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de Koning, M.

DOI

[10.1080/0031322X.2019.1705011](https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1705011)

Publication date

2020

Document Version

Final published version

Published in

Patterns of Prejudice

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[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

de Koning, M. (2020). The racialization of danger: patterns and ambiguities in the relation between Islam, security and secularism in the Netherlands. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 54(1-2), 123-135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2019.1705011>

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The racialization of danger: patterns and ambiguities in the relation between Islam, security and secularism in the Netherlands

MARTIJN DE KONING 

ABSTRACT The question of European foreign fighters in Syria has transformed security and counter-radicalization into important pillars of the liberal secular governance of Muslims in Europe. By exploring how Dutch integration and counter-radicalization policies connect the idea of danger to Muslims and Islam, de Koning analyses how admission to the Dutch nation-state is regulated according to what kind of deficiencies outsiders are thought to have, locating them in ideas about ‘race’, culture and religion. By focusing on the idea of a racialization of danger, de Koning argues, first, that, already prior to 9/11, a securitization logic existed in Dutch policies in which a form of Islam that was perceived to be ‘unacceptable’ was regarded as a potential danger to social cohesion and the rule of law. And, second, in analysing the process of racialization, that we should take into account its ambiguities in order to understand how the racialization of Muslims works.

KEYWORDS culturalization, Islam, the Netherlands, race, racialization, radicalization, risk, Salafism, secularism, security

In studies of racialization, links to secular governance have remained under-theorized and, similarly, studies of secularism often mention racialization only in passing.¹ As research shows, however, ideas about regulating religion (secularism) and regulating race (multiculturalism) are intertwined with and subjected to ideas about the nation-state and its definition of what counts as religion and which forms are more and less desirable and/or acceptable.² Focusing on the connection between Islam and danger, I analyse how, in

This article is based on research for ‘Forces that Bind and/or Divide’, a project funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam, and also on informal talks with policymakers, policy documents, archives on integration and a review of the Dutch literature.

- 1 Atiya Husain, ‘Retrieving the religion in racialization: a critical review’, *Sociology Compass* (online), vol. 11, no. 9, 2017, e12507.
- 2 Vincent Lloyd, ‘Race and religion: contribution to symposium on critical approaches to the study of religion’, *Critical Research on Religion*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, 80–6; Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon 2004). On the entanglements of security, secularism and Islam, see also Yolande Jansen, ‘Secularism and security: France, Islam, and Europe’, in

public debate and policymaking, admission to the Dutch nation-state is regulated according to what kind of deficiencies outsiders are thought to have, locating them in ideas about 'race', culture and religion.³ As such, I take issue with the 'integration governance' in Dutch politics and policies regarding migrants and their descendants, particularly Muslims, with its focus on questions concerning how Muslims should integrate, how they should be deradicalized, and whether or not Islam fits into Dutch society.

In response, I want to contribute to our understanding of how this connection between Islam and danger came about, and how it has worked throughout the last thirty years in Dutch policies. I first discuss the notion of racialization in relation to integration. This will be followed by a more detailed exploration of how the notions of danger, risk and security work in counter-radicalization policies. My argument will be twofold. First, I will argue that, already before 9/11, a logic of securitization existed in debates and policies in which a form of Islam that was perceived to be 'unacceptable' was regarded as a potential danger for social cohesion and the rule of law. And, second, in analysing the process of racialization, that we should take into account its ambiguities in order to understand how the racialization of Muslims works.

Integration and secularism: how race and religion intersect

In this contribution I intend to explore the narratives about the state's regulation of people, and how the Muslim as a subject of the state's fragmented policies is reproduced as an alien and radical Other embodying risk and danger. From the nineteenth century onwards, European states have sought to control populations and public order by trying to identify those deemed most dangerous. The notion of the dangerous person has a specific history in Europe, partially pertaining to the mentally ill for whom psychiatric units were established in the nineteenth century.⁴ In the implementation of state policies in Europe and the United States, this notion pertained to individuals and partly to the idea of uncontrollable crowds.⁵ Looking at the Netherlands in the early twentieth century, Jan Rath has explored the policies regarding

Linell E. Cady and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd (eds), *Comparative Secularisms in a Global Age* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2010), 69–86.

