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Criticism of Islam.
Responses of Dutch Religious and Humanist Organizations Analyzed

Sipco J. Vellenga

Introduction

During the last five decades Islam has emerged as Europe's second religion after Christianity.[1] In a relatively short period the number of Muslims in Western Europe has increased to more than 15 million and Islam has become a fixed part of Europe's religious landscape. Arguably, Islam will be one of the forces that shape Europe's cultural future.

The presence and increasing visibility of Islam in Europe has evoked various responses. One of them – and a very important one from a political point of view – is that of *criticism of Islam*, or, in its harsh and xenophobic form, *anti-Islamism* or *Islamophobia*.[2] In a number of European countries, so-called nationalist-populist parties have emerged that show a deep aversion to Islam and Muslim migrants. Examples are the Flemish Block (Vlaams Blok) in Belgium, the Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti) in Denmark, the Swiss People's Party

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1 Jenkins, Philip: *God's Continent. Christianity, Islam and Europe's Religious Crisis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007; Nielsen, Jørgen: *Muslims in Western Europe*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, [3]2010.

2 It makes sense to distinguish ›Islam criticism‹ and ›Islamophobia‹. Islam criticism is a much broader concept than Islamophobia. That concept is coined by the Runnymede Trust report: *Islamophobia: a challenge for us all*, London: Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, 1997. Nevertheless this report used a rather broad definition of Islamophobia, it also noted that: »in a liberal democracy it is inevitable and healthy that people will criticize and oppose, sometimes robustly, opinions and practices with which they disagree« (Runnymede Trust: *Islamophobia*, p. 4).

(Schweizerische Volkspartei) in Switzerland, the National Front (Front National) in France and the Party for Freedom (PVV, Partij voor de Vrijheid) in the Netherlands.

Expressions of Islam criticism have given rise in many European countries to heated debates about the character of Islam and the freedom Muslims in Europe should have, individually and collectively, to express their religion in the public domain. The focus of this contribution will be on the way leaders of Muslim and non-Muslim organizations have responded to these expressions during the last decade. How did they respond to them and why?

For practical reasons, I will limit this article to the situation in the Netherlands. However, I assume that the situation in this country is to a high degree comparable with that in most other Western European countries where Islam has become an important topic in the public debate. This contribution is based on a research project which I have conducted in collaboration with Gerard Wiegers.[3]

This contribution is structured as follows: first, I will present the research questions that will be answered here, specify the main concepts and refer to the methods used in the empirical research. Next, I will outline the context of selected expressions of Islam criticism will be outlined. Then, I will present the findings. The presentation of the factors which have significant impact on the responses to these expressions will start with the presentation of a theoretical model. The central notion in this model is, as we shall see, *framing*. In conclusion, I will summarize the main results and make a remark on the effects of the responses to the selected expressions on the escalation or de-escalation of the controversy in the Netherlands over Islam and Muslims.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This article focuses on two questions: How did the leaders of nationwide Muslim and non-Muslim organizations in the Netherlands respond to selected expressions of Islam criticism between 2004 and 2010? What are the factors that influenced their responses?

With regard to these questions, the following should be noted. First, it is useful to make a distinction between three types of responses by leaders to Islam critical expressions: their response in the public debate, or the public response; their response within their own organizations, or the internal response; and their

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3   Vellenga, Sipco J./Wiegers, Gerard A.: *Religie, binding en polarisatie*, The Hague: WODC, 2011.

response with regard to the connection to other religious and humanist organizations, or the external response.

Second, the focus is on five expressions of Islam criticism: the film Submission, the Danish cartoons, the film Fitna, the Internet film An interview with Mohammed, and the Swiss ban on the building of new minarets and its Dutch aftermath. The film Submission was made by the Dutch MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali and the filmmaker Theo van Gogh. It was broadcast on Dutch television on August 29, 2004, and depicted in four short scenes the deplorable situation of four Muslim women. On November 2, 2004, Theo van Gogh was killed by Mohammed Bouyeri, who was raised in a Moroccan Dutch family. On September 30, 2005, the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten published twelve cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed. Among them the cartoon of the Prophet with a bomb in his turban and the Shahada – the Muslim declaration of faith, drew by Kurt Westergaard. Five month later, the cartoons were object of emotional protests across the world, from Asia to Europe. The film Fitna, produced by the Dutch MP Geert Wilders, was released on the Internet on March 27, 2008. It shows a number of images of Muslims and violence and anti-Semitism. The last picture of the film was the cartoon of Kurt Westergaard mentioned above. The internet film An Interview with Mohammed, made by Ehsan Jami, was posted on the Internet on December 9, 2008. It is an interview in which Jami poses questions to a masked actor who plays the role of Mohammed on issues concerning the rights of women, Jews and infidelity. On November 29, 2009, the Swiss voters supported a referendum proposal to ban the building of minarets. Four days earlier, the Dutch MP Van der Staaij, member of the Calvinist party SGP, requested the government in a motion to be reserved with regard to legal admitted activities, such as the construction of minarets, as these activities could contribute to feelings of alienation and the erosion of historical Dutch identity among native Dutch people. The motion was rejected by the majority of the Dutch parliament some days after the Swiss referendum. Without doubt, of all these five expressions Fitna caused the largest upheaval in the Netherlands.

