who demonstrated this behaviour. In their view such critique can make Muslims aware of their flaws and help them to become better Muslims. I deduced several types of internal critique from the observations in the mosques and online discussions: 1) generalized criticism directed at the community at large, 2) criticism directed at anonymous members of the group present at a specific moment and 3) criticism of identifiable individuals, either directly to them or indirectly through gossip.

The first type, generalized criticism, was apparent in lectures, sermons and online. Such criticism concerned, for example, the lack of religiosity among Muslims or, in the case of the internet forum, participants using the forum as a dating site. The participants who responded to this criticism usually agreed with the internal critique and sometimes expressed the intention of behaving otherwise. The extent to which they considered this criticism applicable to themselves and how they then put these intentions into practice was not usually apparent.<sup>126</sup> It could be that those expressing and agreeing with the criticism feel that they do not behave in such a way or are at least careful not to. The following fragment from an online discussion confirms this possibility. In this discussion Pumba20 and Zeinab – both female participants – criticize other women’s hypocritical behaviour concerning men. Pumba20 starts by arguing: “Sisters often talk about brothers to make it seem halal, because if they say GUYS (what they in fact are), then it doesn’t sound so ‘halal’ anymore and not so ‘masha’Allah’...so it is brother, brother, brother all the time”. Zeinab responds:

Well spoken sister. Nowadays I see sisters only talk about brother this or that. I even hear that they get their numbers and msn (in my environment). And when you say something about it, gossip immediately starts behind your back.

Thus, while she confirms Pumba20’s opinion she implies that she does not make this mistake herself but instead warns other women.

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<sup>126</sup> A clear exception to this general rule was an online discussion that was not part of the formal analysis, but in which some participants argued that the prohibition for men and women to mingle was also applicable online. In response one of the participants left the forum, yet started to participate in discussions again after a period of absence.

The second type of criticism occurred regularly during lectures and conferences in the mosques, particularly in the case of large, anonymous groups of people. At the As-Soannah mosque, for example, the conference audience did not always act in accordance with the norms of conduct. Occasionally, lecturers or fellow Muslims issued reprimands for talking during classes or for making a mess in the mosque. Particularly at the end of the day, when people were tired, it would quieten down for only a couple of minutes. This demonstrates the well-known phenomenon that in large groups with many participants, individuals feel secure in their anonymity and apparently feel less pressured to respond to the criticism. This is different for general criticism when the 'wrongdoers' are clearly apparent. For example, at a the lectures by a Salafi preacher in Amsterdam one of the women asked whether or not it was allowed to pray with bare feet. When the lecturer responded that women should not be bare-footed in the mosque, one new visitor who had already seemed to feel a bit out of place because of her Western clothes immediately hid her bare feet by sitting on them.

The third type involves personalized criticism of the fundamentalist Muslims between themselves. Sometimes they did so in a surprisingly unfriendly manner, which did not appear to correspond with their own image of correct Islamic behaviour. Examples from the fieldwork are an occasion when a woman was reproached for feeding her baby while food in the mosque was not allowed and another moment when a clearly annoyed woman told another woman to take her nagging children outside. Among women who knew each other I witnessed more friendly forms of criticism and even jokes about un-Islamic behaviour or looks. The trend of wearing coloured lenses in the Brixton mosque provides a representative example. The women considered wearing coloured lenses to be un-Islamic, because they beautify them. At a certain moment, when a woman wearing them admitted that they were not allowed I asked why she was nonetheless wearing them. One of her Muslim sisters repeated in a teasing way 'yes, why do you wear them?' and said that she should take them out. Initially the woman with the lenses did not respond, but when a friend of hers came in wearing such lenses and was also subject to similar joking remarks, both of them left and returned a little while later without the lenses.

Online personalized critique takes a slightly different shape. Unlike in the mosques in this study, online Muslims with different religious orientations meet each other. Instead of criticizing the in-crowd of like-minded Muslims the participants in the discussions analyzed principally direct their attention to alternatively-minded Muslims. Moreover, they show much more animosity towards each other and regularly use foul language. For example, in a discussion about whether or not it is allowed to live in a non-Muslim country a male Muslim participant, Djoko, criticizes the Muslims who believe that they should undertake *hijra* to a Muslim country and contends that they are too weak to

actually do so. A female participant named Xxikramx, who appears to have an extremist orientation,<sup>127</sup> responds:

Djoko, May Allah give you a disease that makes you suffer so much that you wish to die and to thereafter suffer so much again that you will desire to live again but can't go back. Say Ameen! Ameen.

Such language illustrates the reality of internal struggles as opposed to the ideal of a strong Muslim community.

Another form of personal critique – though in the absence of the person it concerns – is gossip. In their discourse the fundamentalist respondents are strictly opposed to gossip. Nonetheless, in practice they did express criticism behind other people's backs or complained about how common gossip was within their fundamentalist circle. For example, after orthodox convert Vanessa had argued that one should be careful in criticizing others, she also talks critically of a Muslim sister who gave another sister looks of disapproval: "That gets to me. I was annoyed the entire evening. What gives you the right to judge others like that? (...) That's gossiping without words". Like Vanessa, several other fundamentalist respondents mentioned situations where they saw others acting contrary to their group's norms. While talking about these other Muslims they did not seem to feel that they were gossiping themselves. Only orthodox convert Naima says that she does not want to gossip and therefore she does not mention names. So in her view – and maybe also Vanessa's and the others who did not mention any names – there is no gossip when the people criticized remain anonymous. In online discussions gossiping took similar shapes. In several cases participants did not mention the name of the person in question, whether a fellow participant or a publicly known Muslim. In other cases they did mention the name. On several occasions other participants criticized those who started such a topic. In one discussion about whether Osama bin Laden is right or not, participant 'Arabischelessen' considers this gossip:

O, you who believe, remember your tongues. Guard your tongues, because your tongues will testify for you on Judgement Day. This is gossip regarding Osama Bin Laden. Fear Allah and guard your tongues. (...) May Allah forgive you all and I advise the one who opened this topic to close it.

It seems that both gossiping and the critique of gossiping confirm in-group norms. Moreover, criticism implies that the person who expresses critique or condemns gossiping would not behave in such a way, whereby this person confirms his or her own membership of the group.

This study offers a couple of indications that the respondents who form part of extremist groups might be subject to harsher criticism from other group

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<sup>127</sup> Her profile picture is a black flag with an Arabic text and a sword below it. Additional texts in her profile include 'Assalafiya' and "When you warn against extremism, do not forget to warn again negligence. When you promote al-Wala, do not forget al-Bara".

members than the other fundamentalists. This would be in line with their more resistant discourse. As Section 5.1.5 has demonstrated, they adopt stricter norms for when somebody ceases to be a Muslim, most of them consider *takfir* to be an obligation, and they are more focused on resisting other people. It seems that this also affects the relations within their own group. Extremist born-again Nidal, for example, admits on one occasion that within his group there is considerable internal pressure to act like a good Muslim and that he can imagine that some former members were afraid to oppose this group pressure. Extremist born-again Maysa describes how the group of sisters that she used to be part of demanded that she pay attention to the smallest details:

Then they would check if I didn't have any images in the house. And then there would be a little bag from the Kruidvat [a Dutch chemist's] and then they said 'yes sister, shall we cut it [the human images on the bag] out with scissors?'. Or the teletubbies were on and then they would say 'yes sister, music, that is not allowed' or then I was wearing my headscarf in a certain way and then they said 'yes sister, that is not the Sunnah, is it?'. And then I thought, 'mind your own headscarf!'.

Although such internal social control could indicate that the extremist respondents feel closer, it prompted Maysa to lose touch with this group of sisters. In addition, it could also lead to less cohesive groups as there is distrust between the members. Some online participants wondered if certain others were undercover agents. Extremist born-again Marid also reports that he feels a bit paranoid at times about being watched and even suspected a person in his close circle of doing this. To reduce the attention he felt attracted to him he took distance from his circle of brothers.

Overall, it appears however that critique plays an essential part in keeping the respondents' local communities together in two ways. Firstly, criticism can make group members aware of their own anti-Islamic behaviour and stimulate them to adapt accordingly. Secondly, expressing critique of inappropriate behaviour confirms the group's norms,<sup>128</sup> which can strengthen the sense of connectedness. In addition, critique confirms the group membership and status of the person who criticizes because expressing criticism implies that the critic does comply with the rules and thus claims the moral high ground in relation to than the subject of criticism.

#### ***6.2.4 Impression Management: Ignoring Disagreement and Incorrect Behaviour***

Besides confirmation and critique as forms of social control, there were several situations in which the Muslims in this study maintained the image of a unified Muslim community by ignoring inappropriate behaviour and in doing so seemingly managing their Muslim impression (Goffman, 1959). A telling example was an incident in the Brixton mosque. On a Friday afternoon a strange

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<sup>128</sup> As Durkheim (1988: 164-165) explains, breaking social rules can confirm what the norms are or should be.

woman enters the mosque to pray. She looks and acts in ways that differ from the way the Brixton women do things. Firstly, she is dressed differently as she wears a t-shirt and sweatpants as opposed to the traditional *khimars* or at least *abaya's* and *hijabs* worn by the other women. Furthermore, she has bare feet and only puts a headscarf on when she prepares for prayer. Secondly, she prays differently from the women, which starts with the preparation for prayer. Instead of going to the bathroom to do the washing ritual, *wudu*, she rubs her hands against the wall and makes gestures as if she is washing herself. Thereafter she refuses to borrow the *khimar* that one of the women offers her because the Brixton women believe tight clothes turn a prayer void. This causes some exchanges of secretive smiles and glances among the women. Yet, they do not correct the woman nor talk about what happens. When I see one of the women, Rasmiyah, giving a disapproving look I ask her why the woman rubs her hands against the wall. Rasmiyah does not express criticism, though, but simply explains that when Muslims are travelling and do not have water at their disposal, they are allowed to do the washing like this. When I remind Rasmiyah of the obvious fact that there is water downstairs a reserved look comes into her eyes and she says that you do not have to use water in the case of certain diseases or aches that the water would worsen. While I establish that there are no visible signs of such diseases or aches and want to ask a further question, Rasmiyah indicates that she does not want to talk about it anymore and nobody comments on what has happened after the woman has left. While their lack of response is in keeping with their orthodox discourse of not judging others too quickly and the prohibition of gossiping, it seems that ignoring dissonance also helps to keep up appearances because it implies ignoring differences of opinion within the Muslim community.

Another way of ignoring dissonance was visible online. In the discussions it occurred regularly that opinions were far apart and that one participant severely criticized another participant. Though many discussions involved people who refuted each other's opinion and tried to convince them otherwise, there are multiple cases in which the participant who is criticized totally ignores the critic. In these cases it seems as if parallel discussions are taking place within one topic between different clusters of like-minded people, for instance between those with an orthodox orientation and those with extremist sympathies. To an outsider it might seem that the participants are taking the easy way out, because in this way they do not have to counter the 'evidence' that other parties present. Unfortunately the discussions did not disclose the motives behind ignoring critical participants. The result, however, seems to be a form of impression management, because the person who is criticized ignores it in order to be able to continue his or her own performance, as if there is no dissonance and no threat to one's claim to absolute truth.

To summarize, confirmation, stimulation, critique and impression management help the fundamentalist respondents to keep their group together and secure their individual and group Muslim identity.

### 6.3 Internalizing Muslim Identities

A common ground between the representations and group processes discussed in the previous sections is that they help the Muslims in this study to internalize fundamentalist identities and stimulate them to commit to the group. How does this work?

Religion studies demonstrate that by engaging in religious practices and presenting oneself as a religious person to the outside world, one confirms one's religious identity not only to others, but also to oneself. This can help people to reshape their self-image (Grimes, 2002; Henkel, 2005; Mellor & Shilling, 2010; Storey, 1999: 129; Winchester, 2008). In this study the presentation of self as a fundamentalist Muslim has a similar circular effect. By trying to talk, dress and act as a fundamentalist Muslim, the respondents present themselves as Muslims to others, commit themselves to their fundamentalist community and simultaneously remind themselves about being a Muslim. While the fundamentalist respondents admit that they had to make an effort to represent their religion in the beginning, they argue – in so many words – that behaving like a Muslim comes more naturally to them over time. As orthodox convert Natasha says representatively: “It is not that you think with every step that you take ‘oh yes, I should do this du’a when I go in. It simply becomes automatic, just like waking up in the morning is automatic”. Furthermore, internalization and commitment make them feel that they are making progress and becoming better Muslims over time. Orthodox convert Vanessa presents this common view as follows: “I feel a stronger Muslim now than in the beginning. Then it was only on the outside, in matters of appearance. Now it is my entire way of life”. To keep up their level of commitment and to ensure their progress, several fundamentalist respondents admitted that they try to shake themselves up when they feel that their level of *imaan* is getting low. They do this in various ways, such as by – temporarily – engaging more intensively in fundamentalist circles and Islamic activities. Some mentioned that they stay inspired through their role models. Extremist born-again Nidal, for example, admits that he watches films of *jibadi* fighters on You Tube to remind himself of his activist cause.

In terms of the group processes, confirmation, stimulation, critique, and impression management are instruments to confirm fundamentalist individual and group identities in several ways. First of all, impression management helps to keep up the credibility of the Muslim identity of individuals and the connectedness within the Muslim community. Besides, the various forms of social control – confirmation, stimulation and critique – appear to have a double effect. On the one hand, the persons who exert the various forms of social control implicitly confirm that they are Muslims and commit to fundamentalist norms. On the other hand, those who are subjected to social control are believed or asked to confirm their Muslim identity and commit themselves to the group. This could explain why fundamentalist respondents talk about social gatherings with their Muslim brothers and sisters as stimulating experiences. These respondents admit that the presence of their brothers and sisters motivates them to strive to become better Muslims by keeping them ‘focused’ or ‘alert’ as they

stimulate each other to read more books, undertake more Islamic activities, et cetera. One of the women in the As-Soennah mosque, for example, said that she loves the conferences because they make her feel inspired to do better. She adds with regret that the intensity of this feeling only lasts for a little while, ‘just like when you get back from holiday’ and ‘you get back into the old rut’ more quickly than you would like to. Several respondents used the rise in their level of *imaan* in the presence of other Muslims as an argument to associate more with Muslims than with non-Muslims. Though, as Section 6.2.2 has demonstrated, there are some exceptions to this general rule. In the case of a couple of extremist respondents pressures within their group have seemingly prompted them to distance themselves from their group members.<sup>129</sup> Overall, however, impression management and social control help the respondents to internalize their fundamentalist identities and strengthens their commitment to their Muslim communities.

Yet, how does this relate to the apparent tensions between fundamentalist beliefs and actual behaviour? Do these apparent tensions obstruct the fundamentalist respondents’ self-image as committed Muslims? Obviously, the respondents are often aware of the apparent discrepancy between some of their beliefs and behaviour for which they gave a number of general theological justifications and a remedy. These concern 1) their level of belief (*imaan*), 2) the remedy of remorse (*tawba*), 3) the importance of the right intention, 4) setting religious priorities, 5) distinguishing between obligatory and recommended behaviour, and 6) pointing at differences of opinion among scholars.<sup>130</sup> Firstly, regarding their *imaan*, the respondents argue that it fluctuates. Because of their human nature they have strengths and weaknesses, and better moments and moments in which they make mistakes by giving in to temptations. Secondly, while the fundamentalist respondents believe that they are bound to commit sins, they argue that if they show true remorse and have the sincere intention to better themselves – even in the last seconds of their lives – God will forgive them. Thirdly, the respondents emphasize that it is not only their actions that count, but also their intentions. If they have the intention of behaving like good Muslims, they contend, they will already be rewarded to a certain extent. To give an example, if they try to shake hands with people of the opposite gender in as few situations as possible, they could – according to some – gain at least some credit (*hasanat*). Fourthly, the fundamentalist respondents argued occasionally that there are situations in which certain Islamic rules have priority over others, such as in the case of radical convert Hujjat who shaves off his beard to gain support for the Islamic state. Fifthly (and also expressed by Hujjat concerning his

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<sup>129</sup> This is in line with Matza’s (1990) argument that “unstable and shaky groups may come to stress loyalty and solidarity and thus mask the brittle bonds that tie it together” (Matza, 1990: 157). It could thus be that these groups’ stress on living according to strict rules was actually a sign of them being unstable, as a result of which they eventually fell apart.

<sup>130</sup> Such explanations can also be found in other religions, such as Christianity, and they are therefore in no way exclusive to the fundamentalist Muslims in this study. The moderate Muslims also used such arguments though their liberal interpretations did not lead to the same paradoxes as in the case of the fundamentalist respondents.

beard), the fundamentalist respondents distinguish between obligatory and recommended behaviour. Wearing the *niqab*, for example, is in the view of the fundamentalist respondents recommended, but it is not obligatory. Thus, even though they would not be behaving at their best, they reason that they are remaining within the framework of Islam. Finally, the fundamentalist respondents argue that there are differences in scholarly opinion, also within their own current in Islam. In those cases where they admit that the 'evidence' is not clear, they have to determine which evidence they consider to be the most convincing. Since the fundamentalist respondents emphasize that Muslims have a personal responsibility it is ultimately up to the individual to choose the right verdict. In the case of some fundamentalist respondents I received the impression that they had chosen certain verdicts, which suited them best. In short, the fundamentalist respondents explain and remedy their 'drift' with theological arguments.