- 3 Barnor Hesse, 'Racialized modernity: an analytics of white mythologies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2007, 643–63.
- 4 Michel Foucault, 'About the concept of the "dangerous individual" in 19th-century legal psychiatry', trans. from the French by Alain Baudot and Jane Couchman, *Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1978, 1–18. See also Lisa M. Blackman, 'The dangerous classes: retelling the psychiatric story', *Feminism & Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1996, 361–79.
- 5 Johannes Scheu, 'Dangerous classes: tracing back an epistemological fear', *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2011, 115–34.

onmaatschappelijken (literally, those who are unsocial or anti-social families), whose alleged culture of non-conformity was used to legitimize government interference in terms of social (housing) projects, social care, surveillance and so on.⁶ As Lydia Morris explains with regard to ‘dangerous classes’ (which is very close to the Dutch *onmaatschappelijken*) and how this concept intersects with ideas about citizenship,⁷ the state’s concerns often did not (solely) pertain to the condition of poverty but to an alleged culture of poverty that then supposedly resulted in social maladjustment. Furthermore, as these groups categorized as ‘dangerous classes’ appeared to be difficult for the authorities to understand, and therefore escaped analysis and containment, their threat was of a social nature as well as an epistemological one.⁸ In Europe the idea of the ‘dangerous classes’ and *onmaatschappelijken* often pertained to white working-class people, but David Theo Goldberg shows that the ‘forces of unruliness’ have often also been racially defined and that ideas about natural and/or cultural differences have been connected to, and provoked, the perception of danger.⁹ In the case of the Netherlands, strategies pertaining to the *onmaatschappelijken* underpinned the minority policies of the 1980s that turned migrants from Surinam, the Dutch Antilles, Turkey and Morocco and their descendants into subjects of government interference.¹⁰

When it comes to Muslims in contemporary Europe, the management of ‘race’ and the management of religion often overlap and inform each other through integration and counter-radicalization policies. I take secularism as a discursive formation that, in a political sense, refers to the state’s prerogative to determine the separation between public and private, religious and secular, and the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable modes of religion.¹¹ Here I will particularly focus on how, since the 1990s, the concern with Muslims as subjects in need of state intervention and regulation has been expressed and shaped through the language of security, danger and secularism in debates and policies. Although race cannot be reduced to threat—as it is associated with ideas about wanting to know more about racial strangers or how to exploit them—danger, as Goldberg explains, is its most significant aspect,¹² and makes it necessary to keep those deemed a threat at a distance. Or (I would add), if that is not possible, to redeem and reform them or contain

6 Jan Rath, ‘The Netherlands: a Dutch treat for anti-social families and immigrant ethnic minorities’, in Mike Cole and Gareth Dale (eds), *The European Union and Migrant Labour* (Oxford: Berg Publishers 1999), 147–70.

7 Lydia Morris, *Dangerous Classes: The Underclass and Social Citizenship* (London and New York: Routledge 1994).

8 Scheu, ‘Dangerous classes’.

9 David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2009), 334.

10 Rath, ‘The Netherlands’.

11 See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2003).

12 Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*.

them sometimes through the use of exceptional measures, or regular measures implemented in exceptional ways.

In the Netherlands, from the 1970s onwards, Muslims and Islam have been regarded in debates and policies as potential dangers to social cohesion and the so-called Dutch ‘cultural achievements’.¹³ In my analysis I will specifically focus on how the idea of danger is related to ideas about Muslims as a group—as well as ideas about their culture and religion—by using the concept of ‘racialization’, which refers to the process of imputing generalized and essentialized ideas about biological, cultural and religious differences to subordinate groups in order to distinguish them from the majority of society.¹⁴