Third, we studied the leadership of 21 Dutch organizations, ten of which were Muslim, five Christian, three Jewish, one Hindu, one Buddhist, and one Humanist. In selecting these, we used the following criteria: operating at the national level; contacts with public authorities; ethnic diversity; religious diversity; and an equal distribution between Muslim and non-Muslim organizations. Most of the Muslim organizations under consideration are members of one of the two liaison organizations which are acknowledged by the Dutch government and claim to represent the overwhelming part of Dutch Muslim communities, namely the Islamic Council of the Netherlands (CMO, Contactorgaan Moslims en Over-

heid) and the Dutch Muslim Council (CGI, Contact Groep Islam). We studied the following CMO members: the Union of Moroccan Mosques in the Netherlands (UMMON, Unie van Marokkaanse Moskeeën in Nederland), the Islamic Foundation of the Netherlands (ISN, Islamitische Stichting Nederland; Turkish; Diyanet), the Islamic Center of the Netherlands Foundation (SICN, Stichting Islamitisch Centrum Nederland; Turkish; Süleymanli), the Dutch Islamic Federation (NIF, Nederlandse Islamitische Federatie; Turkish; Mili Görüs), the Shi`ite Umbrella Association (OSV, Overkoepelende Sjiitische Vereniging); the following CGI members: the Union of Lahore Muslim Organizations in the Netherlands (ULAMON, Unie van Lahore Moslim Organisaties Nederland Surinamese; Lahore Ahmadiyya), the Federation of Alevi Associations in the Netherlands (HAK-DER, Federatie van Alevitische Verenigingen in Nederland), the Federation of Islamic Organizations in the Netherlands (FION, Federatie Islamitische Organisaties Nederland); and two ›independent‹ Muslim organizations: the Islam & Dialogue Foundation (SID, Stichting Islam & Dialoog; Turkish; Gülen movement) and the National organization of Muslim women in the Netherlands (Al Nisa). In addition to consulting the leaders of these Muslim organizations, we referred to the leadership of five Christian organizations: the Council of Churches in the Netherlands (RvK ,Raad van Kerken in Nederland), the Roman-Catholic Church (RKK, Rooms-Katholieke Kerk), the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN, Protestantse Kerk in Nederland), the Being Church in the Netherlands Foundation (SKIN, Samen Kerk in Nederlands; migrant churches), the Christian Reformed Churches in corporation with the Gospel & Muslims Foundation (CGK, Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken; E&M, Stichting Evangelie & Moslims), three Jewish organizations: the Central Jewish Committee (CJO,Centraal Joods Overleg), the Dutch-Jewish Congregation (NIK, Nederlands–Israëlitisch Kerkgenootschap), the Dutch Association for Progressive Judaism (NVPJ, Nederlands Verbond voor Progressief Jodendom); and three other organizations: the Buddhist Union of the Netherlands (BUN, Boeddhistische Unie Nederland), the Hindu Council for the Netherlands (HRN, Hindoe Raad Nederland) and the Humanist Union (HV, Humanistisch Verbond).

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, we explored three sources. Firstly, we conducted semi-structured interviews with leaders of the selected 21 organizations. In addition, we collected and analyzed documents about these leaders and their organization. The Internet was an important source. Thirdly, we studied secondary literature about these organizations in order to get a more nuanced picture of them, the way they function, their world-views, history, internal structure, external connections and position in society.

We analyzed the documentation as well as the transcriptions of our interviews. The transcriptions are analyzed according to the common methods of qualitative research of open, axial and selective coding.[4] Our final analyses of the leaderships' responses have been presented to our respondents, allowing them to correct possible mistakes. All references to organizations should be understood as a reference to their leaderships.