Hence, one could argue that group interactions and trying to represent Islam strengthen the fundamentalist respondents' individual and group identity as a Muslim, that is, unless the demands of commitment seemingly become too high as in the case of a couple of the extremist respondents. Through their commitment, the fundamentalist respondents have come to see their Muslim role as an ever more convincing identity.<sup>131</sup>

#### **6.4 Merits: Self-Identity, Belonging and Social Status**

So what do representation, commitment and internalization offer the respondents? It is possible to deduce several merits from the data. A merit from the point of view of the respondents themselves – as of religious believers in general – is obviously the spiritual experience (Giordan, 2009b). Yet, as this study is concerned with understanding what representation, commitment and internalization offers to these particular respondents, it is necessary to also consider the attraction in the light of identity strain. The former sections have already pointed at an important merit in this respect, namely that representing Islam and committing to fundamentalist groups can strengthen one's individual and group identity as a Muslim. Regarding their individual identity the previous section has demonstrated that the fundamentalist respondents generally admit that they are still 'weak' and give in to temptations at times. However, theological explanations of 'drift' and the 'progress' that they experience through internalizing their Muslim identity help the fundamentalist respondents to develop a positive self-image;<sup>132</sup> these explanations and the internalization help them to see themselves as committed Muslims who are striving to eventually

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<sup>131</sup> Also see Goffman (1959) for the internalization of roles in general and Lövheim (2004) for religious online communities.

<sup>132</sup> Compare to Ellison (1992) who says that religious people form more positive self-images and to Pollner (1989) who argues that religious people score higher in terms of their well-being. It would thus seem that the impact of representation of and commitment to fundamentalist identities is similar to that of other religious identities.

become an 'authentic' Muslim. In terms of their group identity, moreover, the fundamentalist respondents gain a secure sense of belonging through committing themselves to the Muslim community and playing their part as group member.

In addition, the image that other group members have improves when the respondents represent Islam and commit themselves to the group. By becoming a practising Muslim the fundamentalist respondents give the impression that they have a good relation with Allah and consequently they gain more respect from in-group members and a better status within the group, which is known to strengthen people's sense of a positive identity (e.g. Bourgois, 2003, Matza, 1990: 189). The respondents report increased respect from family members, like-minded Muslims in the mosque but also random Muslims that they meet. Despite the formal discourse that it is only Allah's opinion that matters, several respondents admitted caring about the opinions of others. Some orthodox female respondents in particular said that they feel more respect from others now they cover themselves. In addition, a couple of the female respondents from Muslim families argued that covering their bodies and practising their faith more helped them to gain trust from their parents. As a result, they say their parents have become less controlling and granted them more freedom to go out (also see Roex et al., 2010). Former radical and born-again Almahdi is one of the men who experienced more respect when he started to grow a beard, dressed more traditionally and became more involved in Islam. He says that almost everybody around him showed him more respect and started to look up to him. He says about this experience: "You are glad, almost proud. It is good to hear that people see you like that. (...) It's those things that give you that positive feeling". In his case, as in the case of many other respondents, initially moderate Muslims in his environment also reacted positively towards him for becoming serious about Islam.

When their fundamentalist orientation becomes clear, however, their fundamentalist community becomes a more important source of respect. Despite the fundamentalist respondents' argument that they should not feel better than other Muslims, they acknowledge that some Muslims practise their faith more and are therefore better Muslims than others. The main criteria that they use to determine whether somebody is a good Muslim – and thus their status within the group – is a person's level of 1) knowledge and 2) *imaan*. One could argue that a high level of knowledge is a precondition for being a good Muslim, whereas the level of *imaan* determines how well somebody tries to put or puts this knowledge into practice. Obviously, the various fundamentalist respondents do differ in terms of what they consider to be the right knowledge and what they see as an expression of high *imaan*. For example, orthodox respondents commonly mentioned that Muslims who are studious, modest and altruistic as probably having a high *imaan*. On the opposite side of the fundamentalist spectrum the extremist respondents argued that engaging in a violent *jihad* and being prepared to die as a martyr are signs of a high *imaan*.

With these differences in mind, two principal trends become apparent from the conversations, online discussions and observations. Firstly, new

members to the group have less status than members who have shown commitment to the group for a longer period of time. In the mosques the relation between being a regular student and status was particularly evident. On average the women who seemed to be viewed as the most knowledgeable in the mosques were in their late twenties up until their mid-thirties and appeared to have been loyal students for a number of years. Yet, there were also younger studious women in their early twenties who taught classes or were regarded as knowledgeable because they had proved their commitment by being a regular visitor. In the mosques this difference in status became apparent, as the loyal students were more eager to answer the teachers' questions than the newer group members. Moreover, besides them providing more answers, the loyal students in the Brixton mosque had fixed places. These women were generally more serious about taking notes and sat next to the 'sing along' karaoke machine through which they could hear the voice of the imam, whereas the other younger women sat at the sides of the room where they were often more occupied with taking care of their young children than with taking notes. When asked about these fixed places, a younger woman explained that this was because these women had been coming to the mosque for a longer time and had earned these places. Over the course of the 3.5 month observation period I never saw any of the younger girls occupy the places of these knowledgeable older women during classes.

The second trend among the Muslims in this study is that they gained status by making a higher than average effort to commit themselves. Examples of such efforts vary from being particularly studious (for instance by learning the Quran by heart), making a special effort in helping Muslim brothers and sisters in trouble, to sharing food with others in the mosque. From the respondents' accounts it appears that Muslims who encounter obstacles to being a Muslim and still stay on the right path, gain additional status. This might explain why in this study's fundamentalist circles converts have a relatively high status, whereas in moderate-traditional Muslim circles it is argued that they experience more trouble in gaining status (e.g. Harmsen, 2008) The fundamentalist respondents mention three reasons for their appreciation of converts. Firstly, the fundamentalist respondents who were raised as Muslims usually see them as brave for having chosen Islam in opposition to their parents and social environment. As a result, they argue, converts have to struggle to be Muslims on a daily basis. This is particularly the case for the youngsters who have recently converted and who still live at home. Secondly, from the observations it became clear that converts tend to make greater efforts to be good Muslims as if to confirm their group membership. Several of the converts in this study mentioned that they felt far behind the other group members in terms of knowledge, which made them feel insecure and inspired them to try to catch up. Their fellow Muslims, in return, argue that they respect the tendency of converts to follow Islam more strictly than many of their brothers and sisters from Muslim families. The common view of the enthusiasm of converts is that it results from the fact that they make a conscious choice to become Muslims. Extremist born-again Marid, for example, says that he is a bit jealous of converts, because 'they have

not wasted time', as he thinks he has. Thirdly, the fundamentalist respondents regard converts as clean, uncorrupted slates. They argue that converts can immediately learn about 'pure' Islam and do not have to rid themselves of the excess baggage of previously adopted cultural Islamic practices. The accounts by the converts show that they generally come to accept these positive views and become more confident, thereby confirming their status. Figure 6.4 contains a fragment from an observation report from the Al Fourkaan mosque in Eindhoven which summarizes the reasons that the respondents give for the converts' positive status.

Besides the reasons that the fundamentalist respondents mention, it is likely that it helps the respondents to feel positive about belonging to their Muslim community. In a time in which the respondents regularly face negative opinions from Dutch non-Muslims about Islam, the fact that native Dutch people convert to Islam could support them in their viewpoints and strengthen their group identity. It seems that in return the group members compliment the converts and make them feel more welcome.

FIGURE 6.4 | *Position of Converts*

The following observation is from a conference where I met a group of Muslima's of Moroccan descent and some Dutch converts. During one of the breaks I was with Laiba when we witnessed the following scene:

A friend of Laiba comes in and greets Laiba in a friendly manner. She is with some older women who enter into a conversation with a native Dutch convert of about 20 years old. The convert is dressed in a dark *khimar* and has red cheeks, seemingly due to excitement. She obviously feels welcome thanks to the interested women and she shares her conversion experiences. She says that in particular she has never been able to understand the Holy Trinity in Christianity. By now I have heard this argument many times, so I listen carefully to what the women have to say. They say *alhamdulillah* several times, full of admiration, in response to the choice to convert. The convert says that she was introduced to Islam through a Muslim friend, but contrasts her own development to that of this girl. According to the convert her friend is now far behind in terms of level of practising. (...) Laiba's friend then explains to me that she respects Dutch converts, because they consciously choose Islam and really go for it. She has been raised as a Muslim and thinks that many other Muslims like her are not as seriously involved with the religion as the converts are, even though they might want to be.

In short, one can argue that commitment and internalization help the fundamentalist respondents to confront identity strain. They do so by, on the one hand, securing a positive sense of self and belonging. On the other hand, they confront identity strain because it gives the respondents an opportunity to gain status. The special status that converts have within the fundamentalist communities in this study could point to an additional attraction of

fundamentalist views for Dutch converts. While they might be seen as outsiders with little knowledge in traditional Muslim groups, they receive respect in fundamentalist groups who want to purify Islam from cultural innovations.

## **6.6 Summary**

This chapter has demonstrated that the fundamentalist respondents strive to represent Islam individually and within their fundamentalist communities. They commonly do this through the use of names, language, their physique, behaviour and activities. Moreover, they maintain the local fundamentalist groups that they form together – besides through representing Islam – through different types of social control and impression management. Despite these efforts, there are some indications that the fundamentalist respondents ‘drift’ between Islamic and Western life styles.

Representing Islam and commitment to their fundamentalist communities helps the respondents to internalize their Muslim identities. To help this internalization and to resolve the tensions of drift, the fundamentalist respondents rely on several theological arguments. As a result, they feel that they are making progress in becoming their ideal, ‘authentic’ self. The principal merits of being a representative of Islam, committing themselves to the group and internalizing the Muslim identity are that they gain a secure, positive sense of self and belonging, and status in the eyes of group-members. It appears that converts have a special status within fundamentalist communities because of the obstacles they have to face on their way to ‘pure’ Islam, their evident efforts and their lack of cultural practices. Thus, representing Islam, committing themselves to fundamentalist groups and internalizing Muslim identities help the fundamentalist respondents to deal with identity strain.



## A 'LATE MODERN' IDENTITY PROJECT UNDER STRAIN

So far this study has sought motives and reasons which can explain the respondents' conversion to orthodox, radical and extremist interpretations of Islam. It has done so by exploring their conversion reports (in Chapter 3), their fundamentalist discourses (in Chapters 4 and 5) and their everyday practice (in Chapter 6). It has become apparent that the fundamentalist respondents report that they had experienced an identity crisis. With the exception of some of the orthodox respondents from Muslim families, this crisis appears to have been an experience of identity strain: feeling a discrepancy between what the respondents saw as their actual, 'unauthentic' self and their ideal image of an 'authentic' self. While this experience of identity strain (and, in the cases of the few orthodox respondents from Muslim families, a milder identity crisis) has contributed to their cognitive opening, their fundamentalist turn took place under the additional influence of significant others. Furthermore, this study has shown that Islamic fundamentalism offers discourses which provide a means for dealing with identity strain. In brief, the dualism of fundamentalist – and particularly extremist – discourses offer a positive and secure individual and group identity. It does so by providing clear sources of identification as well as aspects to 'resist'. Moreover, it has become clear that the fundamentalist respondents try to put these discourses into practice. Even though there are some tensions observable between their fundamentalist ideals and everyday practice, the respondents believe that they represent Islam or are at least trying to do so. Through their individual practices, their commitment to the group and group pressures the fundamentalist respondents internalize the image of an 'authentic' Muslim self and community.

My following task is to try to put these findings into perspective by interpreting them further. That means that, firstly, it is necessary to reflect on the respondents' conversion to fundamentalism in the light of the contemporary social context. And secondly, on the basis of its findings, this study requires a coherent theoretical framework, which – if possible – encompasses the respondents' various motives, reasons and practices. The following section deals with the first matter. In this it considers what scholars have previously presented as modern aspects of fundamentalism and which modern characteristics can be deduced from the Dutch respondents' fundamentalist views and behaviour. The subsequent section includes the explanatory part of the theoretical framework. As will become clear, this framework is the result of 'bricolage' as I take useful elements of existing theories – that might in some cases seem outdated, but hold valuable lessons – and reconstruct them to fit the modern context. The principal theoretical elements stem from Cohen's theory of delinquent subcultures and his later 'sociology of the deviant act', Merton's strain theory (as introduced in earlier

chapters), Giddens's ideas about identity projects and Bauman's reflections on liquid society. The resulting theoretical framework shows how social structure, cultural goals, negative representations of Muslims in the media and individual experiences all play an interactive part in the construction of fundamentalist subcultures among Dutch Muslims.

### **7.1 'Late modern' Fundamentalists**

How does the respondents' conversion fit into the broader social context of modern Dutch society? At first glance there might not seem to be much modern in a turn to Islamic fundamentalism, which aims at recovering the 'pure' Islam of many centuries ago. Yet, when taking a closer look at the attitudes and behaviour of the fundamentalist Muslims in this study, some modern elements become evident.

First of all, certain aspects of the respondents' Islamic fundamentalist discourse correspond with contemporary, Western attitudes and beliefs. For one, the nostalgia for the glorious past of Islam could itself be seen as modern. Giddens (1991: 206) and Young (1999) contend that in the chaos of a globalizing, modern world, people are tempted to nostalgically search for past securities to hold on to. The longing for 'pure' Islam and its clear rules could be regarded as examples of such securities. Furthermore, the fundamentalist respondents have adopted the belief that humans are capable of reshaping the world according to their ideal. Gray (2003) has argued that such a belief in human control is a modern, Western myth.<sup>133</sup> In line with Gray's argument one could even argue that the fundamentalist respondents have also adopted this modern myth on the personal level through their objective to reshape their individual selves according to their ideal role models. They believe that through striving to be good Muslims they gain control over their own destiny in the afterlife. In addition, this study has demonstrated that the fundamentalist respondents focus on individual responsibility. Despite their collective ideal of a global Muslim community, they emphasize the individual obligation to gain Islamic knowledge, distinguish truth from falseness, and to strive to become a better Muslim. The fundamentalist respondents stress their personal relationship with God and emphasize that they should not blindly follow scholars, but remain critical and investigate things for themselves. One could argue, therefore, that this emphasis matches modern, individualist attitudes. Finally, the fundamentalist respondents display modern, Western arguments in their resistance to social injustice as they generally apply common Western standards to determine what qualifies as such injustice. For example, they complain about double standards of Western countries towards Muslims regarding the right to self-defence and/or the freedom of speech. It thus appears that the

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<sup>133</sup> A typical example of this type of reasoning is present in Fukuyama's work 'The End of History' (1992) in which he argues that history is about to reach its ideal destination: liberal, capitalist democracy.

fundamentalist respondents are disappointed in common, Western expectations that they have seemingly internalized.

Secondly, Islamic fundamentalist movements are modern in the sense that they could be seen as interactive results of contemporary social contexts, both globally and in the Netherlands. On a global scale, Roy (2004) and Mandaville (2004) argue that fundamentalist movements stem from contemporary struggles between currents in Islam within the Muslim world which Huntington's (1996) essentialist view of Islam ignores. Such struggles also became visible in this study, both within fundamentalist groups and between moderate Muslims and the various fundamentalist groups. Therefore, in accordance with Mandaville (2004: 81-82):

The politics of 'Islam and the West' is but one side of the story. Another politics, that of Islam and its own 'internal others', is becoming increasingly important in the present translocal climate. Hegemony in its Western guise is not the only obstacle contemporary Islam needs to negotiate; there is also hegemony within. Islam is still undoubtedly the master signifier, but there is an enormous conceptual diversity as to the proper relationship between this signifier and its signified(s).

These struggles relate to religion's claim to be the truth, both within and outside the Muslim world. It could, therefore, be argued that the fundamentalist respondents' scripturalist, absolutist claim to one ultimate and knowable truth is a counter-reaction to contemporary society's pluralism. In addition, regarding the situation in Western countries, Roy (2004) views the emergence of transnational Muslim movements, such as those of radical Islam, as a modern result of the longing for a strong Muslim identity in societies where Muslims form a minority. This argument also seems to be true for the Dutch context, where negative attention to Islam has weakened the already precarious social position of Muslims since 9/11. As has become clear, fundamentalism's strong identity has been a major attraction to the fundamentalist respondents, in line with this argument to those from Muslim families. Furthermore, Islamic fundamentalist discourses are contemporary in the sense that they are, at least in part, a reaction to Western cultural norms and values. This becomes clear from the fact that fundamentalist discourses provide a counter-discourse against what they present as the 'excesses' of Western materialism, individualism, sexual freedom, lack of gender roles, lack of deeper meaning and suchlike. Through such counter-discourses, the covering of women's bodies and social separation of the sexes can – in a Western context – become symbolic for the 'liberation' of what the fundamentalist respondents see as Western promiscuity and the focus on sexuality.

Thirdly, on the behavioural level there are some respects in which the fundamentalist respondents show that they are products of modern Western societies. This becomes principally evident in what seems to be their occasional 'consumption' of Islam and their Muslim identity (compare to Aldridge, 2007: 216-217; Boccock, 1993). Chapter 6 has shown that the respondents tend to

'shop' for suitable verdicts and interpretations, and that pragmatism and nuances in putting Islamic rules into practice leads them to drift between a more fundamentalist and 'Western' lifestyle.<sup>134</sup> Another example of consumption could be argued to be present in the respondents' great interest in knowledge about simple, everyday rules that are relatively easy to implement and are thus arguably more 'consumable'. Besides these forms of 'consumption', a modern attitude and even practice is visible in the female respondents' focus on liberties and rights. Despite the common image of traditional gender roles, several of the female respondents reported that they received less social control from their Muslim families after their conversion to fundamentalism and/or used fundamentalist discourses to assert themselves to men by pointing to the rights of women in Islam.

In brief, there are thus several modern aspects to the fundamentalist discourses and behaviour of the Muslims in this study. The question that remains for the following section is to what extent an explanatory, theoretical framework could be built to fit the findings as summarized in this section.