Racialization, as I argue here, is hardly a linear and straightforward process. If we look at the Netherlands, despite a long period during which Muslims have been categorized as a (potential) danger, they have at the same time been able to establish a strong infrastructure with about 450 mosques, 45 Islamic primary schools, burial places and allowances for (until now) un-stunned ritual slaughter. With some notable exceptions, the general rule has been that, if organizations draw up plans that are financially sound and meet the legal criteria, the mosque or school in question has been established (and usually still can be), albeit rarely without opposition and additional requirements.¹⁵

Initially, in the 1970s, principles such as ‘integration with retention of identity’ were often seen as pragmatic approaches for preparing so-called ‘guest workers’ (later named ‘ethnic minorities’) to return to their home countries; these were later turned into programmatic slogans for a group-based approach to migrants.¹⁶ The Dutch model of incorporating migrants, and the racialization on which it is based, has attempted to maintain social cohesion and the status quo by including migrants instead of excluding them. This has meant that the governments in the 1980s and 1990s tried to involve migrant communities—increasingly addressed as Muslims—in their policies,

13 Peter Scholten, *Framing Immigrant Integration: Dutch Research-Policy Dialogues in Comparative Perspective* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2011).

14 Building on, among others, the following works: Étienne Balibar, ‘Is there a “neo-racism”?’ in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (eds), *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, Balibar trans. from the French by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso 1991), 17–28; Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge 1989); Nasar Meer, ‘Racialization and religion: race, culture and difference in the study of anti-semitism and Islamophobia’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, 385–98; Karim Murji and John Solomos, ‘Introduction: racialization in theory and practice’, in Karim Murji and John Solomos (eds), *Racialization: Studies in Theory and Practice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2005), 1–29.

15 When it comes to building mosques, in particular, see Nico Landman and Wendy Wessels, ‘The visibility of mosques in Dutch towns’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 31, no. 6, 2005, 1125–40.

16 Rally Rijkschroeff, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Trees Pels, *Bronnenonderzoek Integratie-beleid* (Utrecht: Verwey-Jonker Instituut 2003).

so the latter could then in turn defend their interests and claim their rights, as long as they fit into the Dutch model of the regulation of religion.¹⁷

This admittedly brief history of Dutch integration politics serves to clarify my interests here. Rather than looking at how people identify with or adhere to a particular religion, I am concerned with what Barnor Hesse calls ‘governmental racialization’, which

is characterized by the social routinization and institutionalization of regulatory, administrative power (e.g. laws, rules, policies, discipline, precepts) exercised by Europeanized (‘white’) assemblages over non-Europeanized (‘non-white’) assemblages as if this was a normal, inviolable or natural social arrangement of races.¹⁸

Hesse’s approach allows us to go beyond ‘race’ as a matter of biology and, moreover, to analyse racialization as part of the continuing governance of who belongs to the nation-state and who does not. Also, it directs our attention to the ‘routinization’ and ‘institutionalization’ of governance, and leads us to question why particular policies appear to be normal and natural. As I will show in the remainder of this article, the focus on danger in Dutch counter-radicalization policies is particularly salient here.

Political Islam: connecting migration, social cohesion and Islam in the 1990s¹⁹

While in integration policies and debates, the link between Islam and danger was often conditional and never exclusive—since it also pertains to increasing cultural diversity in general—during the 1980s and 1990s a new, more concrete, threat gradually emerged after the Cold War: political Islam. A few years after the Rushdie Affair in 1989, the Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (BVD, Dutch Security Service) published a report making clear that it had shifted its focus from the ‘Communist threat’ to migration and Islam. It stated that one of the possible side effects of migration from South European and North African countries could be the ‘progressive radicalisation or fundamentalization of Muslim communities in foreign parts’, and that conflicts from

17 Maarten P. Vink, ‘Dutch “multiculturalism” beyond the pillarisation myth’, *Political Studies Review*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2007, 337–50; Marcel Maussen, ‘Pillarization and Islam: church–state traditions and Muslim claims for recognition in the Netherlands’, *Comparative European Politics*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2012, 337–53.