CONTEXT

The overwhelming majority of the Muslims in the Netherlands are of Turkish, Moroccan or Surinam origin. The first Turkish and Moroccan immigrants settled down in the 1960s. They were single male laborers who expected to return home after a short stay. By the mid-1970s, however, many of these workers decided to prolong their stay and a process of family reunion started. The first Surinam Muslims came in the 1950s. Their numbers increased rapidly in the early-1970s, after the Dutch government announced that the colony of Suriname would become independent in 1975. Since the end of the 1970s, a third category of Muslim immigrants has entered the Netherlands, consisting of political refugees from mainly Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Due to these developments, the number of Muslims has increased rapidly in the Netherlands, from 51,000 in 1971 to approximately 380,000 in 1988 and subsequently to more than 900,000 at the present time – approximately 6 percent of the Dutch population.[5]

Many factors contributed to the emergence of a public and political debate on Islam in the Netherlands. This rise was not only the upshot of the rapid growth of the number of Muslims, but probably more important, the increasing visibility of Islam, the stronger religious identification of migrants from the Muslim world, the rise of political Islam and Muslim militantism as well as the higher value put in the media on the cultural dimension of integration of migrants in Dutch society. It can be argued that this debate started with the Rushdie affair in 1989 and became more intense after the turn of the century.[6]

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4   Strauss, Anselm/Corbin, Juliet: *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1998; Kvale, Steinar: *Doing Interviews*, Los Angeles/London/New Delhi: Sage, 2011.

5   FORUM: *Factbook - The Position of Muslims in the Netherlands: Facts and Figures*, Utrecht: FORUM, 2010.

6   See Peters, Ruud/Vellenga, Sipco J.: »Contested Tolerance: Public Discourses in the Netherlands on Muslim Migrants«, in: Monica Wohlrab-Sahr/Levent Tezcan (eds.),

Within this debate various discourses can be noticed. One of them is the discourse of Islam criticism. In the first half of the first decade of this century this discourse became leading, in the sense that Islam critics got the power to set the agenda of the debate while other participants were compelled to respond to their contributions. In the autumn of 2001, in the aftermath of ›9/11‹, the scholar and politician Pim Fortuyn, who rejected the hitherto existing policy of multiculturalism, decided to stand in the May 2002 elections. In his election campaign, he promised, among many other things, to make every effort to defend Dutch society against the threat of ›Islamization‹. On 6 May 2002, however, he was murdered by a (non-Muslim) Dutch animal rights activist, an action that profoundly shocked the population. Nine days later his party, the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF, Lijst Pim Fortuyn), won a sweeping election victory and became the second-largest party in parliament after the Christian Democrats, with 26 of the 150 seats.

From 2002 onwards, Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali has become a prominent figure in the public debate about Islam and multiculturalism. In collaboration with Theo van Gogh, filmmaker and publicist, she produced the film *Submission*. On 2 November 2004, Theo van Gogh was stabbed to death by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch youth of Moroccan descent. In February 2006, Ayaan Hirsi Ali declared, in connection with the publication of the cartoons about Muhammad in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten*, that she wanted to defend the right to freedom of speech as a right to offend hard-line Muslims.[7] In the summer of 2006, she left the Netherlands for a position with the American Enterprise Institute, a neo-conservative think-tank in Washington DC.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's negative views on Islam resonate in the work of many other Dutch opinion makers and politicians. In 2006, Geert Wilders founded the PVV, which presents itself explicitly as an anti-Islam party. The negative view of Wilders on Islam radicalized. Since 2007 he has not longer characterized Islam as a backward religion incompatible with so-called western values, but as fascist ideology. »The root of the problem is fascist Islam. The sick ideology of

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Soziale Welt Sonderband 17: Konfliktfeld Islam in Europa, München: Nomos, 2007, p. 221-240; Vellenga, Sipco J.: »›Huntington‹ in Holland. The Public Debate on Muslim Immigrants in the Netherlands«, in: *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 21(2008), p. 21-42.

7   Hirsi Ali, Ayaan: *The Right to Offend*, Speech in Berlin on February 9, 2006. Available from *http://vorige.nrc.nl/opinie/article1654061.ece/The_Right_to_Offend* (accessed October 15, 2013).

Allah and Mohammed as laid down in the Islamic Mein Kampf: the Koran.«[8] In March 2008, Geert Wilders released the anti-Islam film *Fitna*. At present, his party holds 15 seats in the Dutch parliament.

The rise of the Islam critical voice in the Netherlands has led to a heated public debate. This critical voice has been contested by people who advocate a more positive view on Islam and/or a pluralist society. They reproach members of the anti-Islam camp for being intolerant and feeding social unrest. This debate takes place on a national level in particular by politicians, journalists, writers and academics. Here my focus is on the way leaders of religious and humanist organizations have responded to expressions of Islam criticism.