## **7.2 Bricolaging an Explanatory Model: A Modern Identity Project, Subcultures, and Strain**

To build a theoretical framework that covers this study's findings this section consists of three steps. Firstly, this section considers relevant theories on the contemporary social context. Secondly, it will relate these theories about late modernity to suitable theories for the individual and group characteristics of the respondents. These are theories concerning the emergence of subcultures and strain. Thirdly, this will contribute to a theoretical model which encompasses both the complexity of the many social-structural and social-psychological factors that have contributed to the respondents' conversion to Islamic fundamentalism. The choice of theories stems from an evaluation of these factors: the impact of the respondents' social context, their modern attitudes and behaviour, their focus on identity and their group processes. For that reason I have opted for theories about late modernity and the formation of subcultures which pay attention to identity formation as a process that individuals engage in as active actors.

### *7.2.1 Dutch Fundamentalism and Late Modernity*

The previous section reflected on the modern characteristics of the respondents' fundamentalism. In view of these modern aspects, it could be considered whether their conversion to Islamic fundamentalism could be explained using existing theories about modern times. To answer that question this section discusses some principal ideas that scholars such as Bauman (2000, 2006), Giddens (1991)

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<sup>134</sup> This 'drift' is comparable to how Matza (1990) describes the drift of delinquents between conventional and criminal activities. In his view delinquents are only "casually, intermittently, and transiently emerged in a pattern of illegal action" and do not fully commit themselves to neither delinquent or to conventional acts (Matza, 1990: 28).

and Young (1999, 2007) have presented about 'late modernity'. At the end of this section a comparison will be drawn between their reflections and the situation of the fundamentalist respondents.

According to these scholars we live in turbulent times in which society is dramatically changing shape through globalization, technological advances, the consequential changing dimensions of time and space, fragmentation, individualism, the decline of community, secularization, emancipation and rising expectations in Western, prosperous societies. One could disagree about the novelty and the actual causes of these developments (e.g. Jameson, 1991). Yet, despite possible differences in opinion about the causes, there is no doubt that people deal with social changes and that these changes foster insecurities. Bauman (2000) therefore speaks of late modern societies as being 'liquid societies' which are characterized by increasing mobility and inconstancy. As a consequence, scholars have argued, inhabitants of contemporary societies cope with ontological insecurities that threaten a stable sense of self.

Scholars have argued that such changes affect people's sense of identity on both a group and individual level. Concerning the group level, scholars such as Castells (1997: Chapter 5) state that globalization destabilizes a major traditional source of identity: national identities. He contends that increasing flows of trade and people challenge the power and meaning of the nation state and national identities. Though others, like Sassen (1998: Chapter 10), stress that the nation-state has not become irrelevant, it is likely that global social changes can contribute to identity crisis and strain among the population of nation states. In line with Young's (2007: 141) argument, this crisis could increase the desire to confirm national identities, which can foster polarization and social exclusion of ethnic and other out-groups, such as Moroccans or Muslims in the Netherlands. However, globalization does not only threaten group identities. On the contrary, through the relocation of time and space in the information age, transnational 'imagined communities'<sup>135</sup> are on the rise. Most notably the Internet has opened paths to transnational communities and hence transnational ways of belonging (e.g. Eriksen, 2003; Mandaville, 2004).

At the same time, scholars have argued that identity has become of central importance in modern societies. Giddens (1991) speaks of identity as a project (also see Bauman, 2004: 18; and cf. Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Giddens characterizes this project as an interactive, continuous and reflexive endeavour. In his view, the identity project demands that individuals make a life-long effort to accomplish self-actualization. To reach self-actualization they have to feel 'true' to themselves, which requires them to be convinced of their self-image (cf. Goffman, 1959). In late modern societies people evaluate the level of success of this project in multiple areas: concerning personal relations, jobs, talents, health, beauty, et cetera. Yet, Giddens argues,

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<sup>135</sup> Anderson (1983) also describes nations as 'imagined communities'. He argues that they are *imagined* in the sense that "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983: 6)

succeeding in one's identity project is a personal responsibility. Failure is therefore something that one has to blame oneself for and a lack of success can thus negatively affect one's self-image (also see Young, 2007: Chapters 1 and 2). Since Giddens also considers identity to be an interactive project, however, it requires confirmation by others. When people feel deprived of confirmation and feel that they have not reached their ideal image of 'full potential', this could arguably contribute to stress and an identity crisis.

It could be argued, moreover, that there are several factors that can further a sense of crisis. One factor which complicates matters for individuals is the wide range of lifestyle options that they have in contemporary society. Principally through emancipation, fragmentation and individualism such options have expanded in Western countries such as the Netherlands and are less restricted by matters such as gender, social class and traditions. For example, it is decreasingly likely that an individual would become a carpenter because his father was one. Moreover, the traditional roles of men and women are disappearing, as well as the obvious character of social institutions related to these roles, such as marriage. People thus have a personal responsibility to choose 'the right' option from a larger variety of lifestyles (Giddens, 1991: 75-85; Bauman, 2000; Beck 1986). This could prompt people to feel stressed about the need to make choices, which could enhance the sense of identity crisis (Giddens, 1991: 196). Another factor which complicates matters concerns the apparently increased expectations of success in Western consumer societies. A successful identity project – in the eyes of the self and others – requires choosing the 'right' lifestyle. It would be considered to be the 'right' lifestyle if it neutralizes an individual's feelings of meaninglessness and replaces them with the satisfactory experience of self-actualization by becoming one's 'authentic' self (Bauman, 2004; Giddens, 1991; Young, 2007). Satisfaction might be hard to achieve in a consumer society, which stimulates people to always want more. It is equally hard to achieve because of the images portrayed in the media of what it means to be 'somebody', such as being a famous VIP and as demonstrated by the multitude of talent shows on television. This could lead to people having high expectations of themselves which could intensify the experience of crisis.

Obviously, it is hard to determine what impact such social trends have on individuals, such as the fundamentalist respondents. Nonetheless, elements of these theories about late modern times are recognizable in the accounts of the fundamentalist respondents, since they reported experiences of ontological insecurity. Moreover, it appears that their religious practice remedies these ontological insecurities in precisely those areas that theories about late modernity identify as evoking such insecurities. That is, Islamic fundamentalist discourses sketch an image of ultimate security by limiting lifestyle options through rules, countering aspects of emancipation through the renewed introduction of traditional gender roles, the denial of pluralism's validity by promoting an image of universal truth, the emphasis on brotherhood as opposed to weakening social bonds and national identities, and the negation of the value of worldly success. However, while trying to overcome these ontological insecurities, the

fundamentalist respondents still appear to undertake an identity project. This becomes clear from their image of an 'authentic' self that one has to strive for throughout one's life, their argument of personal responsibility in self-actualization, their belief that one can always become better (as a Muslim), and the high and idealized standards which the extremist respondents in particular set for themselves.

In short, it appears that the fundamentalist respondents are engaged in a late modern identity project. Through this project they try to approach a stable, secure image of an 'authentic' self that remedies a number of insecurities linked to modern times.

### *7.2.2 Bricolaging a Theory of Identity Strain*

While these theories about late modernity might explain what attracts the respondents to Islamic fundamentalist views and why they engage in an identity project in this day and age, these theories fail to account for several matters concerning Islamic fundamentalism's attraction. Firstly, considering that theories about late modern society assume that ontological insecurities are a common societal feature, one might expect that fundamentalist views would attract more Western citizens than they currently do. These theories do not thus explain why only some Westerners turn to Islamic fundamentalism to find ontological security. Secondly, the ideas about late modernity discussed do not explain why the respondents opt for Islamic fundamentalism and not for other fundamentalist or dualist views. Thirdly, these theories fail to explain why some respondents opt for orthodoxy while others adopt radical or extremist views. To understand these matters a shift of focus is required from the macro-sociological level to the individual and group level. Most notably, the respondents' conversion accounts can help to determine this study's theoretical focus.

As this study has shown, the respondents' conversion and commitment to various Islamic fundamentalist views relates to a combination of a large variety of factors, involving a cognitive opening and the influence of significant others and group processes. The cognitive opening of the fundamentalist respondents is linked to an identity crisis that is in most cases characterized by the experience of 'identity strain'. Significant others and group processes have contributed to the respondents' conversion processes by introducing them to fundamentalist beliefs and by stimulating commitment to the group. It is the identity strain that distinguishes the fundamentalist respondents from the moderate respondents and that could thus explain why only some turn to fundamentalist views. The interactive role of such individual strain and group processes come together in Cohen's work on delinquent subcultures (1955) and especially in his 'Sociology of the Deviant Act' (1965). In this work he uses Merton's (1938) strain theory, which he adapts, principally by adding an interactionist perspective. In his first major work on delinquent subcultures, Cohen explains these subcultures by building on Merton's concept of cultural goals versus structural opportunities (Young, 2009b). Although Cohen explains delinquent subcultures by status frustration which stems from class differences and differential opportunity

structures, he broadens his theoretical perspective in ‘Sociology of the Deviant Act’ by not only talking of ‘status’, but also of ‘self’ and ‘social identity’. He thus creates scope for the focus on ‘identity’ that a theory for the Dutch Muslim’s conversion to fundamentalism requires. Cohen even challenges academics to combine interactionist perspectives on identity<sup>136</sup> with strain theories to come to a general theory of deviance. Moreover, since he talks of deviance as including matters such as opposition to dominant social norms – and compares the adoption of deviant roles to processes of religious conversion – his challenge does not appear to be limited to explaining crime, but also seems to aim at including non-conformist, oppositional views such as those of Islamic fundamentalism (Cohen, 1965: 13-14). Cohen’s theoretical contributions on subcultures, symbolic interactionism and his adaptations of Merton’s concept of strain could thus serve as a basis for bricolaging a suitable theoretical framework which explains the choice for the various fundamentalist views.

### *Explaining the Cognitive Opening*

One facet of the explanation of the respondents’ conversion to Islamic fundamentalism concerns the accounts of what I have described as ‘identity strain’. I have opted for this term with reference to Merton (1938), because of the ontological questions that most fundamentalist respondents report and the discrepancy between their actual (‘unauthentic’) self and ideal (‘authentic’) self which fosters tension.<sup>137</sup> These respondents reported a combination of various strenuous experiences, varying from being adrift in their life, personal loss and suffering, social exclusion and lack of recognition, and a desire for transcendence. But how does identity strain relate to Merton’s distinction between culture and social structure? An answer to this question would serve as a first response to Cohen’s challenge to bring symbolic interactionist theories of the self together with strain theories. In an attempt to take on that challenge, I will first place the concepts ‘culture’ and ‘social structure’ in the broader context of present times.

In relation to cultural goals, Merton has acknowledged in an interview with Cullen and Messner (2007) that he chose financial success as an example of the multiple cultural goals that exist in society. In view of this, one could argue that the emphasis on identity projects would therefore indicate that a successful identity is a cultural goal in contemporary Western societies like the

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<sup>136</sup> The starting point which he summarizes as “the actor engaged in an ongoing process of finding, building, testing, validating, and expressing a self”.

<sup>137</sup> Social-psychological identity theories have made a similar distinction between actual and ideal self. Erikson (1968) already distinguished between the ‘ego identity’ and the ‘ego ideal’ or the ‘ideal self’. Self-discrepancy theories elaborate on these ideas and present various types of discrepancies between an actual self and an ideal or ought self. With ‘ideal self’ they refer to the ideal image that somebody aspires to, or believes another person to wish, for the self. The ‘ought self’ concerns an image of what a person should be like (what his or her duty is), either from a personal perspective or in the eyes of others. Self-discrepancy theories have attempted to integrate these different discrepancies into one model that explains the emotional reactions to the various discrepancies, such as low self-esteem and anger (Higgins, 1999). Self-discrepancy theories fail, however, to clarify how people cope with these emotions.

Netherlands.<sup>138</sup> The fundamentalist respondents also appear to have embraced this goal as their search for personal value and their identity projects suggest. To reach this goal, modern-day societies grant a multitude of means, due to increasing lifestyle options, which allow for different paths to create a successful identity project.

But does that mean that the contemporary social structure grants people – including the respondents – sufficient opportunities to succeed in their identity project? It is regarding these structural matters that the characteristics of late modern societies come into the theoretical framework. As mentioned in Section 7.2.1, late modern societies have been characterized as liquid which fosters ontological insecurity, an insecurity that the fundamentalist respondents also claim to have felt and have searched for a way out to overcome it. So, nothing in these societies appears solid, including sources of identity. For example, as a result of the lack of traditional gender roles, it has become less evident what it means to be a woman or a man. Similarly, job insecurities and an increase of options on the labour market, makes it harder for people to derive a secure identity from their work. Consequently, the liquidity of the social structure limits the opportunities for people to reach a stable and satisfying sense of self, especially as reflected in the respondents' experience of being adrift in their lives. On the basis of the theoretical thoughts of Cohen (1955, 1965) but also Young (2007) and Tajfel (1974) one could argue that such a lack of a solid or 'positive' identity can breed polarization and social conflicts between groups, because the lack of stable sources for identification can encourage people to determine their identities in opposition to others, such as the radical and extremist respondents above all do. The resulting polarization and social conflict, in turn, impact on the social structure as they lead to in-groups and out-groups that have differential opportunity structures for achieving a successful identity. Theories on the formation of individual and group identities assume that members of out-groups are expected to have more trouble establishing a positive group identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which is likely to affect their individual identity (Goffman, 1963). As polarization between Muslims and non-Muslims has increased in the Netherlands, the social structure has made it harder for Muslims to establish a positive group identity since 9/11. This is clearly visible in the social exclusion and lack of recognition that the respondents from Muslim families and the converts (after their conversion) report.

It could even be argued that cultural goals themselves form obstructions to the opportunities for achieving a successful identity. The assumption behind a successful identity project is that one should continuously strive to become more authentic regarding every aspect of one's identity (in terms of jobs, relationships,

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<sup>138</sup> In so many words Young also acknowledges this by arguing that "self-realization, the notion of constructing one's own destiny and narrative, becomes a dominant ideal. (...) All of this creates great potentialities for human flexibility and reinvention. Yet it generates at the same time considerable ontological insecurity – precariousness of being. (...) At no stage in history has there been such a premium on identity, on constructing a narrative of development and discovery, yet where the materials to construct it are so transient and insubstantial" (Young, 2007: 3).

self-expression, et cetera). A tension thus between, on the one hand the project never being finished, and on the other hand, the focus on ‘authenticity’ and ‘self-actualization’ which suggest the possibility of completion. In short, high cultural expectations obstruct the very potential of the opportunity structure to make people – who strive to ‘have it all’, possibly fuelled by consumer ideals – feel satisfied about their identity project (cf. Young, 2007: 3). The fact that many fundamentalist respondents stated that they ‘lacked a sense of satisfaction’ supports the validity of this assumption.

Furthermore, people necessarily evaluate the success of their own project in comparison to others who might be more successful (at least in certain respects). This occurs, for example, through comparison with fairytale lives in films or images of celebrities that they are confronted with in the media (also see Cohen, 1955: 124-125). As a result, people could feel ‘relatively deprived’, which would make it hard to feel satisfaction with one’s personal identity project. This could account for the desire for personal transcendence that most of the radical and extremist respondents report, as this desire also reflects the high expectations of oneself in comparison to others. While having to deal with these high expectations, the Muslim respondents are more likely to feel relatively deprived as they tend to experience less recognition in the Netherlands due to Islamophobic sentiments.

In sum, updating Cohen’s theories to the late modern context of the Netherlands helps to understand the cognitive opening of the respondents for conversion and radical conversion. The essence of this update is that the respondents, like other people in late modern societies, can experience strain regarding their identity because not everybody has the opportunities to reach the cultural goal of a successful identity project. The lack of opportunity is, on the one hand, due to the social structure, because it is the liquid nature of society which fosters ontological insecurity and as such it obstructs a stable and positive identity project. On the other hand, the lack of opportunity is inherent in contemporary cultural goals. Contrary to the image that one should succeed at reaching a fixed state of ‘authenticity’, identity projects are dynamic and are supposed to continue until death. One is thus unlikely to reach a stable sense of satisfaction. This lack of satisfaction is further impeded by relative deprivation through comparison with the many (mass-mediated) examples of ‘more successful’ others. Individuals who encounter negative opinions about their identity – such as Muslims facing Islamophobic sentiments – are likely to feel more relatively deprived regarding their identity project than members of positively valued groups.

### *Explaining Fundamentalist Subcultures*

Besides providing a theory for the respondents’ cognitive opening it is also necessary to explain the role of group processes and how – and especially why – Islamic fundamentalism provides a ‘secure’ identity, which helps the respondents cope with identity strain. For this purpose, it is helpful to turn to Cohen’s and other scholars’ work on subcultures, deviant or otherwise. According to Cohen

the problems of adjustment that are implicit in status frustration – which could be argued to equally apply to ‘identity strain’ – inspire people to search for like-minded people with whom they form subcultures. Through these subcultures, Cohen argues, people seek a way out of their problems of adjustment. Although Cohen offers a theory of deviant subcultures he makes occasional reference to other subcultures, thereby implying that the same pattern may apply to non-deviant subcultures. Obviously, subcultural group processes and the merits of membership are not reserved to deviant subcultures (e.g. Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979). Therefore, it should be possible to formulate a subcultural theory, which includes the various forms of fundamentalism in this study. I will do this by taking three steps. Firstly, I will reflect on what subcultures are and in what ways the respondents’ groups match this description. Secondly, I will try to explain the different ways in which the fundamentalist respondents became part of fundamentalist groups to explain the role of significant others. Thirdly, I will try to create a theoretical framework for the attraction of and commitment to the different fundamentalist groups.

Hall and Jefferson (1976) describe subcultures as ‘sub-sets’ that show both differences and commonalities with their parent culture. In their view:

Subcultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their ‘parent’ culture. They must be focussed around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But, since they are sub-sets, there must also be significant things which bind and articulate them with the ‘parent culture’ (Hall & Jefferson, 1976: 13-14).