18 Hesse, ‘Racialized modernity’, 656–7.

19 This section and the next builds on Nadia Fadil and Martijn de Koning, ‘Turning “radicalization” into science: ambivalent translations into the Dutch (speaking) academic field’, in Nadia Fadil, Martijn de Koning and Francesco Ragazzi (eds), *Radicalization in Belgium and the Netherlands: Critical Perspectives on Violence and Security* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris 2019), 53–80; and Martijn de Koning, Carmen Becker and Ineke Roex, *Islamic Militant Activism in Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2020, forthcoming).

the countries of origin could be transferred to the Netherlands with 'bloodshed, obstruction of the freedom of speech or other constitutional rights [and] severe disturbances of the public order' as possible consequences.²⁰ Although controversial, the combination of this new orientation, and political, socio-economic and ideological developments in the Muslim communities, raised questions and concerns among politicians and opinion-makers about the relationship between Islam, cultural diversity and migration, and democracy, social cohesion and security.²¹

In 1998, the Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (BVD, National Intelligence and Security Agency) published a new report in which it warned against the rise of a form of political Islam that would gain both increasing influence through mosques and funding from Islamic foundations abroad.²² The distinction between ordinary or mainstream Islam and 'political Islam' resonated with the trope of 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' Islam that had long been part of the Dutch management of religion, and was always related to ideas about who belongs to the nation-state and who threatens it.²³ The Dutch colonial authorities often established alliances with local ethnic and religious groups and, in some cases, attempted to bring Islamic education under state control while attempting to restrict transnational influence from the Middle East on local Islam in the colonies that was deemed less political. Today, it affects all manner of Islamic ideologies, all of which are labelled 'radical' because they are seen as a threat to the democratic order. The underlying concept is that 'acceptable Islam' keeps within the boundaries set for it in the public space, but may be labelled 'unacceptable Islam' if it enters the public space in an aggressive or even assertive manner.

The above-mentioned reports also show that the scope of the BVD's work, and therefore the idea of security, was explicitly extended beyond the threat of political violence to include integration. The 1999 BVD annual report stated: 'Beside the "classic" threats to democratic order—terrorism, right-

20 'Verslag van de vaste Commissie voor de inlichtingen- en veiligheidsdiensten over haar werkzaamheden (juli 1990–juli 1991)', Tweede Kamer (House of Representatives), session year 1991–2, 22463, nr. 3. Unless otherwise stated, all government proceedings and BVD/AIVD documents mentioned are available via the author's online archive at <https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/lnZULjOakPdv4K> (viewed 5 February 2020). In addition, all translations from the Dutch, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

21 De Koning, Becker and Roex, *Islamic Militant Activism in Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany*.

22 BVD, *De politieke Islam in Nederland* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior 1998), 20.

23 James C. Kennedy and Markha Valenta, 'Religious pluralism and the Dutch state: reflections on the future of article 23', in W. B. H. J. van de Donk, A. P. Jonkers, G. J. Kronjee and R. J. J. M. Plum (eds), *Geloven in het publieke domein: Verkenningen van een dubbele transformatie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2006), 337–53; Annelies Moors, 'Colonial traces? Islamic dress, gender and the public presence of Islam', in Marcel Maussen, Veit Bader and Annelies Moors (eds), *Colonial and Post-Colonial Governance of Islam: Ruptures and Continuities* (Amsterdam: IMES 2011), 135–54.

wing or left-wing extremism and political violence—we are talking about the intentional efforts of political and religious movements, and foreign powers, to hinder or frustrate integration policies.²⁴ It was thought that the lack of integration, related primarily at the time to high unemployment and low education results, would create grievances among Muslim migrants that could increase the risk of a small faction turning to violence. On the other hand, both the BVD and its successor, the Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD, General Intelligence and Security Service), distinguished between various types of political violence, and defined terrorism in narrow terms. This was not without reason and, in 2001, the AIVD warned against the possible consequences of the increasing securitization of Islam in the debates as the service feared it would lead to the stigmatization of Muslim communities which, in turn, could fuel radicalization.²⁵