PATTERNS OF RESPONSE

Before presenting the patterns of response that can be observed with the organizations researched, it is important to notice that we can distinguish three *positions* in the field or system of Islam criticism.[9] If we put it in judicial terms, first there is the party of the persecutor (accuser), namely the party of the Islam critics, second there is the party of the defendant (accused), namely the party of the Muslim organizations whose religion is criticized, and third there is the party of the bystanders, namely the party of the non-Muslim organizations. The first research question is about the party of the accused and bystanders: what patterns of response can we trace among the leaders of the selected Muslim and non-Muslim organizations? I will start with the response of the Muslim organizations.

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8   Wilders, Geert: »Genoeg is genoeg: Verbied de Koran«, in: *De Volkskrant*, August 8, 2007.

9   In his article Religion and Conflict the Belgian social scientist Luc Reychler, for instance, emphasizes that the roles religious organizations play in conflict situations are strongly influenced by the positions they take within those situations (Reychler, Luc: »Religion and Conflict«, in: *The International Journal of Peace Studies* 2 (1997), p. 1-11). They can act as conflicting parties, but also as bystanders, as the non-Muslims organizations in our research. Religious bystanders can adopt a neutral stand, but can also choose to intervene. They can decide to support one of the conflicting parties or can take the role of a peace-builder or peace-maker.

Muslim organizations

Three types are discernible in the responses by Muslim organizations: resignation/ avoidance, defensive/ disapproval, and offensive/counteracting. I underline that the responses are mostly more complex and ambivalent than these terms suggest and show always a certain variance, depending on the topic to which a specific response applies.

Resignation/ avoidance: These responses show a certain indifference. The leaders feel that the criticism does not apply to their organization and can safely be ignored. »This isn't about us. It's about other Muslims«, a leader of the Ahmadiyya association ULAMON said. Reaching out to the critics or to other religious or humanist organizations is no priority in this type of response, which can be found beside the leaders of the ULAMON with the leaders of the Süleymanli association SICN and the Alevi association HAK-DER.

Defensive/ disapproval: In this case, the leaders do take the criticism to heart, but refrain from taking public action, either because they feel incapable of doing so or because they do not see it as part of their responsibility. According to Dr. Bülent Senay, president of the Turkish Dutch ISN, for example, it is the responsibility of Dutch society, or broader, of European society to combat expressions of anti-Islamism, not of Muslims. Beside ISN, this type of response is discernible with the Gülen organization SID and the Shia association OSV.

Offensive/ counteracting: This type of response is characterized by active involvement. The leaders respond to the Islam-critical expressions in whichever way they find suitable, such as filing law-suits, issuing public statements, launching poster campaigns, or strengthening their ties with non-Muslim organizations. The Islamic women organization Al NISA for example, has actively participated in the public debate on Islam since 2004. Its aim is to counteract the negative image of Islam. To this end it has launched several times humorous poster campaigns, such as in 2007 which was entitled ›Real Dutch‹. Al Nisa has always been in favour of working with other religious and societal organizations that share its emancipatory aims. Furthermore this type of response is shown with the Moroccan Dutch UMMON, the Turkish Dutch NIF and the ›Arabic oriented‹ FION.

Non-Muslim organizations

The responses by non-Muslim organizations can be characterized as supportive, non-committal, and critical.

Supportive: These responses express solidarity to the ›accused‹ Muslims and Muslim organizations when Islam is – in their eyes - insulted. They advocate the right to freedom of expression but condemn insults against the Prophet or the Koran. The response may be limited to issuing public statements, but may also encourage more dialogue and cooperation. In response to the killing of Theo van Gogh, for example, the leaders of the RKK in the Netherlands raised the status of their dialogue activities to that of the highest level of the Conference of bishops and set up, related to that, a Council for Interreligious Dialogue (CID; Contactraad Interreligieuze Dialoog). This Council has taken many interreligious and cultural dialogue initiatives and has responded publicly to all mentioned expressions of Islam criticism, except to the film Interview with Mohammed and the Swiss minaret affair. This type of response is displayed by the mainstream Christian churches as well as the Jewish organizations

Non-committal: In this case, there is virtually no public response to the Islam-critical expressions. The organization's leadership may feel these expressions are none of its business, or may be faced with internal division. Contacts with Muslim organizations are scarce or lacking. We find this response with the leaders of the Christian Reformed Churches as well as the umbrella organizations of Christian migrant churches SKIN, Buddhist centre BUN and Hindu groups HRN.