One scholar who can shed light on the distinctive character of subcultures is Hebdige (1979). He explains that “subcultures represent ‘noise’ (as opposed to sound)” and attempt to form “a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation”. As such Hebdige emphasizes the oppositional character of subcultures, such as the punks. Subcultures represent noise through the development of subcultural, oppositional styles (also see Clarke, 1976; Muggleton, 2000). Previous studies in the Netherlands have already applied the term ‘subcultures’ to describe Islamic fundamentalist groups. These studies have mentioned that within Islam various subcultures come into being based on different interpretations and expressions of Islam. Contrary to the image of tightly-knit networks, these studies present a more nuanced view of the level of connectedness between group members (Buijs et al., 2006; de Koning, 2008, 2009; Roex et al., 2010). The present study also confirms that subgroups and individual differences of opinion exist within each of these communities, which points to the fragmentation of subcultural identities (also see Grossberg, 1996: 91). Despite this fragmentation, the general characteristics of subcultures mentioned by Hall and Jefferson (1976) are noticeable in each of these groups, although one might argue that they have two – namely Dutch and Islamic – parent cultures. The commonalities between the fundamentalist respondents’

subcultures and their Dutch and Islamic parent cultures are apparent, respectively in the respondents' modern features as mentioned in the previous sections and in the use of Islamic sources of knowledge. Regarding their distinctiveness, the previous chapters have discussed several features that set fundamentalist subcultures apart from their parent cultures. Most notably, the fundamentalist respondents develop alternative activities, such as attending Islamic lectures with like-minded Muslims. Regarding their values, they resist what they see as the degeneration of both Islam and modern Western societies. Moreover, they oppose the negative connotation that 'pure' Islam has in these societies. In terms of material artefacts, the clothing of fundamentalist Muslims in a Western context is the most striking symbol of their subcultural resistance. The ideal of covering the body for women and wearing traditional clothes and beards for men, for example, most obviously represents opposition to the central role that looks, fashion, and sexuality play in Dutch society, including among moderate Muslim citizens. Finally, the fundamentalist respondents create Islamic territories by creating virtual or actual Islamic surroundings, by trying to avoid un-Islamic environments such as bars and clubs and by preferring single-gender (work) environments (for subcultural territories in general see also Clarke, Hall, Jefferson & Roberts, 1976: 14; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995). In short, the subcultural styles of the fundamentalist respondents resist their parent cultures to a considerable extent.<sup>139</sup> One could even argue that their counter-discourses symbolize the 'noise' that Hebdige talks of in relation to punk subculture, even though the punks' anarchism might seem far removed from Islamic fundamentalism (cf. Fraihi, 2006; Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979: 100-102).<sup>140</sup> While the punk counter-discourse involved 'liberation' from strict rules through anarchic ideals, the use of foul language, promiscuous sexual behaviour and dissonant music, the fundamentalist respondents seem to be heading in the opposite direction and want to be 'liberated' – in their view – from the many lifestyle options and the lack of 'clear' rules in a contemporary Western society such as the Netherlands (cf. Haenfler, 2007 who describes this type of resistance in the 'straight edge' movement).

Now that this section has established that the fundamentalist respondents' form subcultures, it will now turn to how they commit themselves to these groups. What is obvious about the respondents' commitment is that they took different paths toward the various fundamentalist groups. It appears that in some cases peers play a central part in drawing in the respondents, whereas in other cases the initiative to engage in fundamentalist circles seems to stem

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<sup>139</sup> Unlike those of the moderate respondents that reflect their dual belonging; while the moderate women generally wear a headscarf and some men opt for a beard, they mix Islamic and Western styles and blend them into a more modern form. A typical example is the fashionable, short dress on top of trousers which especially the moderate female respondents wear. Another example is that moderates listen to both Islamic and Western music. They see the two types of belonging not as mutually exclusive and thus a hybrid subculture of a non-resistant kind is a logical result.

<sup>140</sup> The disagreement between the various Islamic orientations and their resistance to both Islamic and Western cultural elements confirm criticism of the image of subcultures as monolithic counter-cultures pitted against one dominant 'parent culture' (see Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003: 7).

mainly from the respondents themselves. In both cases, however, the respondents seemingly had a cognitive opening for particular fundamentalist interpretations. The respondents' engagement in fundamentalist subcultural groups thus appears to result from a combination of interactive learning, the gradual internalization of group standards and a desire to belong. This study's theoretical frame should therefore include elements of social learning, identity and symbolic interactionist theories. In Cohen's subcultural theory all these elements are present. He describes the coming into being of a subculture as a process of "mutual conversion" in which the conversion of others helps to convert oneself (Cohen, 1955: 61). In his view, people opt for a specific subcultural group through a combination of available ideologies, by 'shopping around', and by meeting 'kindred souls' (Cohen, 1955: 70). His ideas thus cover the situation of the respondents, who also appear to have sought contact with like-minded people and with whom they have internalized fundamentalist subcultural norms in social interaction.

This raises the question as to why the respondents form and seek out the various fundamentalist subcultures. Cohen contends that people who adopt an alternative moral order, such as that of a delinquent subculture or a religious group, could be inspired to do so by problems of adjustment for which they seek a solution in this alternative moral order. He explains the solution that religious subcultures promise by describing them as:

Coalitions of groups whose status is unsatisfactory or precarious within the framework of the existing order and who find, in the ideology of the movement, reassurance of their importance and worth or the promise of a new society in which their importance and worth will be recognized (Cohen, 1955: 66).

Since the desire for status has made way for the more encompassing search for a stable, positive individual and group identity to explain the processes in this study, Cohen's ideas could be further adapted by arguing that the fundamentalist respondents who experienced an 'unsatisfactory or precarious' individual and group identity, also interactively search 'reassurance of their importance and worth'. They appear to find this reassurance in a fundamentalist moral order and in the fundamentalist image of an emerging global *ummah* 'in which their importance and worth will be recognized' (also see Haenfler, 2007).

Nonetheless, according to Cohen becoming part of such a subculture does not necessarily lead to a permanent or real solution. Concerning the permanence he states that subcultures can come to an end when they cease to match the needs of current or potential members (Cohen, 1955: 65). Similarly, one could argue that subcultures can adapt over time when the needs of the group's members change. Fundamentalist subcultures are therefore not static, but dynamic. From an individual standpoint one could equally argue that a change in one's personal needs or a lack of fulfilment could make one leave a subcultural group. This assumption helps to explain why some of the former and current fundamentalist respondents either adapt their views and practices or abandon

fundamentalist views over time. Regarding how ‘real’ the solution of subcultural membership is, Cohen contends that even though people might embrace an alternative moral order, their old moral order is still present (see Section 5.2.3). As such, Cohen’s theory explains the drift that the respondents demonstrate between modern, Western and fundamentalist views and practices as stemming – at least in part – from the previously internalized ‘Western’ moral order that keeps pressing for recognition.

Besides these limitations to the solution that subcultures offer, Cohen sees complications if the subculture adopts views and behaviour that dominant groups in society are opposed to. As he states:

To the extent that the esteem of outsiders is a value to the members of the group, a new problem is engendered. To this problem the typical solution is to devalue the good will and respect of those whose good will and respect are forfeit anyway. The new subculture of the community of innovators comes to include hostile and contemptuous images of those groups whose enmity they have earned (Cohen, 1955: 68).

In Cohen’s view subcultures can respond to criticism through “protective provocation” which means that its members unconsciously evoke the anger and hostility of outsiders in order to prove the outsiders’ animosity. In this, Cohen (1955: 69) argues in a functionalist way: “the hostility of the ‘out-group’, thus engendered or aggravated, may serve to protect the ‘in-group’ from mixed feelings about its way of life” (cf. Young, 2007: 141, 165). He argues this is the case for members of deviant, criminal subcultures who have mixed feelings due to their previous moral order.

Then to what extent do these theoretical notions about mutual hostility apply to the case of the fundamentalist respondents? Regarding this matter it is obvious that certain groups in non-Muslim Dutch society have developed critical if not Islamophobic opinions about Muslims. This development has particularly taken shape since 9/11 and with regard to fundamentalist subcultures. It could thus be argued that members of Islamic fundamentalist subcultures are facing the outer threat of negative opinions from other groups. Nonetheless, the respondents have converted to Islamic fundamentalism when Islam and fundamentalist views were already under social scrutiny. More importantly, some of them were non-Muslims. This raises the question about why they opted for a negatively valued religion rather than other options. Whether negative opinions are a complication or could instead be one of the attractions of Islamic fundamentalist subcultures could thus be considered. An explanation for the attraction of Islam rather than other religions or ideologies could be that it has become one of the most obvious alternative moral orders in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since Islam has become increasingly viewed as ‘other’ by Dutch society, a symbolical distance is undertaken from Dutch society, the old moral order and sources of identity by the very act of turning Muslim (e.g. Wohlrab-Sahr, 2006: 74). Regarding the choice for fundamentalism rather than other interpretations of Islam this study has demonstrated that the image of the ‘other’

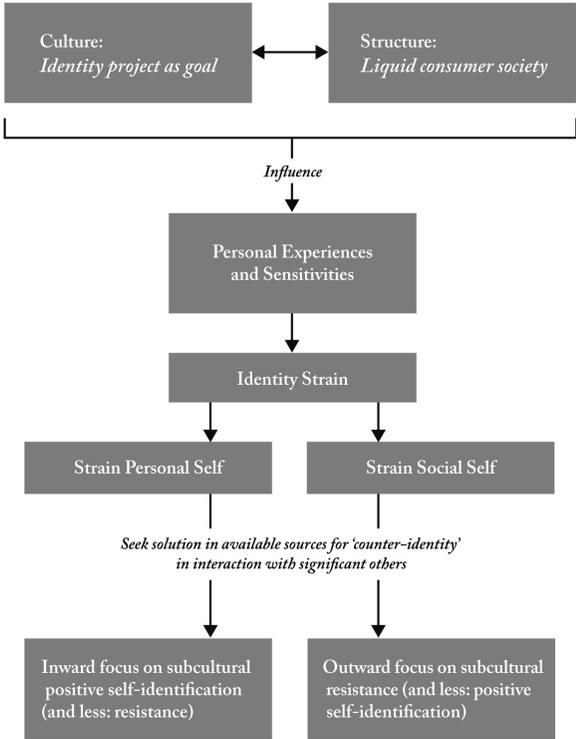
or even 'enemy' helps the fundamentalist respondents to clarify their own individual and group identity. In theoretical terms Christie (1986: 424-43) explains that a communal enemy can raise the sense of connectedness and solidarity between group members and divert the attention away from other, internal struggles. This would imply that people who experience identity strain and who feel outsiders to the dominant groups in society – whether through social exclusion or because they want to distance themselves from the dominant groups' moral orders for other reasons – might in fact be drawn to Islamic fundamentalism, because its dualism helps them to determine their own identity (also see Young, 2007: 34-36).

But how does the issue of hostility relate to the differences between the various fundamentalist groups? This study has demonstrated that these groups display diverse responses to their different types of identity strain, involving varying amounts of out-group hostility. On one end of the fundamentalist spectrum are the orthodox respondents who mainly report strain as a result of personal suffering, which principally concerns their personal selves. In response they focus inwardly by emphasizing self-improvement through positive self-identification rather than resistance or 'hostility'. On the other end of the spectrum are the radical and the extremist respondents who have reported the greatest sensitivity to social exclusion and the most intense desire for personal transcendence. It is especially the extremist respondents who have opted for 'hostile' resistance as the essence of their new identity. These findings are in line with Cohen's assumption that subcultural hostility rises when "the esteem of outsiders is a value to the members of the group," as is particularly the case for radical and extremist respondents who express greater sensitivity to the judgement of others. It could be that a hostile discourse, through which they 'reject the rejectors' (cf. Sykes & Matza, 1957), helps them to devalue the esteem of outsiders. Similarly, the lesser degree of sensitivity of the orthodox respondents to the judgement of others could reduce their need to become hostile.

Moreover, Cohen argues that members of deviant subcultural groups simultaneously create a defence against the inner threat of mixed feelings that stem from their former moral order pressing for recognition. According to Cohen this defence takes place via a process of 'reaction formation', as discussed in Chapter 5. In this chapter it has already been argued that it is not possible to verify whether the response of all the radical and extremist respondents can be understood in terms of reaction formation. Yet, the accounts of the former radical and extremist respondents do point at reaction formation in their cases, as they confirm in retrospect that they projected their internal struggle outwards. For now, however, suffice it to explain the differences between the orthodox respondents and the radical and extremist respondents without reference to reaction-formation. No matter what exact psychological process underlies it, a relation can be observed between their type of identity strain and their animosity. All in all, it appears that among the respondents a lesser degree of sensitivity to the judgement of others and an inward focus coincides with a focus on positive

self-identification, whereas a greater degree of sensitivity and an outward focus relates to an emphasis on hostility and resistance discourses to cope with identity strain.<sup>141</sup>

FIGURE 7.1 | *Explanatory Model Identity Strain and Fundamentalist Responses*



In sum, the respondents have formed Islamic fundamentalist subcultures. They have done so in interaction with like-minded people, and in interactive response to their personal experiences and the social context of the Netherlands. Their choice of Islam can be explained by its counter-cultural potential in modern times in which Islam is under close scrutiny. The choice of fundamentalism

<sup>141</sup> As a result of the adaptations of Cohen's and Merton's theory, the responses to strain that Merton describes are not useful for explaining the responses of the respondents. To some extent they display elements of multiples of these responses: conformity, innovation, rebellion and even retreatism. There are also some resemblances between the respondents' responses to strain and the reactions that Tajfel (1974) describes to inter-group hostility, namely social creativity and social competition. Because of the limited applicability it is more fruitful, in my opinion, to hold on to the descriptions that this study has provided up till now: by describing the response of the fundamentalist Muslims in this study in terms of the process of identification and the different primary focus in this on either positive self-identification or 'resistance'.

relates to the secure identity project that its dualism promises and that they long for. The different orientations of the fundamentalist respondents' subculture could be explained by their different experiences of identity strain. Considering the local meaning that the global phenomenon of Islamic fundamentalism acquires, the resulting fundamentalist subcultures are of a glocal nature (Robertson, 1995; Huq, 2003). Figure 7.1 provides a graphic presentation of the theoretical model as set out in this section.

Their identity strain seems to result from an interplay between the contemporary cultural focus on a successful identity project and a liquid social structure which colours the respondents' personal experiences. It appears that the orthodox respondents who principally experience identity strain concerning their personal selves attempt to cope with this strain by focusing on positive self-identification. The radical and extremist respondents' greater sensitivity to external opinions points to primarily strain concerning their social selves. They deal with this strain through focusing on 'resistance', thereby displaying hostility.

### **7.3 Summary**

What are the results of the efforts in creating a theoretical framework which explains the respondents' conversion to orthodox, radical or extremist Islamic views? Firstly, this chapter has discussed the modern characteristics from the fundamentalist respondents' attitudes and behaviour. It has argued that their nostalgia, belief in the control of destiny, individualism, and their modern Western arguments and expectations indicate that they are products of modern Dutch society. Furthermore, their discourses appear to be related to contemporary struggles, such as in the Muslim world. Moreover, through their discourses they oppose pluralism, social marginalization and certain modern Western norms and values, most notably concerning sexuality.

On the basis of these arguments and the findings of the previous chapters this chapter has continued to bricolage an explanatory model. Theories about late modernity have helped put the fundamentalist respondents' modern characteristics into perspective. It appears that their choice for Islamic fundamentalism is related to the liquid society that they live in as their conversion to fundamentalist views helps them to confront exactly the ontological insecurities and unstable identities that characterize late modern societies. By striving to become as good a Muslim as possible they try to become their 'authentic' selves and thus redirect their late modern identity project. When combining these insights especially with Cohen's reflections on Merton's strain and subcultures it is possible to complete this study's theoretical framework. One theoretical assumption is that it is a cultural goal in late modern societies to have a successful identity project. Secondly, there are both cultural and structural pressures that form obstacles for people who attempt to reach this goal. In short, the liquid structure of late modern societies, the tendency to compare one's situation to that of others and the cultural goal that one has to always strive to become more 'authentic' can destabilize identity projects. Late modern citizens

are therefore likely to experience tension regarding their identity projects. I call this tension identity strain because it involves the tension resulting from a discrepancy between one's sense of an 'actual' self and 'ideal' (or 'authentic') self.

The theoretical model continued by explaining the respondents' reaction to identity strain. To cope with their various forms of identity strain the respondents became part of different fundamentalist subcultures by seeking and interacting with like-minded people. Fundamentalism claims certainty as opposed to late modern doubts and therefore promises a secure identity project. The reason for choosing Islamic fundamentalism rather than other dualist visions is that it is one of the – if not the – most obvious counter-cultural discourse available since 9/11. Moreover, in this chapter I have explained the differential choice for Islamic orthodoxy, radicalism and extremism with the various types of identity strain that the respondents reported. I have done this by combining insights from Merton and Cohen. On this combined theoretical basis I have explained that the orthodox respondents reacted to identity strain by turning their focus mainly inwards through positive self-identification. The radical and extremist respondents though, who demonstrated a greater sensitivity to external opinions, turn their focus principally outwards through resistance. To cope with identity strain it appears that they had to distance themselves more fiercely from the opinions of others by becoming more hostile.

This chapter has thus placed the respondents' motives and reasons for choosing for Islamic fundamentalism as well as their fundamentalist practice in the broader social context and an interactionist theoretical perspective. Consequently, the moment has arrived to draw some conclusions to bring this study to a close.