‘Salafism’ and the securitization of Islam from 2001 to 2009

Despite these warnings, the events of 9/11, the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 and the rise of anti-Islam politicians such as Geert Wilders have all resulted in the growing securitization of Islam in the Netherlands, a process that has placed the focus of the media, politics and integration policies almost entirely on Muslims, Islam and the alleged threat they present to democracy and social cohesion.²⁶ After the attacks on the Twin Towers in New York in 2001, the securitization intensified, and it was no longer terrorism alone that was seen as a threat but also radicalization. While in previous years the focus was mostly on foreign influences and ‘political Islam’, after 9/11 the attempts by young Dutch Muslims to travel to Chechnya and Kashmir in 2002, the Madrid attacks in 2004 and the murder of Theo van Gogh later that same year contributed to the emergence of home-grown radicalization as a new problem for Muslims and with Muslims. Gradually, more and more government agencies became involved in combatting radicalization, and security took priority over policy on immigration and integration. All manner of programmes were introduced to detect early signs of radicalization, signs that were in part informed by orthodox religious behaviour (such as refusing to shake hands and wearing facial coverings).²⁷

24 BVD, *Jaarverslag 1999* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior 2000), 15.

25 BVD, *Terrorisme aan het begin van de 21e eeuw. Dreigingsbeeld en positionering BVD* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior 2001), 7; Beatrice de Graaf, ‘Religion bites: religieuze orthodoxie op de nationale veiligheidsagenda’, *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2011, 62–80 (65–6).

26 Rens Vliegthart, *Framing Immigration and Integration: Facts, Parliament, Media and Anti-Immigrant Party Support in the Netherlands* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam 2007).

27 Martijn de Koning, Joas Wagemakers and Carmen Becker, *Salafisme: Utopische idealen in een weerbarstige praktijk* (Almere: Parthenon 2014).

In an attempt to show how and why radicalization was a potential danger, a 2002 AIVD report linked the 'Salafite mission' (later on simply 'Salafism') to the process of radicalization.²⁸ Salafism was regarded as a solution to the perceived identity crisis among Muslim youth as it looked to ban, refute and counter all that was considered un-Islamic from a person's life in order to become a 'true' Muslim. The idea proposed in the report was that the Salafi ideology might lead to radical convictions if combined with other, political, visions about how society was or ought to be. The consequences of these convictions, it was thought, might then lead to anti-integrationism, the rejection of state authority and questioning the legitimacy of institutions. This could eventually result in an active struggle against society and, ultimately, to involvement in 'radical Islamic violent activities'. According to the report, it was particularly preachers, imams and others who took up a recruiting role and tried to isolate and prepare young Muslims for the violent jihad.²⁹

However, notwithstanding this explicit, albeit conditional, connection between Salafism and danger, in its first years, the AIVD remained concerned with the potentially stigmatizing effects of securitization and the possible connection with radicalization.³⁰ Not long after the terrorist attacks in Madrid, that warning by the AIVD was no longer heard, the potential danger from 'radical' networks in the Netherlands was continually emphasized, and the scope of anti-terrorism legislation was widened. It was no longer only about attacks or generalized threat, but was also a matter of the 'subversion of social structures' and the 'incitement of fear', both of which were now punishable under anti-terrorist laws.³¹ The murder of Theo Van Gogh in November 2004 increased the sense of threat, and there were louder cries for security measures. The security gaze of the AIVD, politicians and the public were now firmly fixed on Islam and Muslims.³² In 2005 the government published the policy document 'Weerbaarheid en Integratiebeleid' (Resilience and Integration Policy).³³ This document, as well as its successor, 'Actieplan polarisatie en radicalisering 2007–2011' (Action Plan on Polarization and Radicalization

28 AIVD, 'Saoedische invloeden Nederland: Verbanden tussen salafitische missie, radicaliseringsprocessen en islamitisch terrorisme', nr. 2176836/01 (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations 2004).

29 Fadil and de Koning, 'Turning "radicalization" into science'.

30 'Bestrijding internationaal terrorisme; Brief minister met notitie over de achtergronden van jihadrekruten in Nederland', 3 March 2004, Tweede Kamer (House of Representatives), session year 2003–4, 27925, nr. 120.