Critical: Responses of this type are positive about most of the content of the Islam-critical expressions, even if their form may not win approval. These responses take side with the critics if and when they are under threat because of what they said. This type of response was found with the HV (Humanistic League). The association declared in June 2006: »The Humanistic League accuses the extreme responses in large parts of the Muslim world to the publication of the - in the meanwhile well-known - Danish cartoons. Satirical drawings have proven to be an effective means to mock people, institutions, officials and population groups. In a constitutional state, citizens who think they are abused or insulted can take judicial steps«.[10]

10 Humanistic League, Press release: »Cartoons en de vermoorde onschuld«, February 9, 2006.

FACTORS

Model

What factors have affected these patterns? In order to assess which factors possibly affected these patterns, we, first of all, surveyed scholarly literature about the way religious organizations act in conflict dynamics. On the basis of this survey, we constructed a tentative model capturing the various factors (Figure 1). This model assumes that the response of the leaders is the outcome of the three main factors: the *framing* of the leaders, the influence of *external forces*, such as the government, and the influence of *internal forces*, such as member organizations and their members. The framing of the leaders is influenced by background factors: *traditions* and *worldviews*, *experiences of threat*, and characteristics of the *organization*s (goals, ethnicity, and position). The key notion in the model is the concept of framing. I distinguish two types of framing: diagnostic framing and prognostic framing.[11] The process of diagnostic framing produces specific definitions of the expressions of Islam criticism and the process of prognostic framing refers to specific strategies and tactics of the organizations with regard to these expressions, or in other words, addresses the question ›what is to be done?‹

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11 The concept of ›framing‹ goes back in sociology to work by Erving Goffman and in particular his famous study *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974. He considers a frame as a scheme of interpretation in which the particulars of the events and activities to which we attend are organized and made sensible. Among others, David Snow and Scott Byrd applied this concept to the study of social and religious movements. They made a useful distinction between diagnostic framing, prognostic or strategic framing and motivational framing (Snow, David S./Benford, Robert D.: »Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization«, in: *International Social Movement Research* (1988), p.197-217; Snow, David S./Byrd, Scott C.: »Ideology, Framing Processes, and Islamic Terrorist Movements«, in: *Mobilization: An International Quarterly Review* 12 (2007), p.119-136.

Figure 1: Model of factors
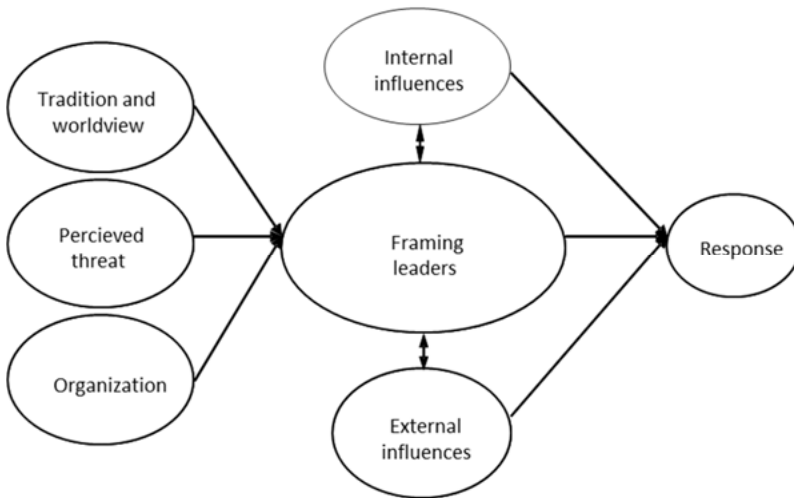
Framing

Our empirical research shows that framing is critically important. The way lead-ers define the selected expressions of Islam criticism and stipulate the general strategy and tactics with respect to them influences the way they responded to a high degree.

Diagnostic framing: Among the leaders of the organizations studied at least four types of diagnostic framing can be discerned, namely religious framing, po-litical framing, societal framing and juridical framing. These four are ›ideal types‹, what means that we find them in practice never in a pure form but always in mixed forms. Some Muslim organizations define the Islam-critical expres-sions primarily as offensive to the key symbols of Islam (UMMON, NIF, SID), whereas others see them mainly as expressions of anti-Islamic or racist political ideologies (ISN, Al Nisa, FION). Among the non-Muslim organizations we find primarily societal and constitutional types of framing. The Christian RvK, RKK, PKN, as well as the Jewish NIK and NVPJ, responded to *Fitna* primarily from the perspective of the cohesion of Dutch society, qualifying the film as provoca-tive and a source of polarization. The Humanist HV, for its part, stressed the le-gitimacy of the Islam-critical expressions, viewing them from the perspective of constitutional freedom of expression, stepping in for the critics if and when they are under threat.