## **Conclusions**

### **WESTERN FUNDAMENTALISTS: THE NEED FOR AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH**

Now that the end of this study is in sight, it is necessary to go back to the beginning. The introduction raised several questions that required an answer. The two principal research questions are: how is the fundamentalist development of Dutch Muslims taking place, and what are the underlying reasons and motives for this development? While seeking an answer to these questions, this study has offered insight into the meaning of the various Islamic fundamentalist perspectives to the respondents. The conclusions will address this study's principal findings and their implications. For that purpose these conclusions consist of three parts. The first part consists of a summarized answer to the two main research questions. The second part deals with the implications of the findings for the image of an Islamic fundamentalist threat, the 'otherness' of Dutch Muslim fundamentalists, criminological and other theory, and Dutch policy measures. The third and final part reflects on the questions that this study raises for future research.

#### **Fundamentalist Development, Reasons and Motives**

Regarding the respondents' religious development, this study has shown that they went through a process of religious conversion. The respondents' conversion processes appear to be the result of a complex interaction of various factors. Furthermore, according to the fundamentalist respondents' stories the form this process took varied. Some of them reported specific and abrupt turning points while others claim their development to have been slow and steady. Furthermore, even though converts tend to present themselves as independent seekers, there does appear to be some variation in the extent to which significant others played a role in the respondents' conversion processes. Some respondents acknowledge that significant others have played an important part in their discovery of and commitment to Islamic fundamentalism. Others appear to have been more active and independent in seeking out their fundamentalist group. In addition, this study has demonstrated that their development has taken different directions over time. Whereas some have stayed relatively loyal to their fundamentalist outlook, others have drastically changed their viewpoints in the course of time. The most typical case was a convert who initially turned to Islamic extremism, and then 'drifted' from moderate to orthodox views, all within approximately two years time. The respondents tend to view this drift as part of a 'natural process' that is overall one of a gradual 'progress'. Besides the respondents' attitudes that developed over time, their practice also reflects drift (in terms of Matza, 1990).

On the one hand, this occurs because respondents changed their Islamic practice over the years, for example because of new insights. On the other hand, the respondents seem to drift between fundamentalist and Western lifestyles, as becomes evident in their pragmatic approach to life in the Netherlands. With regard to their practice the respondents generally feel that their drift does not obstruct their aims to become better Muslims.

*Differential Experiences: An Orthodox Inward and Radical/Extremist Outward Focus*

While significant others play an essential part – at least in the commitment of the respondents to their fundamentalist groups – their influence fails to account for the choice between the different types of fundamentalism. Instead, the turn to orthodoxy, radicalism or extremism, appears to be related to the cognitive opening that the respondents have at a particular moment in time. For most fundamentalist respondents this opening concerned a severe experience of identity crisis, resulting from at least two types of the following experiences: disillusionment with being adrift in their lives and a lack of deeper meaning, personal suffering and loss, social exclusion and a lack of recognition, and a desire for transcendence. I have chosen to talk of ‘identity strain’, because of the respondents’ accounts that they experienced a tension due to a discrepancy between what they see as their actual or ‘unauthentic’ selves and their ideal or ‘authentic’ selves.

Typically, the experiences reported by the orthodox respondents were different from those reported by the radical and extremist respondents. The orthodox respondents mainly recounted experiences of personal loss and suffering and sketched an image of strain concerning their ‘personal selves’ which involves an inward focus. The radical and especially the extremist respondents, on the contrary, seemed more sensitive to social exclusion and a lack of recognition. Combined with their dreams to transgress normality and to ‘be special’, I have argued that their strain mainly concerns their ‘social selves’, that is how they think they appear in the eyes of others. They direct their attention more outwardly.

*Dutch Fundamentalists as a Modern Phenomenon*

Furthermore it has become clear that the respondents’ experience of strain is closely linked to the modern Western society that they live in. Like other citizens in late modern societies, the respondents demonstrate the desire to have a successful identity project. I have argued that by undertaking this project they strive to gain a stable sense of their ‘authentic’ selves. Yet, several conditions contribute to their identity project facing strain. These conditions exist on the cultural and structural level of society. Regarding the cultural level, it is inherent in the identity project that one has to strive to become ever more ‘authentic’ and be successful in all areas of one’s life. Consequently, one can never fully reach one’s goal which might contribute to a lack of satisfaction. On the structural level, not everybody has the same opportunities (and capacities) and not

everybody can thus reach the same level of ‘success’ in every area. So when one determines one’s success in comparison to others who are – at least in certain respects – more successful, a satisfying sense of success becomes particularly hard to attain. Another structural obstacle concerns the liquidity of modern society, since liquidity implies a lack of stability and an increase of ontological insecurity, whereas a successful identity project requires a stable, secure sense of self (Bauman, 2004; Giddens, 1991; Young, 2007). Such structural and cultural factors in combination with the respondents’ personal background and experiences explain the respondents’ cognitive opening to Islamic fundamentalist views.

But why did they opt for Islamic fundamentalism and not for another ideology or counter-culture? We have seen that this cannot fully be explained by significant others. The respondents played a much more active part in their conversion processes. As has become clear, identities are formed through positive self-identification and differentiation. One could argue that due to the social attention paid to Islam since 9/11 and polarization Islamic fundamentalism has become one of the most readily available sources for religious identification and opposition in the Netherlands. So for the respondents who experienced identity strain and who tried to construct their ‘authentic identity’, Islamic fundamentalism has become a logical option. As opposed to the ontological insecurities and resulting identity strain, fundamentalist views offer a positive and stable individual and group identity. These secure identities stem from fundamentalism’s dualism which offers clear markers for both positive self-identification – e.g. with their Muslim role models and the Muslim *ummah* – and resistance to ‘un-Islamic’ elements, and stimulates the feeling that they can rely on an ultimate, universal truth and a higher power which is in control. It is in everyday practice and through social interaction and commitment that the respondents internalize their Muslim role and thus strengthen their individual and group fundamentalist identity. It is once again possible to distinguish between the various groups of fundamentalists. In line with their inward focus, the orthodox respondents emphasize the path of positive self-identification. They focus on improving themselves and doing *da’wa* by following the example of their role models in terms of piety, patience, friendliness, helpfulness and suchlike. On the contrary, the radical and extremist respondents with their outward focus stress the path of resistance. Their resistance identities (Castells, 1997) help them to distance themselves from normality and/or turn against those people or elements of society that they felt judged by or excluded from (Cohen, 1955).

### **Research Implications: A More Nuanced View of Dutch Muslim Fundamentalists**

So far this study has reviewed the religious development and focus of the fundamentalist respondents and has proposed explanations for why they have chosen different paths. As such, this section has summarized the answer to the

two central research questions. That leads to the question: what are the implications of this study? The following section discusses these implications by answering some additional questions, as hinted at in the introduction: What does this study imply for the image of Islamic fundamentalism as a threat to Dutch society? How 'other' are the fundamentalist respondents from Dutch non-Muslims? What course should policy makers take? And what are the implications of this project for criminological and other theory?

### *Nuancing the Image of Islamic Fundamentalism as a Threat*

This study's introduction discussed Dutch society's perception of Islam and particularly Islamic fundamentalism as a threat. Obviously, there are different perspectives on the threat that Islam and Islamic fundamentalism pose to the Netherlands. In addition, this image has changed over time. On the one hand, the link between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism has been nuanced. Since there have not been any terrorist attacks in recent years, intelligence services and policy documents argue that there is mainly an external, yet 'limited' threat (NCTb, 2011). On the other hand, the view of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism as a potential threat to the Dutch democratic order has remained largely intact. Islamophobic sentiments have increased in the Netherlands since 9/11, which is seemingly confirmed by Geert Wilders' popularity.<sup>142</sup> In addition, some politicians and scholars have taken a firmer stance, contending that Islam (or Islamic fundamentalism) is anti-Western and inherently undemocratic, thereby insinuating that a clash of civilizations is taking place (Huntington, 1996; e.g. Jansen & van de Ven, 2008). The question that this conclusion has to address is what this study contributes in the light of current images of Islam and Islamic fundamentalism.

In short, the answer to this question is that current images need to be further nuanced. I will explain this by discussing how the fundamentalist respondents' responses to identity strain reveal nuances on three levels, involving their attitudes and behaviour: attitudes regarding the national level, attitudes regarding the international level and behaviour. Concerning the first level, differences are observable in the fundamentalist respondents' attitudes regarding the Dutch context. It is only extremists who legitimize violence and radicals who are advocates against the democratic order. By comparing their attitudes, it has become clear that the orthodox respondents lack the activism which characterizes the radical and extremist ones. On the contrary, the orthodox respondents claim to accept Dutch society and its political system and focus mainly on their personal development. The radical and extremist respondents consider it their personal responsibility to change society from the top down or to support others who are trying to do this. While the extremists generally consider terrorism may

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<sup>142</sup> It remains to be seen whether a turning point has taken place. The Netherlands Institute for Social Research observed a possible change in attitudes among the autochthonous Dutch for the first time in 10 years. Since 1998 approximately 50% of the native population considered Islamic and Western lifestyles irreconcilable, whereas this percentage was 41% in 2008-2009 (Gijssberts & Dagevos, 2009: 272).

be committed in the Netherlands or other Western countries, the radicals are opposed to violent *jihad* in the Netherlands and they intend to and do keep their activism within current Dutch legal boundaries. One could wonder therefore whether these radical attitudes undermine the democratic order or in fact constitute an appeal to the rights granted by that democratic order thus implying actual participation in that very order.

Concerning the international level, fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist respondents alike tend to criticize the political situation in Muslim countries. Unlike the moderate respondents, however, the fundamentalist respondents believe that what they regard as a 'truly' Islamic state is the best alternative. For that reason, the orthodox respondents support the implementation of sharia in Muslim countries. Yet with regard to this international aspect they do not have an activist attitude. Alternatively, the radical respondents present it as their personal duty to protest against injustices done to Muslims abroad. Moreover, they invoke the freedom of speech to spread their message and to convince others of the necessity of an Islamic state in Muslim countries. To realize this Islamic state they consider that a revolution may be instigated, if necessary with violent means. The extremist respondents have similar goals, but unlike the radicals express support of the violent strategies of notorious 'terrorist organizations', such as Al Qaeda, in trying to attain this goal. Nonetheless, the radical and extremist respondents rely on common, Western just-war arguments to legitimize their attitude. So in their activism the radical and extremist respondents might show direct opposition to some of the democratic order's central features, but indirectly express their support of them.<sup>143</sup>

The third level involves the tensions that exist between the fundamentalist respondents' attitudes and behaviour. The everyday practice of the respondents reveals many much more nuances than their strict attitudes would suggest. Nuances become apparent in precisely those areas that Dutch society is worried about. As opposed to the image of a practice of self-isolation, the respondents have considerable and often friendly contact with non-Muslims. Furthermore, they participate in Dutch society through their work and studies. To be able to function adequately they regularly compromise on clothing rules and religious behavioural norms, such as by interacting with non-Muslim men and women. Furthermore, the political activities of the radical and extremist respondents generally do not correspond with their ideals. Instead, the respondents demonstrate a considerable level of armchair activism. So although the radical and extremist respondents' beliefs obviously hold the potential for more activist behaviour, even the most extremist respondents hardly ever put their ideals fully into practice and they do have scope for compromise.

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<sup>143</sup> Unfortunately, the gathering of data in this study took place long before the Arab Spring and thus it was not possible to ask the fundamentalist respondents' opinion about current developments. In view of their fundamentalist discourse they would be likely to support these developments under the condition that the next government will implement *sharia* and install what they regard as a 'truly' Islamic state.

The general implication of this study is that the image of Islamic fundamentalism as a ‘threat’ to the Dutch and other democratic orders needs to be further nuanced. Essentialist views of Islam as a threatening religion are particularly unjustified. Similarly and more specifically, there is a need for a more nuanced view concerning Islamic fundamentalism. As such this study has strengthened and refined Roex et al.’s (2010) claim that it is necessary to distinguish orthodox Muslims from radical and extremist ones.<sup>144</sup> It is only the extremist respondents who express verbal support for violent means to rebel against the Dutch democratic order, and the radical and extremist respondents against governments, usually non-democratic orders, in Muslim countries. Yet both these groups use just-war arguments and there are hardly any indications that they would put these attitudes into practice.

*A Glocal Phenomenon: The Sameness of Dutch Fundamentalist Muslims*

Another question raised in the introduction concerns the otherness of Islamic fundamentalism. The common view of Islamic fundamentalism is, firstly, that it has an external origin. This view provides an explanation for fundamentalism’s presence in the Netherlands as a result of Muslim migration to the Netherlands. According to these views, it is above all second-generation youngsters from Muslim families who feel attracted to fundamentalist interpretations of their own religion because of the identity crisis which stems from their diasporic lives. In itself it is logical to assume that Islamic fundamentalism as a religious ideology emerged in the Netherlands through migration processes. Yet, this study has established that not only second-generation immigrants from Muslim families turn to Islamic fundamentalism: children from non-Muslim migrant parents and native Dutch individuals also feel attracted to orthodox, radical, and extremist Islamic beliefs.

Secondly, in social and academic debate the primary focus is on the differences in values and attitudes of fundamentalist Muslims in comparison to non-Muslim Dutch citizens. Nonetheless, this study has demonstrated that the respondents’ conversion is principally inspired by the internalization of and disappointment in common modern, Western expectations – as reflected in the resentment about double standards as mentioned in the former section. The reasons for the attraction are thus internal in modern, Dutch society and so the turn to Islamic fundamentalism does not stem from a clash of civilizations. On the contrary, it is apparently the most ‘integrated’ fundamentalist respondents who seem to be attracted to radical and extremist views in the sense that they are the most indignant about double standards and they appear to care most about the opinions of the Dutch, thus implying that they want to belong. They would seem to reverse their sensitivity through creating resistance identities. Considering the common Western values and attitudes of the fundamentalist respondents, it could be that Islamic fundamentalism in the Netherlands differs from fundamentalist movements in Muslim countries.

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<sup>144</sup> The government has confirmed this need for a distinction in its National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (NCTb, 2011).

One should therefore acknowledge that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism is not simply an imported problem, but partly has its origins within Dutch society. In fact, this study has indicated that some native Dutch converts have also turned to Islamic fundamentalism and that they have done this in part as a protest to what they regard as negative aspects of Western culture and society, such as excessive hedonism. So even though fundamentalist views seem foreign, the fundamentalist respondents are in large part a product of modern, Western societies and are thus not as 'other' as many Dutch people have tended to believe. Western and 'local' dimensions underlie the respondents' turn to Islamic fundamentalism and are recognizable in their fundamentalist attitudes, their pragmatic practice, the nature of their fundamentalist groups and the modern identity project that they undertake. Being modern, Western and becoming a Muslim fundamentalist, can thus go hand in hand. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that Islamic fundamentalism in the Netherlands is a truly glocal phenomenon that would seem to be just as much – if not more – Dutch as it is foreign (Robertson, 1995).

*Theoretical Implications: Merits of Interdisciplinary Bricolaging*

In the introduction I said that in this study I would consider various levels of explanations for the respondents' turn to Islamic fundamentalism. These levels range from micro (psychological) to macro (sociological) explanations and stem from multiple disciplines. Moreover, I also said that I would update Cohen's – and Merton's – classic criminological theories by merging them with identity theories in late modern times. This section evaluates the added value of this approach and demonstrates what the theoretical implications of this approach are.

I argue that this approach has resulted in two major insights. Firstly, combining social-psychological insights and Cohen's subcultural theory with Merton's strain theory creates a theoretical opening to distinguish between the turn to orthodox, radical or extremist Islamic viewpoints. By paying attention to the social-psychological level an apparent difference emerged between the experiences and sensitivities of the orthodox, radical and extremist respondents.<sup>145</sup> It would thus be of value to take a social-psychological perspective in understanding social issues such as conversion and radical conversion, and the formation of subcultures and deviant subcultures.

The second principal insight of this study concerns the merits of updating classic theories to apply them in modern times. During the past century growing attention has been paid to people's identity, under the influence of individualism and increasing lifestyle options, among other things. Simultaneously, ontological insecurities – fostered by, for example, globalization and fragmentation – appear to have been on the increase. In view of these developments, society and its individual members have changed their focus. Theories which use culture and social structure as explanations should thus be

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<sup>145</sup> Implicit in these findings is the normality of the fundamentalist respondents: their conversion can seemingly be explained on the basis of common social-psychological patterns.

reconsidered and if necessary, adapted to be in keeping with the current social context. This study has demonstrated that such an update to modern conditions is a worthwhile endeavour. Through such an update it is possible to learn valuable lessons from previous theories while at the same time demonstrating an awareness of current circumstances and elaborating on these previous lessons.

Together these two insights have led to a theoretical framework which recognizes the impact of the current social structural level by including both social structure and culture, the group level through recognizing the importance of peer pressure, and the individual level by acknowledging personal differences following from individual experiences, sensitivities and motivations. In line with the central role of identity in contemporary society it is identity that is at the focal point of this theoretical model.

*Policy Implications: A Narrower, More Inclusive Approach*

I have been asking myself whether an academic study such as this one should present policy implications in greater or less detail as it is not a policy report. I came to the conclusion that this study has many implicit policy suggestions that I do want to make explicit, because of the negative impact which inappropriate policies could have on further polarization. To begin with, considering that Dutch fundamentalists are more similar to other Dutch citizens than is commonly assumed, policies that treat radicalism as a problem of ‘otherness’ – resulting from immigration or a clash of civilizations – are based on wrong assumptions and could, as a result, fail. It is likely to be equally dysfunctional to adopt an essentialist approach which focuses on Islam or Islamic fundamentalism in its entirety as a threat. Through such an essentialist approach politicians fall into the same dualist trap that they criticize fundamentalist Muslims for and in doing so they could promote polarization. Even though government policies explicitly recognize the need to distinguish between those fundamentalist Muslims who are violently inclined and those who are not, these policies continue to focus on a large group of potential radicals and extremists through their ‘broad approach’.