31 De Graaf, 'Religion bites', 68.

32 De Graaf, 'Religion bites'; Vliegenthart, *Framing Immigration and Integration*; but see also Nathalie Vanparys, Dirk Jacobs and Corinne Torrekens, 'The impact of dramatic events on public debate concerning accommodation of Islam in Europe', *Ethnicities*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2013, 209–28.

33 Minister for Immigration and Integration, 'Nota Weerbaarheid en integratiebeleid', 19 August 2005, Tweede Kamer (House of Representatives), session year 2004–5, 29754, nr. 27.

2007–2011),³⁴ set out a dual policy approach: repression of radicalization and violence on the one hand, and prevention and awareness-raising on the other. It focused particularly on the latter, showing a specific form of governmentality: namely the need to convince groups of people that ‘radical Islam’ was dangerous and therefore that there was a need to set up programmes designed to detect signs of radicalization and increase ‘resistance’ to it. Integration and radicalization were closely linked in this context.³⁵

Whereas the public debate after 2004 mainly concerned Islam in general, or radicalism and extremism, the AIVD and the Nationaal Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid (NCTb, National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism) increasingly focused on ‘Salafism’ as a threat to social cohesion and democratic relationships.³⁶ Besides ‘Salafism’, other religious far-left and far-right movements as well as the animal rights movement were included in counter-radicalization policies but to a much lesser extent.³⁷ This inclusion of other modes of radicalization occurred partly because the government feared that securitization would have negative stigmatizing consequences, and partly because politicians and government agencies could not agree on how to deal with radicalization. As a result, there was no clear message on deradicalization. There were times when securitization was the predominant approach and others when the focus shifted to de-securitization. Additionally, pleas for a more respectful debate became stronger, and government officials publicly stated that they considered an injurious style of politics —referring in particular to Geert Wilders— to be inappropriate.

Assessing the threat after 2010: ‘jihadism’³⁸

After 2009, the tone of the debate and the AIVD’s publications seemed to become less alarmist, although specific anti-radicalization training programmes and information campaigns still focused mainly on Salafism. From 2010 onwards, a new target came into focus for the AIVD, the media and politicians. In March that year, Sharia4Belgium appeared on the scene in Belgium under the leadership of Fouad Belkacem (alias Abu Imran). The organization also made the news in the Netherlands when, in the same month, it disrupted a debate with Dutch

34 Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, ‘Actieplan polarisatie en radicalisering 2007–2011’.

35 Minister for Immigration and Integration, ‘Nota Weerbaarheid en integratiebeleid’.

36 AIVD, *Van dawa tot jihad: De diverse dreigingen van de radicale islam tegen de democratische rechtsorde* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations 2004); AIVD, *Radicale dawa in verandering: De opkomst van islamitisch neoradicalisme in Nederland* (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations 2007).

37 AIVD, ‘Saoedische invloeden in Nederland’; AIVD, *Van dawa tot jihad*; AIVD, *Radicale dawa in verandering*; NCTb, *Salafisme in Nederland: Een voorbijgaand fenomeen of een blijvende factor van belang?* (The Hague: NCTb 2008).

38 This section builds on de Koning, Becker and Roex, *Islamic Militant Activism in Belgium, The Netherlands and Germany*.

writer Benno Barnard at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). From our discussions with policymakers and anti-radicalization workers, we learned that this immediately prompted questions about the potential for such an organization among Muslims in the Netherlands, exactly how large the organization was and precisely what form of ‘jihadism’ it represented. The conversations also revealed the extent to which policymakers were uncertain of a suitable approach. Was this simply a group of ‘nutters’ with little potential? Was it a public order problem, or a terrorism and radicalization problem? What was the link between the radicalization of this group of young Muslims and street life in the main cities? What were their relationships like with those who counted themselves as Salafists? What were Sharia4Belgium and its Dutch counterparts Sharia4Holland and BehindBars (all in all 150–200 people) actually about?³⁹

According to the AIVD at that time, the term ‘jihadism’ referred to an ‘extremist ideology’ based on the glorification of the violent jihad. In the same AIVD glossary, the ‘violent jihad’ was defined as ‘armed struggle against the perceived enemies of Islam, legitimated by invoking Islamic jurisprudence’.⁴⁰ Although Sharia4Belgium engaged in a provocative and aggressive struggle against those they considered enemies of Islam in Belgium and the Netherlands, at the time this did not include armed violence, even though many perceived the group’s behaviour as aggressive. Accordingly, the ideas that actual violence could occur and that Sharia4Belgium and Sharia4Holland’s mission was a precursor to violence regularly surfaced in our conversations with policymakers during that period.