Prognostic framing: Essential for the public response of the leaders is not their diagnostic framing, but the combination of their diagnostic and strategic framing. Starting from their framework, the mainline Christian churches plead for interreligious and cultural dialogue. Although the CGK (Christian Reformed Churches) largely share the diagnoses of the situation of these churches, they did not respond to the expressions because they are of the opinion that response to criticism of Islam is certainly not their responsibility but that of societal and political organizations. Likewise, some of the Muslim organizations say it is not their task but that of the government (ISN) or non-Muslim organizations (SID) to oppose anti-Islamism, while others try to counterbalance the negative image of Muslims in the media by launching a poster campaign (Al Nisa) or by sending appeals to Islamic authorities not to boycott Dutch products (UMMON), according to their strategic visions.

Background factors

Tradition and world view: In many organizations the diagnostic and prognostic framing of the expressions of Islam criticism is influenced by the (religious) tradition of which it considers itself to be a part.[12] In the mainline protestant churches reports of synods on interreligious relations are guiding, whereas in the Roman Catholic Church a document as *Nostra Aetate*, the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council, is influential. Within all Muslim organizations the particular traditions of interpretation of textual sources (the Qur'an and the Sunna) they are affiliated with, are crucial. For the leaders of ›non-official‹ Muslim organizations, such as NIF (Milli Görüs) and I&S (Gülen), the doctrinal writings of the founders of

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12 Beginning from the so-called meaning system approach, Israela Silberman, Torry Higgins and Carol Dweck (2005) stress the impact of the contents of beliefs, goals, and actions of religions groups on their attitudes towards conflicts (See Silberman, Israela,/Higgins, E.Torry/Dweck, Carol S.: »Religion and World Change. Violence and Terrorism versus Peace«, in: *Journal of Social Issues* 61 (2005), p. 761-784). They state that these aspects can facilitate both violent as well as peaceful activism. In line with this approach, Mark Juergensmeyer put the concept of ›cosmic war‹ at the heart of his analysis of the alleged global rise of religious violence (Juergensmeyer, Marc: *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). According to him, images of divine warfare are persistent features of religious activism. By relating conflicts to the metaphysical struggle between good and evil, they give them an absolute character.

their movements, Necmettin Erbakan (1926-2011) and Fethullah Gülen (1941) respectively, are authoritative.

Experience of threat: Although many Muslim organizations consider the selected expressions as insults to key symbols of their faith, they apparently do not experience them as a serious threat.[13] It is likely that the support they received from non-Muslim organizations and from the government during the Fitna affair partly contributed to this. In particular, the leaders of the Moroccan organizations declared that the stance the Dutch government took during the affair stimulated them to contribute to a ›calm and sensible‹ response among Muslims in the Netherlands and the Islamic world.

Organization: One important factor that affects the framing of the leaders of the organizations studied is the type of organization.[14] Actually we can distinguish two main types, namely *interest-driven* organizations and *value-driven* or-

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13 Social identity theories point out that identity threat is very likely a necessary condition to the eruption of intergroup conflict. According to Jeffrey Seul, religion has the powerful ability to serve identity-related needs of individuals and groups (Seul, Jefrey R.: »›Ours is the Way of God‹. Religion, Identity, and Intergroup Conflict«, in: *Journal of Peace Research* 36 (1999), p. 553-569). That is why it can promote the production and escalation of intergroup conflict. In the same vein, Herbert Kelman points out that in existential conflicts, the experience of threat to collective identity is a core issue (Kelman, Herbert C.: »Negotiating National Identity and Self-Determination in Ethnic Conflicts. The Choice between Pluralism and Ethnic Cleansing«, in: *Negotiation Journal* (1997), p. 327-340). This experience stimulates processes of ›selfing‹ and ›othering‹ and lead to a view of the conflict as a zero-sum struggle. The sense of threat and the consequent rejection of the other gain additional strength when religious differences overlap with ethnic or national differences (cf. Verkuyten, Maykel : »Multicultural Recognition and Ethnic Minority Rights: A Social Identity Perspective«, in: *European Review of Social Psychology*, 17 (2006), p.148-184).