This study suggests that alternative, more fruitful policy approaches need to be developed. First of all, it would be more fruitful to narrow current policies down in terms of their scope. Policy makers should be more selective regarding the groups that policies target. For that reason they have to address a number of questions: Is it necessary to worry about orthodox Muslims as long as they accept Dutch society as it is? Do their attitudes and/or behaviour not show sufficient willingness to compromise? Should one otherwise not pay equal attention to orthodox protestants and Jews in the Netherlands for being a threat to the democratic order? Overall, the differences between the respondents’ discourses and practice reveal that their resistance is often of a symbolic nature: they are often opposed to certain characteristics of Western society in words – which they are to a certain extent entitled to do due to the freedom of speech – but tolerate these characteristics in practice. Policy makers should realize that

giving Muslims the impression that they are targeted for being Muslim is very likely to be counterproductive.

It is principally due to this likelihood of counter-productivity that policy makers should be more aware of the role that identity plays in the choice for Islamic fundamentalism. When remembering what experiences helped to create the respondents' cognitive opening, this recommendation might seem hard to put into practice. For example, in a modern society, which is characterized by liquidity, it is hard to increase ontological security. Similarly, it is impossible to prevent personal suffering, certain forms of social exclusion<sup>146</sup> and the high social expectations of individuals. However, policies could focus on measures to deal with social exclusion on a collective level, which has been the principal experience that helped to create the cognitive opening of the radical and extremist respondents in this study. On the one hand, such measures could help prevent polarization. Policies should thus refrain from an 'us' versus 'them' approach, because such an approach would foster dualistic thinking on both sides – like in the case of the Norwegian right-wing extremist Breivik – and thus contribute to polarization. If policy makers ignore this and keep focusing on the difference between Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims it could be that Islamic fundamentalism becomes more attractive to both Muslims and non-Muslims, in particular to those who feel socially excluded. As in the case of some of the respondents, becoming Muslim fundamentalists under the circumstances of polarization offers them a very immediate way of distancing oneself from the groups that they feel excluded from. In short, it is likely to be more productive to emphasize these youngsters' sameness and belonging to Dutch society and – if possible and reasonable – to remove the obstacles which prevent them from fulfilling their positive ambitions.<sup>147</sup>

Participants in public debate can contribute to diminishing polarization and thus the attraction of Islamic fundamentalism in several ways. Social discourse plays an essential part in polarization. In the past decade Islamophobic sentiments have gained a central place in social debate. Several politicians and other public figures have taken the lead in criticizing Islam and Muslims under the banner of the freedom of speech. Obviously, it is important to safeguard constitutional rights such as the freedom of speech. Yet, considering the findings about the role of experiences of social exclusion in the conversion to Islamic fundamentalism Dutch society would benefit from a more balanced public debate. The media could contribute to creating a balance by offering an equal platform to multiple viewpoints, including those of moderate and fundamentalist Muslims.

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<sup>146</sup> This is especially problematic if exclusion takes place for characteristics that are specific to the excluded person, for example, when people are being bullied at school for the way they dress.

<sup>147</sup> Obviously I am not arguing that extremism and radicalization will cease to exist if the government offers more opportunities to Islamic radicals and extremists. Social reality is not that simple and many social interactions are simultaneously at work in radicalization processes. Yet, I am arguing that Dutch society has to break the negative interactive spiral if it wants to diminish the attraction of Islamic radicalism and extremism. Offering alternatives is likely to contribute to this spiral's change of direction.

In short, considering that the main motivation behind the respondents' turn to radical viewpoints is their sensitivity to social exclusion, it is necessary to remember that arbitrary policies and generalized Islamophobic expressions seem to strengthen radical and extremist resistance narratives. Without more recognition for the sources of identity strain and a more accurate approach, Dutch society is likely to keep nurturing fundamentalist discourses of 'Islam being under attack' and Muslims being the underdog, thereby raising the attraction of radical and extremist currents within Islamic fundamentalism.

### **Remaining Questions and Suggestions for Further Research**

Following from the lessons learned, this study also offers suggestions for future research. A major theoretical lesson of this study is the apparent usefulness of interdisciplinary bricolaging. The turn to orthodox and radical Islam appears to result from a complex social interaction. To come to a better understanding of such a complex phenomenon as conversion to Islamic fundamentalism it has been fruitful – and will likely to be so for future research – to learn lessons from a variety of disciplines, ranging from conversion studies to social-psychology, sociology and criminology. Notwithstanding the consequential contributions of this study to existing knowledge, it also leaves some questions unanswered and evokes new questions.

Most notably, the question remains if the findings can be generalized so that they can be applied to other cases. Firstly, it remains to be seen if this study's findings are applicable to other fundamentalist Muslims in Western countries. This question particularly concerns Muslims with radical and extremist views, since their sample has been the smallest in this study. One way of answering this question is by subjecting the findings in this study to a further, e.g. quantitative, test. Similarly, and maybe more importantly, the implications of this study could be examined in relation to other forms of radicalization. For example, are the same patterns, and reasons and motives present in the radicalization processes of right-wing extremists, such as the Norwegian Anders Breivik?

Furthermore, several problems remain concerning the meaning of Islamic fundamentalism to Western Muslims. There is still much more to be said about the ways in which orthodox, radical and extremist Muslim identities take shape in the Netherlands, particularly in group contexts outside the mosque, which this study has hardly addressed. This matter could be the subject of a more extensive ethnographic research project. Moreover, it would be interesting to make a full comparative study of Islamic fundamentalism's meaning in, on the one hand, Western and, on the other hand, Muslim countries to increase understanding of the glocal dimensions of Islamic fundamentalism.

A final essential question for policy purposes concerns the extent to which the identity strain that contributes to the conversion to Islamic radicalism and extremism could be resolved or – accidentally – fostered through interventions. Considering the apparent link between radical and extremist views and social exclusion, it would be worthwhile to study the potential counter-

productive effects of interventions, through studying the reactions of radicals and extremists to policy measures and social discourse, including everyday Islamophobic expressions.

As an epilogue to this study I will briefly consider the letter that Jason Walters, one of the Dutch terrorist convicts and a convert, sent to the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* in October 2010. In his letter he contends that he no longer subscribes to his extremist views. Instead, he argues:

I have lost the ideals that I once cherished and I have come to the realization that they are morally bankrupt. (...) I write this to inform society that I no longer identify with the viewpoints that I used to cherish and that I hope to contribute positively to our divided society. By doing so, I hope to warn young people not to be misled by false promises and ideals. (...) A return to the past is no longer possible. We must accept the modern world, with all its achievements, among which the democratic order, and take this as a starting point for deciding on our position in society. (...) This does not mean that we should renounce our religion; it means that we must accept reality and adapt to it. Only then will we really be able to solve our problems (*De Volkskrant*, 2010: 6-7).

Whether Jason Walters is really sincere or not, his words contain some wise lessons. If Dutch society really wants to counter radicalization and polarization, it needs to face reality and break the interactive spiral. Maybe the spiral of Islamic radicalization is already on its retreat, as Jason Walters' letter could symbolize. Yet whether it concerns Islamic extremism or other forms of radicalization and extremism, it appears necessary to look beyond the limitations of contemporary paradigms. Throughout history we find examples of societies only realizing in retrospect what they should have done differently to prevent an escalation of social problems. But why should it be so difficult to acknowledge personal responsibility if this acknowledgement can contribute to a positive change for society at large? I would argue, therefore, that as members or representatives of Dutch society we should accept our own responsibility and stop fuelling polarization. To begin with, this can be done by becoming aware of and changing the exclusionary and contradictory practices which feed discourses of resistance. It is also possible to do this (similar to what Jason Walters appears to have done in his renouncement of an extremist perspective) by refusing to accept simplistic, dualist visions – in our case of Muslims – and instead recognizing the complexities and nuances of social reality.



## Samenvatting

### ZUIVERING EN VERZET: GLOKALE BETEKENISSEN VAN ISLAMITISCH FUNDAMENTALISME IN NEDERLAND

In het eerste decennium van de 21<sup>e</sup> eeuw heeft zich een angst voor islamitisch fundamentalisme in Nederland gevestigd. In het bijzonder geïnspireerd door de aanslagen van 11 september 2001 en de moord op Theo van Gogh in november 2004, is in Nederland een discussie opgelaaid over 'de islam'. Vragen die men in deze discussie stelt betreffen de legitimatie van geweld in islam en de vraag of deze religie en het leven in de Nederlandse rechtsstaat voldoende samen kunnen gaan. De discussie in politiek en media kenmerkt zich niet zelden door een essentialistische benadering, waarbij de neiging bestaat om voorbij te gaan aan diversiteit in geloofsovertuigingen onder Nederlandse moslims.

In reactie op deze ontwikkelingen zijn er verschillende studies verricht naar islamitisch fundamentalistische stromingen in Nederland. In dat onderzoek is de aandacht vooral uitgegaan naar het zogenaamde Salafisme, een stroming die de aandacht van de AIVD kreeg vanwege haar veronderstelde anti-democratische en daarmee gevaarlijke karakter. De meest invloedrijke studie op dit terrein is de studie van Buijs, Demant en Hamdy (2006) met de titel 'Strijders van eigen bodem'. De beschrijvingen en verklaringen die deze studie geeft voor het radicaliseren van jonge moslims van Marokkaanse afkomst hebben als voorbeeld gediend voor latere studies. Al met al schetst eerder onderzoek een beeld van Salafisme en islamitische radicalisering als fenomenen die vooral leven onder tweede generatie Marokkaanse moslimjongeren. De verklaringen sluiten bij dat beeld aan: Salafistische stromingen zouden tweede generatie jongeren aantrekken die tussen de Nederlandse en Marokkaanse cultuur instaan en die worstelen met hun hybride identiteit. Daarmee leggen voorgaande onderzoeken de nadruk op culturele verklaringen. Deze verklaringen laten echter een tweetal belangrijke vragen onbeantwoord. Ten eerste hebben eerdere studies geen antwoord op de vraag hoe het te verklaren is dat ook autochtone Nederlanders voor een Salafistische interpretatie van islam kiezen. Dit is een relevante vraag, omdat zich binnen radicale netwerken in het Westen ook autochtone bekeerlingen bleken te bevinden. Te denken valt aan Jason Walters binnen de Hofstadgroep en Germaine Lindsay die betrokken was bij de aanslagen in Londen in 2005. Bovendien bestaat een aanzienlijk deel van de orthodoxe bezoekers van Salafistische moskeeën in Nederland uit bekeerlingen. Ten tweede resteert de vraag wat het verschil in aantrekkingskracht is van de verschillende stromingen binnen het Salafisme. Oftewel, het is de vraag of er een verklaring is voor het feit dat sommigen voor orthodoxie en anderen voor radicalisme of zelfs extremisme kiezen. Het zijn deze vragen die ik in deze studie heb willen beantwoorden.

### 1. Vooraf: De basis van dit onderzoek

Om tot antwoorden te komen, heb ik dit criminologische onderzoek middels een probleemstelling afgebakend. De probleemstelling in deze studie bestaat uit twee vragen:

1. *Hoe vindt de ontwikkeling van die Nederlandse moslims die zich tot islamitisch fundamentalisme keren plaats?*
2. *Wat zijn de redenen en motieven voor hun bekering?*

Bij het beantwoorden van deze probleemstelling heb ik gebruik gemaakt van verschillende kwalitatieve methoden: half-open interviews, observaties en de analyse van online discussies. De data in deze studie bestaan uit de transcripten van 42 interviews en ongeveer hetzelfde aantal informele gesprekken met 40 respondenten. Onder de respondenten zijn mannen en vrouwen, kinderen uit moslimgezinnen, autochtone en allochtone bekeerlingen, met diverse islamitische oriëntaties. De observaties vonden plaats in verschillende Salafistische moskeeën in Nederland en de Brixton moskee in Londen. De observatieperiode besloeg 11 maanden in Nederland en 3,5 maanden in Londen. In de observatieverslagen komen inhoudelijk substantiële gesprekken naar voren met ongeveer 135 orthodoxe vrouwen. Tot slot maken analyses van 38 internetdiscussies op Marocco Virtual Community onderdeel uit van de data.

Het theoretische kader in deze studie is interdisciplinair. De keuze voor specifieke theorieën heb ik gemaakt op basis van eerdere studies en de eigen bevindingen. Centrale thema's bleken de huidige sociaal-politieke context, identiteit en groepsprocessen. Naar aanleiding daarvan heb ik gekozen voor een *bricolage* van theorieën over de zogenaamde laat-moderne samenleving, interactionistische benaderingen van identiteitsvorming en de betekenis daarvan, en *strain*- en subculturele theorieën.

### 2. Nuances in 'radicale' houdingen en een verduidelijking van definities

In deze studie maak ik gebruik van een aantal beladen termen: islamitisch fundamentalisme, orthodoxie, radicalisme en extremisme. De keuze voor deze termen berust vooral op het feit dat er geen alternatieve termen voorhanden zijn die minder beladen en even passend zijn.

Islamitisch fundamentalisme, zoals gebruikt in deze studie, is te omschrijven als een oriëntatie binnen islam die zich karakteriseert door traditionalisme en 'scripturalisme' (een terugkeer tot de zuivere wortels van islam door een letterlijke interpretatie van de heilige geschriften), dualisme (in het onderscheid tussen waarheid en deceptie, gelovigen en ongelovigen, et cetera) en millennarianisme (de overtuiging van een op handen zijnde einde der tijden). Hoewel het grootste gedeelte van de moslims in Nederland zich ver houdt van fundamentalistische visies, heeft het afgelopen decennium laten zien dat islamitisch fundamentalisme wel degelijk voorstanders heeft onder Nederlandse moslims. Voorbeelden van islamitisch fundamentalistische bewegingen in Nederland zijn het Salafisme en Hizb-ut-Tahrir.

Onder de respondenten bevonden zich ook aanhangers van deze stromingen binnen islam. Binnen de groep fundamentalistische respondenten heb ik op basis van hun denkbeelden een nader onderscheid gemaakt tussen orthodoxen, radicalen en extremisten. Het belangrijkste verschil tussen deze groepen volgt uit hun houding ten opzichte van politiek activisme en de legitimatie en vorm van gewelddadige jihad. Waar de orthodoxe respondenten zich niet inlaten met politiek activisme, kenmerken de radicale en extremistische respondenten zich juist door de perceptie van een persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid om een activistische houding aan te nemen. De extremisten onderscheiden zich vervolgens van de radicalen doordat ze geweld toegestaan achten, waaronder terroristisch geweld in Westerse landen zoals Nederland, landen die ze als medeverantwoordelijk zien voor het lijden van moslims op mondiale schaal.

In relatie tot eerdere studies heb ik de kwalificatie van wat als radicaal en extremistisch geldt proberen te verduidelijken. In tegenstelling tot een aantal eerdere studies (bijv. Roex et al., 2010) heb ik daarbij onderscheid gemaakt naar de vorm die de gewelddadige jihad aanneemt en de precieze context waarin deze jihad plaatsvindt. Daarmee heb ik zelfverdediging tegen een onmiddellijke, persoonlijke aanval met proportionele middelen van radicalisme buitengesloten, omdat dergelijk geweld verenigbaar is met de algemeen geaccepteerde *just war* doctrine in Westerse samenlevingen en dus op zichzelf geen teken is van radicalisme. Een kenmerk van radicalisme is immers dat men zich juist van de heersende orde afkeert.

Aanvullende nuances betreffen de attituden binnen de verschillende fundamentalistische categorieën en vooral hoe de respondenten hun orthodoxe, radicale en extremistische gedachtegoed in de praktijk brengen. Een eerste nuancering is dat ook binnen de verschillende fundamentalistische categorieën meningsverschillen bestaan. Ten tweede, attituden komen niet altijd overeen met feitelijk gedrag. Vooral de radicale en extremistische respondenten leken slechts in beperkte mate naar hun activistische overtuigingen te handelen. Een derde en laatste nuancering volgt uit de ontwikkeling die de respondenten gedurende deze studie lieten zien. Bij een aantal van hen waren in de loop van de tijd sterke veranderingen waarneembaar in hun attituden en gedrag. Het meest typerend was het geval van een bekeerling tot islam die zich binnen twee jaar tot een extremistische houding bekeerde, overging naar een zeer gematigd standpunt en corresponderend gedrag en vervolgens een orthodoxe, salafistische interpretatie van islam oarmde. Al met al nuanceren deze bevindingen het beeld dat er van islamitisch fundamentalisme in Nederland een grote dreiging uitgaat.

### **3. Hoe en waarom bekeren Nederlandse moslims zich tot islamitisch fundamentalisme?**

Na het afbakenen van het onderzoeksthema, de conceptualisering en het categoriseren van de respondenten volgt de kern van deze studie: het beschrijven en verklaren van de fundamentalistische ontwikkeling van de respondenten. Om zicht op het verloop van hun ontwikkeling te krijgen, geeft deze studie aan hoe de

respondenten ontvankelijk zijn geworden – of in woorden van Wiktorowicz (2005) een ‘cognitieve opening’ hebben ontwikkeld – voor fundamentalistische interpretaties van islam. Ter verklaring van hun bekering volgt vervolgens een beschrijving van wat de verschillende vormen van islamitisch fundamentalisme de respondenten te bieden hebben.

### *3.1 De vorm: een doorlopend, veelvormig proces met een rol voor significante anderen*

Deze studie heeft laten zien dat de respondenten een bekeringsproces hebben doorgemaakt. Het bekeringsproces van de respondenten lijkt het resultaat te zijn van een complexe interactie van verschillende factoren. Bovendien kenmerken de bekeringsprocessen van de fundamentalistische respondenten zich door onderlinge variatie en veranderingen in de loop van de tijd. Sommige respondenten zeggen dat ze plotseling op een keerpunt belandden, terwijl anderen hun ontwikkeling beschrijven als een gradueel, natuurlijk proces. In de loop van de tijd lijkt er bovendien sprake te zijn van ‘drift’, aangezien sommige respondenten van de ene op de andere interpretatie leken over te stappen. Het eerdergenoemde voorbeeld van de respondent die binnen twee jaar tijd drie keer van oriëntatie veranderde is daarvan het meest typerende voorbeeld.