With the growing focus on jihadism and the threat of violent acts (which is inherent in the definition of jihadism), there was uncertainty as to how to respond to the rhetoric of the militant networks. But the situation changed rapidly over the course of 2012 and 2013 when it became clear that numerous Dutch people (including many from the above-mentioned networks) had left for Syria. On 13 March 2013, the NCTb published the 32nd Terrorist Threat Assessments for the Netherlands (DTN32), in which it announced that it was raising the terrorist threat level in the Netherlands from ‘limited’ to ‘substantial’ (the second highest of four levels).⁴¹ We can see a remarkable change in the assessment of danger if we compare the 31st and 32nd Terrorist Threat Assessments for the Netherlands (DTN31 and DTN32, published in December 2012 and March 2013, respectively).⁴²

39 See also Proceedings of the House of Representatives, Questions asked by Members of the House, followed by Government answers, session year 2010–11, ah-tk-20102011-3283.

40 ‘Inlichtingenwoordenboek’, glossary of the AIVD, available on the AIVD website at www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/over-de-aivd/inlichtingenwoordenboek (viewed 11 February 2020).

41 Letter from the Minister of Security and Justice to the House of Representatives concerning DTN32, ref. 362553, 13 March 2013.

42 Letter from the Minister of Security and Justice to House of Representatives concerning DTN31, 29754 nr. 215, 14 December 2012.

Although the Minister had warned in the DTN31 letter against becoming less vigilant, in view of the low threat level that had been in place for several years and the Dutch population's strong resistance to 'extremism', the letter also indicated that reducing the threat level was a logical step. The crucial factor that determined raising the threat level in the DTN32 letter appeared to be the rapid increase in the number of people leaving for Syria. The increased 'jihadist radicalization of small groups of young people' was related to this, and the broader scope for 'jihadist networks' in various countries was a development that had been going on for some time, mainly in relation to Syria. Nevertheless, the question remained as to whether this was the only reason for raising the threat level, since the threat was expected to come from those people who were returning rather than those who were leaving. Unless a significant number of people had already returned by that time (we do not have information on this), raising the threat level seems a strange decision if the group outside the country were indeed, according to the government, the most dangerous. Furthermore, if the threat had been going on for a while, why did the DTN31 approve of reducing the threat level because of strong resistance? Notwithstanding the fact that there certainly may have been good reasons for raising the threat level, the assessment of danger also appears to have been based on something other than concrete examples of political violence. In its DTN32, the NCTb also signalled the possible negative consequences of cutbacks and the reduced focus on anti-radicalization, which were also evident in other countries. The published threat assessment also served as an argument directed at politicians and commentators against implementing (further) cutbacks on anti-radicalization measures.

The further narrowing down of the focus of the threat—from Islam to political Islam to Salafism to jihadism—did not mean that Salafi Muslims or other Muslims were off the hook. On the contrary, after 2012, the discussion about Salafism only intensified with proposals to ban or curb its practice. In 2015, nine initiatives to counter the influence of Salafism were approved by the Dutch parliament. One included a motion to ban so-called Salafi organizations, another to curb foreign financial support and to ban so-called Salafi Muslims from working in the army, and yet another to ban so-called Salafi Muslims from attending centres for asylum-seekers. In response, in February 2016, the government published a document called 'Normatief kader problematisch gedrag' (A Normative Framework against Problematic Behaviour).⁴³ This document laid out 'concrete measures' to counter what it called 'problematic behaviour'. Although a spokesperson denied that it was aimed only at Salafism, Salafism is the only example mentioned in the document and the document is an answer to all the anti-Salafi motions. The document stressed

43 Letter to the House of Representatives, reference 2016-0000037893, 25 February 2016, and appended report, 'Normatief kader problematisch gedrag', available on the *Rijksoverheid* website at www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/publicaties/2016/02/25/normatief-kader-problematisch-gedrag (viewed 23 March 2020).

the Dutch government's conviction that the basis of 'our' rule of law was freedom, and made clear that it did not want to forbid a religion or intrude into the personal beliefs of the people.⁴⁴ This position was combined with an approach devised to counter any 'undesirable' Salafi influence, particularly on children.