14 In the field of research on social and religious movements the so-called mobilization approach used to stress the importance of leaders and organizations for the way groups operate in various social contexts (see Edwards, Bob/McCarthy, John D.: »Resources and Social Movement Mobilization«, in: David A. Snow/Sarah A. Soule/Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2004, p.116-152). This approach is recognizable in Scott Appleby's famous study on the complicated relationship between religion, violence and peace, entitled *The Ambivalence of the Sacred. Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. According to Appleby, religious leaders and organizations determine to a high degree the stance that religious groups take within a conflict situation.

ganizations.[15] Whereas interest-driven organizations take their own interest or their members' interests as their main frame of reference, value-driven organizations say they intend to be guided mainly by values. These two types are actually two extremes. All selected organizations bear elements of both within them.

Among the ten Muslim organizations studied, four can be characterized as primarily interest-driven, namely SCIN (Süleymanli), ULAMON (Ahmadiyya), HAK-DER (Alevies) and OSV (Shiites). The remaining six are predominately value-driven: UMMON, ISN, NIF, Al Nisa, FION, and SID. Among the non-Muslim organizations, SKIN, BUN, and HRN are primarily interest-driven, whereas RvK, RKK, PKN, CGK, SEM, and HV are value-driven organizations. The Jewish organizations are somewhere in the middle of the continuum, particularly NIK and NVPJ. The umbrella organization CJO explicitly aims at fostering the interests of the Jewish organizations it represents as well as those of the Jewish communities in the Netherlands in general.

What is interesting is that actually *no* interest organization responded to the criticism of Islam. The interest organizations among the Islamic organizations say that the criticism of Islam is not about ›their‹ Islam, while the non-Islamic interest organizations say they do not have the responsibility to respond to them. »That is not our business.« Accordingly, they hardly invest in strengthening their interreligious contacts in the aftermath of the Islam-critical expressions. In contrast to the interest organizations nearly all value-driven organizations have responded actively to anti-Islam expressions.

It is important to note that all the interest-directed organizations researched are in fact organizations representing *small minorities* within or outside Islam in Dutch society. Many of them are ethnically based. They try to serve the interests of their people and strive to stay aloof from social and political debates when they conclude that their interests are not at stake. Sometimes, this pattern of passivity is partly the upshot of internal dissension about Islam and criticism of Islam among the members of the organization, which makes it impossible for their leaders to take a clear stand in public. The member churches of SKIN, for example, hold widely diverging opinions on Islam and on criticism of Islam.

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15 The distinction between values and interests is a classical one in sociology. It can be traced back to work by Max Weber. In conflict studies this distinction is found in Vilhelm Aubert's study *The Hidden Society*, Totowa (NJ): The Bedminster Press, 1965. In that book on modes of conflict resolution Aubert made a distinction between interest conflicts and value conflicts. Interest conflicts stem from ›a situation of scarcity‹, whereas value conflicts are based ›upon dissenses concerning the normative status of a social object‹. (V. Aubert: *The Hidden Society*, p. 86-89).

The value-driven organizations are actually umbrella organizations of larger minority groups as well as larger religious groups, such as the RKK and the PKN. Partly determined by their position, these organizations feel responsibility for issues of Islam and society in general. Because of that sense of responsibility, they tend to respond to significant events with regard to religion in the public domain.

Internal and external factors

Framing is not the only significant factor. In some cases internal differences of opinion may have prevented organizations from firmly responding, while in other cases instructions from the international headquarters of the organizations may have affected their response.

In particular in the case of *Fitna,* the Dutch *government* appears to have played a significant role. In the aftermath of the Danish cartoons, the Dutch government was deeply concerned about the effects this film could have for the Netherlands. The government feared that in the Netherlands the film would put the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims further under pressure and abroad it would harm Dutch economic interests and for example lead to treats of Dutch embassies in the Middle East. In order to prevent these effects, it took several measures. The Minister of Internal Affair sent a message to the local authorities to be alert, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs instructed diplomats to spread the message among Islamic authorities that the film is only the product of the leader of a small party in Dutch Parliament and the Dutch government distances itself to it. Moreover, the Minister of Justice invited more than twenty leaders of religious, humanist and migrant organizations to discuss the release of the film. Many Muslim organizations felt bolstered by it. This may have been especially true for Moroccan organizations, which have been stigmatized as prone to radicalization because of the Moroccan background of the man who murdered Theo van Gogh. They felt encouraged not only to urge their constituencies to respond ›with calm and dignity‹ to the Islam-critical expressions, but also to advocate the Dutch interests in the Muslim world. Actually, the response to *Fitna* in Muslim countries was quite moderate and calm and remained tiny compared to the Danish cartoons crisis. Some organizations, however, were not pleased with the stance of the government. They questioned the negative assumption on Islam behind the governmental policy and reproached the government for the omission to give the ›*Fitna* consultation‹ a follow-up.