Wat betreft de rol van significante anderen is er ook een onderscheid zichtbaar. Sommige respondenten presenteren zichzelf als ‘actieve zoekers’ in hun bekeringsproces, terwijl andere respondenten het voorbeeld van anderen zeggen te hebben gevolgd. Het staat buiten kijf dat in alle gevallen significante anderen een rol hebben gespeeld. Significante anderen stimuleren, beïnvloeden de richting van, of belemmeren het bekeringsproces. Desondanks kunnen significante anderen niet voldoende verklaren waarom de fundamentalistische respondenten bekeerden, noch waarom ze voor orthodoxie, radicalisme of extremisme kozen. Het blijkt namelijk dat de fundamentalistische respondenten met diverse stromingen in aanraking zijn gekomen, op verschillende momenten in hun bekeringsproces. Bovendien veranderde de kring van significante anderen bij een aantal respondenten in de loop van de tijd.

### *3.2 De aanleiding: een cognitieve opening voor bekering*

Om de keuze voor bepaalde stromingen en de kring van significante anderen te begrijpen, is het van belang om te kijken naar de persoonlijke omstandigheden waaronder de respondenten interesse kregen voor fundamentalistische interpretaties van islam.

Uit de verhalen van de fundamentalistische respondenten over hun religieuze ontwikkeling is af te leiden dat ze een identiteitscrisis doormaakten. Aan de basis van deze crisis lagen verschillende ervaringen die als volgt zijn te categoriseren: 1) een gebrek aan zingeving en richting in hun leven, 2) persoonlijke, pijnlijke ervaringen of het verlies van significante anderen, 3) sociale uitsluiting en/of een gebrek aan erkenning en 4) een verlangen naar transcendentie van het normale. Op zich zijn deze typen ervaringen niet zo bijzonder; er zijn veel mensen – inclusief de gematigde respondenten in deze studie – die zulke ervaringen hebben en die zich niet tot islamitisch

fundamentalisme bekeren. De vraag is dus in hoeverre de ervaringen die de respondenten beschrijven een verklaring kunnen bieden voor de bekering tot de verschillende fundamentalistische stromingen waar ze toe behoren.

Een onderscheidend kenmerk is dat de fundamentalistische respondenten – met uitzondering van een paar orthodoxe respondenten uit moslimgezinnen – in tegenstelling tot de gematigde respondenten, een meer intense crisis meldden. De intensiteit is af te leiden uit de typen ervaringen die ze meldden. Terwijl de gematigde respondenten maximaal één type ervaring noemden, gaven de fundamentalistische respondenten aan twee of meer typen ervaringen – vrijwel tegelijkertijd – te hebben gehad. De aard van deze meer intense crisis heb ik omschreven als *identity strain*, een term die berust op een vrije interpretatie van Merton's (1938) begrip van *strain*. Een beschrijving die meermalen naar voren kwam, was dat deze respondenten het gevoel hadden dat ze niet zichzelf waren. In deze studie wijst *strain* dus op de discrepantie die de bekeerde respondenten ervoeren tussen hun actuele 'niet authentieke' zelf en hun (soms vage of onbewuste) beeld van een ideaal, 'authentiek' zelf.

Onder de fundamentalistische respondenten is er ook een verschil zichtbaar in de typen ervaringen die de orthodoxe respondenten aan de ene kant en de radicale en extremistische respondenten aan de andere kant noemden. De orthodoxe respondenten noemden vooral persoonlijk lijden, terwijl de radicale en extremistische respondenten de nadruk legden op sociale uitsluiting en het verlangen om bijzonder te zijn. Aangezien niet is gebleken dat deze radicale en extremistische respondenten daadwerkelijk meer sociale uitsluiting hebben ervaren, lijkt het dat ze hier vooral meer gevoelig voor zijn. De orthodoxe respondenten getuigen daarmee van een grotere interne gerichtheid op hun 'persoonlijke zelf'. De radicale en extremistische respondenten lijken daarentegen gevoeliger voor het beeld dat anderen van hen hebben, wat betrekking heeft op hun 'sociale zelf'. Deze grotere gevoeligheid en verschillen in focus lijken echter momentopnamen te betreffen, zoals is af te leiden uit de veranderde beleving van een aantal respondenten in de loop van deze studie.

### 3.3 De zoektocht: Fundamentalisme als bron van een zekere en positieve (verzets)identiteit

De volgende vraag die deze studie beantwoordt, is wat de verschillende fundamentalistische interpretaties de respondenten met hun ervaring van *identity strain* te bieden hebben. Zoals alle processen van identificatie, verloopt ook het identificatieproces van de respondenten via enerzijds positieve 'zelfidentificatie', door te bepalen wie ze wel zijn, en anderzijds via differentiatie, door zich af te zetten van waar ze zich niet (langer) mee willen identificeren. Het dualisme dat islamitisch fundamentalisme kenmerkt, biedt een ultieme mogelijkheid tot identificatie en differentiatie.

#### *Positieve zelfidentificatie*

Ten aanzien van positieve zelfidentificatie blijkt dat het dualisme van islamitisch fundamentalisme de respondenten een gevoel van stabiliteit en zekerheid biedt.

Dit gevoel krijgen ze onder meer doordat ze geloven dat ze de absolute waarheid in pacht hebben en dat ze daar onweerlegbaar bewijs voor kunnen presenteren. De fundamentalistische stromingen van de respondenten bieden hen ook een aantal strikt afgebakende modellen op basis waarvan ze hun eigen identiteit kunnen vormgeven, te weten islamitische regels, de wereldwijde moslimgemeenschap, de *ummah*, waarvan ze deel uitmaken en geïdealiseerde rolmodellen. Deze modellen bieden de respondenten een positieve identiteit.

Ondanks deze gedeelde patronen, zijn er enige verschillen zichtbaar tussen de invulling die de orthodoxe, radicale en extremistische respondenten geven aan deze bronnen voor zelfidentificatie. Ten aanzien van de *ummah* hebben de orthodoxe respondenten een meer inclusieve benadering, terwijl vooral de extremistische respondenten geneigd zijn tot *takfir*, waarbij ze andersdenkende moslims tot niet-moslim verklaren. Deze meer exclusieve benadering lijkt ertoe bij te dragen dat ze zich tot een zeer selecte groep van uitverkorenen kunnen rekenen, wat bijdraagt aan een positief zelfbeeld. Een tweede verschil heeft betrekking op de rolmodellen die de respondenten kiezen. De orthodoxe respondenten richten hun aandacht op de positieve voorbeelden die rolmodellen geven zoals vriendelijkheid, behulpzaamheid en geduld. De radicale en extremistische respondenten nemen echter vooral oppositionele rolmodellen tot voorbeeld. Deze rolmodellen staan met hun ambitie om te strijden voor een 'betere' maatschappij voor heldendom en aversieve kracht, waar de respondenten zich mee identificeren.

De verschillende benadering van broederschap en rolmodellen, lijkt te corresponderen met de verschillende aard van de *identity strain* die de respondenten ervaren. De *strain* die orthodoxe respondenten met betrekking tot hun persoonlijke zelf ervaren, sluit een meer inclusieve benadering van broederschap niet uit en verklaart juist hun grotere nadruk op positieve rolmodellen om zichzelf aan te spiegelen. De zeer exclusieve benadering van de radicale en vooral de extremistische respondenten in combinatie met een focus op oppositionele rolmodellen sluit aan bij de *strain* ten aanzien van hun 'sociale zelf'. Door zich in positieve zin van andere moslims te onderscheiden en zich te identificeren met oppositionele helden, kunnen ze zichzelf sterken ten opzichte van anderen en zo hun gevoeligheid voor het oordeel van die anderen neutraliseren.

#### *Differentiatie in de vorm van verzet*

Als andere kant van de dualistische medaille, zetten de fundamentalistische respondenten zich ook af van datgene en die personen waarmee ze zich niet willen identificeren. Ik heb ervoor gekozen om deze differentiatie 'verzet' te noemen, vanwege de sterke mate waarin de fundamentalistische respondenten zich afzetten van dat waar ze zich niet mee willen identificeren. Uit dit onderzoek komen verschillende verzetsdiscoursen naar voren. Deze hebben betrekking op hun leven voor de 'ware', 'zuivere' islam en hun voormalige sociale groep, de Westerse cultuur, andere religies, externe labels, andere stromingen binnen islam en islamofobische sentimenten en praktijken.

Ook hier is echter een verschil waarneembaar tussen enerzijds de orthodoxe respondenten en anderzijds de radicale en extremistische respondenten dat in overeenstemming lijkt met hun verschillende ervaringen van *identity strain*. De orthodoxe respondenten geven blijk van een mindere mate van verzet. Zij keuren vooral bepaalde aspecten van de Westerse (wat ze op bijna één lijn stellen met de Nederlandse) cultuur af, maar ze zijn minder geneigd om anderen te veroordelen. De minder sterke veroordeling van individuen correspondeert met hun interne focus. De discoursen van de radicale en extremistische respondenten laten een sterkere mate van verzet zien. Deze respondenten richten hun pijlen bovendien eveneens op individuen, zoals mensen met een ander geloof of mensen uit hun voormalige sociale kring. Hun negatievere visie op individuen lijkt aan te sluiten bij hun gevoeligheid voor het oordeel van anderen. Het lijkt erop dat de radicale en extremistische respondenten '*resistance identities*' vormen om zich te wapenen tegen hun gevoeligheid voor sociale uitsluiting door – in Sykes' en Matza's (1957) termen – de veroordelaars te veroordelen. Als zodanig kan verzet bijdragen aan een positief zelfbeeld.

Het dualisme van islamitisch fundamentalisme biedt de respondenten dus een antwoord op hun *identity strain*. Dit antwoord krijgen ze via twee paden. Het eerste pad is dat van positieve zelfidentificatie met de zuivere islam. Dit is het pad waar de orthodoxe respondenten de nadruk op leggen. Het tweede pad, dat de radicale en extremistische respondenten als primaire weg bewandelen, is dat van verzet tegen het 'niet-islamitische'.

### 3.4 Van overtuiging naar praktijk: internalisering en de ontwikkeling van een subcultuur

Deze studie laat eveneens zien hoe de fundamentalistische respondenten vorm geven aan de zojuist besproken discoursen van positieve zelfidentificatie en verzet. In de praktijk proberen de respondenten islam te representeren als individu en in groepsverband. Ze doen dit door het gebruik van (islamitische) namen en taal, hun uiterlijk, gedrag en activiteiten. Daarnaast investeren de respondenten in het verstevigen van onderlinge banden binnen de lokale fundamentalistische groepen die ze vormen. Het binden aan de groep doen ze mede door het uitoefenen van sociale controle en impressie management.

Ondanks hun inspanningen blijft er echter sprake van '*drift*' van de fundamentalistische respondenten tussen een meer islamitische en een Westerse levensstijl. Dit uit zich bijvoorbeeld in de liefde van de respondenten voor mode en computerspelletjes die stand houdt en de pragmatische houding die het leven en werken in een niet-islamitische samenleving vereist. Als antwoord op eventuele tegenstrijdigheden tussen hun houding en gedrag maken de respondenten gebruik van een aantal theologische argumenten. In hun beleving blijven ze zich gedurende hun hele leven ontwikkelen en komen ze zo – hoewel ze af en toe wat minder goed de regels naleven – steeds dichterbij het ideaal van hun 'ware' zelf.

Als zodanig biedt de praktijk ook een antwoord op *identity strain*. Door zich aan de groep te verbinden en islam te representeren, internaliseren de fundamentalistische respondenten hun moslimidentiteit voor zichzelf en bevestigen die naar anderen wat hun status in de ogen van groepsleden kan vergroten. Bekeerlingen blijken in termen van status een bijzonder plaats in te nemen. In salafistische kringen hebben ze een streepje op anderen voor, omdat ze vaak meer weerstand moeten bieden tegen negatieve reacties op hun bekering vanuit hun sociale omgeving, hun vaak verwoede pogingen om hun achterstand in kennis in te halen en hun zuiverheid in de leer doordat ze verschoond zijn gebleven van culturele lessen van moslimouders.

#### **4. Duiding: Islamitisch fundamentalistische bekeringsprocessen en de sociale context**

Bij de duiding is het eerste belangrijke punt – vooral in reactie op de ‘*clash of civilizations*’ gedachte (Huntington, 1996) – dat de fundamentalistische respondenten in een aantal opzichten laten zien dat ze heel modern zijn, en dus niet zo ‘anders’, doordat ze bepaalde moderne, Westerse houdingen hebben geïnternaliseerd. Zo getuigen ze van een nostalgische hang naar het verleden (de pure islam) en een vooruitgangsgeloof (in hun persoonlijke ontwikkeling en de uiteindelijke winst voor islam) wat Gray (2003) als kenmerken van de moderne (Westerse) wereld beschrijft (zie ook Young, 1999 en 2007). Daarnaast hebben ze een individualistische houding ten aanzien van hun relatie tot Allah en hun persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid om een goed moslim te worden. Ook geven ze er blijk van bepaalde Westerse waarden te hebben omarmd. Deze studie laat onder andere zien dat de fundamentalistische respondenten verontwaardigd zijn over de twee maten waarmee de Nederlandse overheid in hun ogen meet in het geval van bijvoorbeeld vrijheid van meningsuiting. Het is hun perceptie dat dit recht in veel mindere mate zou gelden voor moslims dan voor niet moslims. Juist deze verontwaardiging laat zien dat ze de waarde van vrijheid van meningsuiting onderschrijven. Aan de andere kant laat zelfs hun verzet tegen bepaalde aspecten van de moderne, Westerse samenleving hun moderne karakter zien omdat dit verzet een tegenreactie vormt en dus een product is van die samenleving.

In het vervolg van deze duiding verbind ik de bevindingen van deze studie met bestaande theorieën over *strain*, subculturen, en identiteit in de zogenaamde ‘laat moderne’ of ‘liquide’ samenleving. Het argument is daarbij dat de *strain* die de fundamentalistische respondenten ervaren in nauw verband staat met de moderne, Westerse maatschappij waarin ze leven. In lijn met Giddens’ (1991) theoretische beschouwingen over de huidige ‘laat moderne’ samenleving, lijken de respondenten net als andere burgers een succesvol ‘identiteitsproject’ te ondernemen dat zich kenmerkt door een continue en reflexief streven naar zelfverwezenlijking. Er zijn echter verschillende factoren op cultureel en structureel gebied die de realisatie van dit project belemmeren en zo bijdragen aan *strain*. Op cultureel vlak ligt er een tegenstrijdigheid besloten in het culturele doel van een succesvol identiteitsproject zelf. Het identiteitsproject veronderstelt

namelijk dat er pas echt succes is bij het eindpunt: de zelfverwezenlijking en een gevoel van een stabiel zelf. Dit doel is moeilijk te verwezenlijken als het identiteitsproject tegelijkertijd vereist dat men altijd moet blijven streven naar 'meer authenticiteit' en er altijd meer succes is te behalen op verschillende vlakken in het leven. Daar komt bij dat het individualisme de nadruk legt op persoonlijke verantwoordelijkheid, ten gevolge waarvan het slagen of falen van mensen in hun identiteitsproject voor eigen conto komt.

Op structureel vlak komt daar bij dat niet iedereen dezelfde kansen heeft in de maatschappij of over dezelfde capaciteiten beschikt. Niet iedereen kan daardoor hetzelfde niveau van 'succes' bereiken. Zeker als men zichzelf gaat vergelijken met anderen, kan dit een bevredigend gevoel van succes in de weg staan. Een ander structureel obstakel komt voort uit de 'liquiditeit' die Bauman (2000) aan de moderne samenleving toedicht. Deze liquiditeit is onder meer het gevolg van alle keuzemogelijkheden die mensen hebben, vooral op het vlak van werk en levensstijl. Dit impliceert een gebrek aan stabiliteit en een toename van ontologische onzekerheid, terwijl een succesvol identiteitsproject juist een stabiliteit en zekerheid vereist (Bauman, 2004; Giddens, 1991; Young, 2007). Deze structurele en culturele factoren in combinatie met de persoonlijke achtergrond ervaringen van de respondenten, kunnen de *identity strain* en daarmee de cognitieve opening voor islamitisch fundamentalisme van de respondenten verklaren.

Een fundamentalistisch identiteitsproject biedt een antwoord op juist die onzekerheden die de liquide samenleving kenmerken. Zo bieden fundamentalistische discoursen een beeld van ultieme zekerheid, omdat ze de vele keuzemogelijkheden ten aanzien van werk en levensstijl door strikte regels beperken, traditionele gender rollen herintroduceren en pluralisme met een beroep op één universele waarheid ontkennen. In reactie op afnemende sociale bindingen wijzen deze discoursen op de betekenis van broederschap en in respons op het streven naar wereldlijk succes, ontkennen ze de waarde daarvan. Hoewel daarmee het doel van een succesvol identiteitsproject op wereldlijk niveau komt te vervallen, blijven de respondenten streven naar een authentiek zelf, zij het in andere vorm. Hun streven is nu om hun 'authentieke' zelf als moslim te bereiken door een 'steeds betere' moslim te worden.

Een vraag die resteert, is hoe het te verklaren is dat de respondenten juist voor islamitisch fundamentalisme hebben gekozen en niet voor een andere ideologie of tegencultuur. Voor een deel hangt dit samen met de mensen die ze tegenkwamen. Aan de andere kant is echter gebleken dat een deel van de respondenten aanvankelijk zelf op zoek ging. Het is zeer goed mogelijk dat islamitisch fundamentalisme, sinds 9/11 en de daarop volgende polarisatie, van de verschillende dualistische opties de meest voor de hand liggende bron van religieuze identificatie en verzet is geworden voor de respondenten die *identity strain* ervoeren en op zoek gingen naar hun 'authentieke' zelf.