In conclusion

In this article, I have analyzed the responses of the leaders of 21 religious and humanist organizations in the Netherlands to five expressions of criticism of Islam. What are the main results? What are the main answers to the two research questions?

With regard to the responses, we can conclude that there is not one response but a *wide scale* of responses discernible among the leaders of the selected organizations. The responses of the Muslim organizations vary from resignation to defensive to offensive and those of the non-Muslim organizations from supportive to non-committal to critical.

With respect to the factors that contribute to the responses, we note that the responses are strongly linked to the *framing* of the selected expressions by the leaders. We can distinguish four types of diagnostic framing, namely religious, political, societal and juridical framing. The combination of diagnostic and strategic framing determines to a high degree the organization's pattern of response. The framing is influenced by the type of organization. It is remarkable that the selected interest organizations which represent small religious minorities do not respond, whereas the other organizations which are more value-driven and more society-oriented do, such as the selected Christian and Jewish churches as well as the relatively large Islamic organizations. The doctrines of these organizations affect their way of framing the expressions of Islam criticism. The leaders of the Muslim organizations researched do not expericience the expressions of Islam criticism as a threat, that is why the factor of perceived threat has only a minor impact on the framing by the leaders.

It turns out that most organizations researched were quite pleased with the *government's* policies, particularly its ›*Fitna* Consultations‹. They felt encouraged not only to urge their constituencies to respond ›with calm and dignity‹ to the Islam-critical expressions, but also to advocate the Dutch interests in the Muslim world. Some organizations, e.g. Al Nisa and SCIN, were less content. They felt that the authorities held a negative view of Islam and kept silent when Muslims actually responded to the Islam-critical expressions with calm and dignity.

What are the societal *effects* of the responses of the leaders of these organizations on the development of the controversy on Islam? Do they escalate or de-escalate the polarization in Dutch society over Islam and Muslims?

It is obvious that the passive responses of the interest-driven organizations do not have an impact of the current controversy over Islam. They do not participate in the public conflict on Islam and consequently do not have influence on it. But

what about the active responses of the value-driven organizations? What is their impact? To this end, it makes sense to pay attention to work of the Dutch sociologist Kees Schuyt. In his lecture *Democratische deugden* (Democratic virtues) he mentioned, based on a review of many studies, four conditions which can contribute to the escalation of an intergroup conflict within a given political context, namely: the dominance of collective identity over personal differences and freedom; the development of a strict ›us and them‹; the character of a conflict and the perception of the resolvability of it; the role of recognized or not-recognized emotions of shame and anger.[16]

The issue is how the value-driven organizations score on these conditions. As it turns out, we find *no positive scores* on any of these parameters. Actually, there are no attempts to curtail internal diversity so as to appear stronger in confronting the critics. The leaders are not able, neither have the aspirations to do that. Only in the days of *Fitna* they deliberately tried to influence the attitude of their constituencies. However, their initiatives at that time were not aimed at seeking the confrontation with Islam critics, but to react ›calmly and sensibly‹.

There is a general tendency to discourage confrontational thinking, both with Muslims and non-Muslims. Several Muslim leaders have stressed their solidarity with Dutch society. By supporting Muslims but at the same time keeping open relationships with critics, many non-Muslim leaders break the polarized way of thinking in terms of ›us and them‹. There is no ridiculing or vilifying of the critics.

Some of our respondents signal a conflict of values and world-views between Muslims and the critics, but no-one sees this conflict as unsolvable. All respondents acknowledge the importance of the rule of law, and come up with ways of dealing with the existing tensions in a peaceful manner.

Several respondents are aware of the emotions that play a role on either side of the divide: feelings of anxiety and discontent on the part of the indigenous population, anger and a sense of being discriminated against and hurt on the part of the Muslim population. They say their aim is to prevent their constituencies from being guided by those emotions.

In conclusion, the responses of the leaders of most of the selected organizations contribute to the de-escalation of the controversy on Islam in the Netherlands. In his famous study *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* Scott Appleby argues that religious actors use to represent a source of peace and political stability in the post-Cold War world.[17] He states that it is a misconception that religious ex-

16 Schuyt, Kees: *Democratische deugden. Groepstegenstellingen en sociale integratie*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2006.

17 R.S. Appleby: *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*.

tremists are a majority within every major religious tradition. In contrast, they are a minority and religious groups which are teaching dialogue rather than violence, reconciliation rather than retaliation, used to constitute the majority. Our research findings *confirm* this statement regarding to the current situation in the Netherlands. By taking a peaceful stance in the current Islam conflict they contribute to ›living together‹ in the Netherlands.

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