Het is daarom van belang om te erkennen dat islamitisch fundamentalisme niet simpelweg een 'geïmporteerd' probleem is, maar dat het deels wortels heeft in de

Nederlandse maatschappij. De meest duidelijke wijze waarop die Nederlandse wortels tot uitdrukking komen, is via de bekeerlingen in deze studie. Er zijn moderne, westerse en lokale dimensies zichtbaar geworden in de houdingen, hun (pragmatische) gedragingen, hun fundamentalistische groep en hun identiteitsproject. Hieruit blijkt dat een islamitisch fundamentalistische identiteit gepaard kan gaan met modern en Westers zijn. De conclusie is al met al dat islamitisch fundamentalisme een globaal fenomeen is (Robertson, 1995), met mondiale ideologische wortels en een sterke lokale kleur van de moderne, Nederlandse context. Daarmee zijn de fundamentalistische respondenten een stuk meer 'eigen' dan over het algemeen wordt aangenomen.

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## GLOSSARY OF CONCEPTS

**Authentic self:** the assumption of a stable and 'true' self.

**Being adrift:** the experience of ontological insecurity through a lack of direction in one's life.

**Born-again:** the respondents from Muslim families who converted to Islamic fundamentalist views.

**Clash of civilizations thesis:** Huntington's (1996) thesis that since the end of the Cold War a new clash is taking place between principally two civilizations: that of the West and that of Islam.

**Conversion:** the turn of the respondents from a certain meaning system to Islam, regardless of whether their previous meaning system was a-religious, religious, or concerned another Islamic current.

**Converts:** the respondents from non-Muslim families who converted to Islamic fundamentalist views.

**'Cultural' Islam:** the term used by the fundamentalist respondents to denote Islamic currents that have accepted cultural innovations and adaptations that 'impurify' the 'pure' Islam of Muhammad, his companions, and the first generations after them.

**Drift:** the shift from socially conventional to socially unconventional attitudes and behaviour. In this case modern, Western or conventional Islamic beliefs and behaviour could be seen as conventional, whereas Islamic fundamentalism represents the unconventional. Drift in this sense implies that the respondents express at times more and at other times less commitment to their beliefs. Drift can also be expressed through a total change of heart and reorientation over time.

**Home-grown:** a term commonly applied to radical and extremist Muslims who grew up in the Netherlands.

**Identity project:** the reflexive, life-long project individuals in late modernity undertake to reach a state of self-actualization and to become their meaningful and 'authentic' selves according to Giddens (1991).

**Identity strain:** a sense of tension (strain) due to a felt discrepancy between what one sees as one's actual ('unauthentic') self and one's ideal image of an 'authentic' self.

**Islamic extremism:** a fundamentalist discourse that is characterized by ultimate dualism, an activist political stance and the general legitimization of violence against enemies of Islam as the necessary means to reach socio-political goals.

**Islamic fundamentalism:** an orientation within Islam characterized by a scripturalist/literalist interpretation of the Quran and the *Sunnah*, nostalgia for a 'pure' Islamic past, a dualist view on the world, and millenarianist beliefs of the world coming to an end.

**Islamic moderateness:** a label that is common to denote a more latitudinarian interpretation of Islam. Some basic characteristics of this interpretation are its view of sources of Islamic knowledge in its socio-historical context and, as a result, acceptance of certain reinterpretations and innovations to make Islam fit the modern context.

**Islamic orthodoxy:** a fundamentalist discourse that is characterized by a lack of political activism.

**Islamic radicalism:** a fundamentalist discourse that is characterized by an activist political stance, a stance that is seen as a personal responsibility, and a relative lack of support for violence as a means to reach these goals.

**Glocalization:** processes in which global phenomena – such as Islamic fundamentalism – merge with the local into glocal shapes (Robertson, 1995).

**Liquidity:** the mobility and inconstancy that characterizes late modern societies as Bauman (2000) argues to be especially visible through the consequences of emancipation, individualism, and the changing character of work, time and space, and community.

**Othering:** the creation of an out-group by distinguishing ‘them’ from ‘us’.

**Personal self:** a person’s internalized self-image as originating from a process of social interaction.

**‘Pure’ Islam:** the image that Muslims with a Salafi orientation have of Islam at the time of the Prophet Muhammad’s life and the Salafis, the pious predecessors. They believe that Islam was then still pure in the sense that it was still uncorrupted through innovations and cultural traditions that later generations of Muslims introduced.

**Radical conversion (or radicalization):** the conversion process toward radical viewpoints.

**Relative deprivation:** deprivation does not have to be of an absolute nature, but it is a result of expectations, aspirations and the comparison with others. Relative deprivation occurs particularly when people fail to be as successful as they expected or desired to be in comparison to others (Runciman, 1966; Webber, 2007).

**Resistance:** that part of the identification process in which individuals distance themselves from everyone and everything that they want to oppose to and not or no longer identify with. The term resistance refers to various types of differentiation, whether involving disagreement, distancing, criticism, opposition, or actual protest and rebellion.

**(Positive) self-identification:** that part of the identification process in which individuals identify themselves with those role models, beliefs, and ideals that they want to identify with.

**Salafism:** an Islamic fundamentalist current that wants to practise Islam the way that the Prophet, his companions, and the first three generations after them practised Islam. For that reason they ban cultural practices and other innovations and refrain from choosing between any of the four major Sunni schools of law (Hanbali, Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafii).

**Social self:** a person’s image of how he or she is seen by others.

**Sufism:** a ‘moderate’ Islamic current that is characterized by a focus on personally experiencing spirituality and – in the words of the fundamentalist respondents – a focus on ‘love’ instead of rules.

**Trust:** in this study trust refers to the sense of the fundamentalist respondents that they can rely on Allah as the Higher Power and hence on their fate as individuals. They trust that anything that happens to them is eventually in their own interest.

## GLOSSARY OF ARABIC TERMS

- Abaya:** a traditional gown from neck to ankles that covers female shapes
- Al djannah:** paradise
- Alhamdulillah:** Allah be praised
- Al-Wala wal-Bara:** the doctrine of love and hate for the sake of Allah
- Ameen:** Amen
- Aqeeda:** the creed
- Bismillah:** in the name of Allah
- Burqa:** a cloth in one piece that covers a woman's face and body from head to toes
- Dar-al-Harb:** the non-Islamic territory that Muslim rulers have no treaties with and that is therefore considered the territory of war
- Dar-al-Islam:** the territory of Islam, that is under the rule of Islamic law
- Da'wa:** doing da'wa means inviting others to Islam
- Djanat al Firdaus:** the highest level in Paradise
- Du'a:** an act of supplication
- Duff:** a traditional Islamic drum that fundamentalists consider allowed for making music
- Fitna:** the divides between Muslims and the consequential lack of unity in their religious attitudes
- Fiqh:** Islamic jurisprudence
- Hadith:** the words and deeds of the Prophets and the pious predecessors that form the Sunnah
- Halal:** in accordance with Islamic rules
- Halaqa:** study circle
- Haram:** opposed to Islamic rules
- Hasanat:** rewards for good deeds
- Hijab:** a headscarf
- Hijra:** emigration to an Islamic country
- Imaan:** belief
- Insha'Allah:** if Allah wants it
- Irhab:** terrorism
- Jihad:** striving in the way of Allah. Jihad can refer to both the internal struggle (*jihad al-nafs*) and the violent struggle against enemies of Islam (*jihad bil saif*).
- Jihadis:** is used in this study to refer to those Muslims that are activist supporters of a violent struggle against what they see as the enemies of Islam
- Kafir:** a non-Muslim and thus 'un-believer'
- Khimar:** a long headscarf that leaves the face uncovered and can have a length varying from the head till just below the breasts or to below the knees.
- Kuf(a)r:** unbelief/unbelieving
- Manhadj:** the religious methodology that a Muslim follows
- Masha'Allah:** whatever Allah wills
- Mujahideen:** a warrior on the path of Allah
- Muwahideen:** a monotheist
- Niqab:** a veil that covers the face. When Muslim women wear the *niqab* they do this often in combination with the *khimar*, a combination that outsiders usually refer to as a *burqa*.
- Salaam 'aleikum:** the Islamic greeting that means 'may peace be upon you'
- (al-)Salaf al-salih:** the pious predecessors, that is the Prophet Muhammad and his companions and the first three generations of Muslims after them.

**Shahada:** declaration of belief in Allah as the only God and the Prophet Muhammad as his last messenger

**Shirk:** the major sin in Islam as it involves associating partners to Allah, thereby denying *tahwid*, the oneness of Allah, that forms the basis of the Islamic monotheist claim

**Sjaitaan:** the devil

**Sunnah:** Islamic courses of conduct as established through the *hadith*

**Tahwid:** the belief in oneness of Allah which refers to monotheism in Islam

**Takfir:** doing *takfir* implies excommunicating somebody as a Muslim by calling him a *kafir*

**Tawba:** remorse

**Ummah:** the global Muslim community

**Wudu:** the ritual washing that is required before prayer

**Zakaat:** compulsory almsgiving, one of the five pillars of Islam

**Appendix**

**RESPONDENTS INTERVIEWS**

Name women N = 19	Age Group at time interview	Education level/Work	Ethnicity	Place of Birth	Family's religion	Self- categorization	Place of Residence	Area	Marital status	Family Situation	Research category
Alifa	18-20	Intermediate vocational education, dropped out	Moroccan	Netherlands, G4	Islam	Muslim (Sunni)	Same as place of birth	Multi-ethnic	Single	Lives with parents	Born-again Orthodox
Anna	21-25	Higher vocational training/University, dropped out	Western European-Indonesian	Netherlands, G50	A-religious	Muslim	G4	Multi-ethnic	Married, 2 <sup>nd</sup> wife	Lives with family, 1 child	Convert Orthodox
Ava	26-30	Higher vocational training/University	Dutch	Netherlands, Little village	Atheism	Sunni, later: Salafi	G4	Multi-ethnic	Divorced & re-married	Lives with husband	Convert From moderate to orthodox
Duriya	21-25	Intermediate vocational education	Moroccan	Netherlands, G50	Islam	Sunni	Same as place of birth	-	Single	Lives with parents	Moderate
Eva	18-20	University	Moroccan-Dutch	Netherlands	Muslim and protestant Islam	Ahl-Sunnah wal Djama'a Salafi	G50	Multi-ethnic	Single	Lives with parents	Orthodox
Fareeha	18-20	Higher vocational training/University	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Salafi	G4	Multi-ethnic	Married	Lives with parents	Born-again Radical
Jala	21-25	University	Eritrean	Eritrea	Islam (Sufi)	Salafi	London	Non-Muslim	Single	Lives with parents	Born-again Orthodox
Kaleemah	51-55	Higher vocational training	Dutch	Netherlands	Catholicism	Muslim with Salafi aspirations	G4	Multi-ethnic	Divorced	Lives by herself	Convert Extremist
Khadjah	36-40	Works at higher vocational level	Dutch	Netherlands	Jewish and Christian	Muslim	G4	Multi-ethnic	Divorced	Has 3 children	Convert Orthodox
Layla	26-30	University	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Salafi (Ahl-Sunnah wal Djama'a)	G50	Multi-ethnic	Single	Lives with parents	Born-again Orthodox

Name women N= 19	Age Group at time interview	Education level/Work	Ethnicity	Place of Birth	Family's religion	Self- categorization	Place of Residence	Area	Marital status	Family Situation	Research category
Maysa	26-30	Higher vocational training/University, dropped out	Moroccan- Dutch	Netherlands, G4	Islam	Mawahideen (monotheist)	G4	Multi- ethnic	Married	Lives with family, has two children	Born- again Extremist
Naima	18-20	Higher general secondary education	Dutch	Netherlands, little village	Catholicism	Sunni	G4	Multi- ethnic	Married	Lives with in-laws, has a child	Convert Orthodox
Natasha	18-20	Intermediate vocational education	Dutch	Netherlands, G4	Catholicism/ Atheist	Muslim (Sunni)	G4	Multi- ethnic	Married	Lives with in-law	Convert Orthodox
Saaliha	21-25	University	Somalian	UK, Wales	Islam	Salafi	London	Multi- ethnic	Single	Lives at home	Born- again Orthodox
Sara	31-35	University	Spanish	Spain	Atheist	Salafi	London	Multi- ethnic	Married	Lives with husband	Convert Orthodox
Soumaya	18-20	Intermediate vocational education, dropped out	Surinamese- Dutch	Netherlands, G10	A-religious	Sunni (following the example of the Salaf)	Village near place of birth	Largely native Dutch	Married	Lives with husband + mother	Convert Orthodox
Vanessa	26-30	Finished higher vocational training, dropped out of University	Surinamese- Dutch	Netherlands, G4	Christian	Salafi/ 'fundamentalist' Muslim	Same as place of birth	Multi- ethnic	Married	Has three children	Convert Orthodox
Yelda	21-25	Higher vocational training/University	Moroccan	Netherlands, G4	Islam	Sunni	Same as place of birth	Multi- ethnic	Single	Lives at home of family member	Born- again Extremist
Zarah	21-25	Higher vocational training/University	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Sunni	G4	Multi- ethnic	Married	Lives with family, has a child	Born- again Orthodox

Name men N= 17	Age Group at time interview	Education levels/Work	Ethnicity	Place of Birth	Family's religion	Self- categorization	Place of Residence	Area	Marital status	Family Situation	Research category
Almahdi	31-35	Dropped out of secondary school	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Muslim	G10	Largely native Dutch	Married	Lives with wife	Born- again Radical to moderate
Aarif	21-25	Secondary school	British	UK, London	Catholic	Salafi	London	Multi- ethnic	Married	Lives with wife	Convert Extremist to orthodox
Azmat	26-30	University	Bengali	Bangladesh	Islam	Sunni	London	Multi- ethnic	Engaged	Lives with parents	Moderate, orthodox aspirations
Bassam	21-25	Higher vocational training	Cape- Verdian	Netherlands, G4	Catholicism	Salafi	Same as place of birth	Multi- ethnic	Married	Lives with wife	Convert Orthodox
Bilal	21-25	University	Moroccan	Netherlands, G4	Islam	Muslim	Same as place of birth	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Single	Lives at home	Moderate
Halim	21-25	University, dropped out	Moroccan	Netherlands, G4	Islam	Muslim	Same as place of birth	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Engaged	Lives at home	Moderate
Hujjat	26-30	Intermediate voc- education, dropped out of higher vocational training	Surinamese	Limburg	Christian	Muslim (Hizb- ut-Tahrir)	G50	-	Married	Lives with family, has a child	Convert Radical
Jamal	18-20	University	Pakistan	Netherlands	Islam (Sufi)	Sufi	G4	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Single	Lives at home	Moderate
Khallad	61-65	Vocational training in Morocco	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Muslim	G50	Multi- ethnic, low. class	Married	Lives with ife	Moderate

Name men N= 17	Age Group at time interview	Education level/Work	Ethnicity	Place of Birth	Family's religion	Self- categorization	Place of Residence	Area	Marital status	Family Situation	Research category
Labeeb	26-30	Islamic University	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Sunni	G4	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Married	Lives with wife from Morocco	Born- again Moderate
Marid	18-20	Higher vocational training	Asian- Dutch	Netherlands, G4	Islam	Muslim/Salafi	Same as place of birth	Largely native Dutch, lower class	Married	Lives with converted wife	Born- again Extremist
Muhammed	36-40	Higher vocational training	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Salafi	G50	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Married	Lives with family, has two children	Orthodox
Naqeeb	21-25	Intermediate vocational education, dropped out	Moroccan	Netherlands, G50	Islam	Salafi	Same as place of birth	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Married	Lives with wife	Orthodox
Nidal	18-20	University	Turkish	Turkey	Islam	Muslim/Salafi	G4	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Single	Lives at home	Born- again Became bit less extremist
Raid	21-25	University	Eritrean	Eritrea, raised in Netherlands	Islam	Muslim (sees Salafi as example)	London	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Engaged	Lives on his own	Moderate with orthodox aspirations
Reza	21-25	Intermediate/Hi gher vocational training	Raised by native Dutch parents	Latin America, adopted	Christian	Muslim	G50	Native Dutch, but most multi- ethnic	Single	Lives on his own	Convert Extremist to mode- rate to orthodox
Sabr	26-30	Intermediate vocational education	Moroccan	Morocco	Islam	Sunni	G50	Multi- ethnic, lower class	Singl	No fixed address	Moderate



## CURRICULUM VITAE

After having finished a foundation course in psychology and having obtained a law degree in Criminal Law and Legal Theory in 2001 at the University of Groningen (RUG), Fiore Geelhoed (1976) chose to pursue a criminological career. For that purpose she lived in Barcelona, Spain in 2001–2002 where she did a criminological Master at the University of Barcelona. When the master's classes had finished, she came back to the Netherlands to write her master dissertation. While doing this, she worked at the criminal court Haarlem, location Schiphol from January 2003–February 2004 to gain practical legal experience.

Fiore started working at the Criminology department of the Erasmus University Rotterdam in March 2004. The first year she worked with prof. dr. Henk van de Bunt on the re-accreditation report for the Research School Safety and Security in Society (OMV). In the following six years she worked as a junior lecturer and as a PhD student within the programme of the OMV. She coordinated and taught two practical bachelor courses in criminology and occasionally gave lectures. During her PhD study she participated in a research project on Islamic radicalism of the IVA research institute in Tilburg. Due to winning a Female Stipend grant in 2008 she had the opportunity to gather additional data in London (UK) over a period of 3.5 months, where she worked at South Bank University.

It is Fiore's ambition for the future to explore the possibilities of documentary film as an ethnographic research method and as a means of reporting research findings. Besides the topic of her PhD, her present research interests concern green criminology and activism.