Highlighting ambiguities and patterns

The racialization of Muslims transformed a religiously diverse group into a problem category for the management of race (integration) and the management of religion (secularism). In this article I have focused on how the idea of Muslims and Islam as a danger to social cohesion and secular values works, and how it is reproduced in Dutch policies on integration and, in particular, on counter-radicalization. I have shown that there is a clear pattern and development regarding the relationships among secularism, Islam and danger. In Dutch integration policies the idea of Islam being dangerous was linked to integration and immigration and, eventually, guest workers from the 1960s became known as 'Muslims'. During the 1990s, the danger was understood to come from the outside: political Islam became the enemy. After 2001, and increasing rapidly up to 2004, that danger was seen as residing within: disenfranchised youth who could turn to and/or get lured into Salafism. As with the term 'Salafism' and before that 'political Islam', the term 'jihadism' signifies Otherness and (conditional) danger, based in part on ideas about Islamic ideology as well as ideas about vulnerable youth. General terms with a variety of meanings ('jihad' may simply mean personal struggle but can also be a military struggle) are thereby reduced to a matter of security. The question then inevitably becomes what this has to do with Islam, which by extension turns into the concern that the state should have for or about Muslims.


At the same time, it is the focus on security and danger that not only draws Muslims into the scope of administrative power but also turns the problematization of Muslims into an almost 'normal' and natural arrangement whereby its racial nature is concealed and legitimized by the managerial language of risk assessment and threats, security and insecurity, as is evident in other European states in a myriad of ways.⁴⁵ This then makes it appear logical for the state to intervene on behalf of national security and the interest of the general public. Furthermore, the counter-radicalization approach is not only punitive; it is also pre-emptive. It claims to assess future risks not only to protect society but also for the well-being of the individual concerned, not only by eliminating risks but by proactively engaging with them. The idea

44 Ibid.

45 For example, Nisha Kapoor, 'The advancement of racial neoliberalism in Britain', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 6, 2013, 1028–46.

of counter-radicalization is that the early signs of potential future violence can be detected, filtered and interpreted by specialists.

Yet, in order to understand the process of racialization, I argue that we also have to look at its ambiguities. While Dutch integration policies reframe particular elements of Islam as a danger, this is conditional and therefore does more than merely limit the opportunities Muslims have in Dutch society. The counter-radicalization approach carries with it a prospect of redemption and change within the racialized framework set by the state. This opens up possibilities for cooperation with local Muslim communities and networks as they are regarded as having a better understanding of the problems among Muslim youth. Furthermore, the problematization of Muslims has turned mosques and other Islamic organizations into much-needed spokespersons for the communities, giving them opportunities to realize their objectives as well. With regard to the focus on political Islam, Salafism and counter-radicalization, the security services have been very clear and consistent in their warnings against further securitization of Islam (even when it has been only out of fear of radicalization) and the possible stigmatizing effects of their policies. Furthermore, other factors, such as the difficulties in understanding jihadism, local militant networks and the financial cutbacks between 2010 and 2012, influenced how groups have been labelled and approached. Therefore, new developments, internal and external to the Netherlands, other policy priorities, and disagreements on how to deal with religion in public (Salafism in particular) may affect and inform the racialization of Muslims as well, turning it into an ambiguous process. It also shows that danger is an unstable concept continuously debated and redefined. Very often it is the outcome of political compromises and a strong adherence to the principle of equality and religious freedom, as well as a racializing interference with Muslims, other policy priorities and the desire to avoid stigmatization.

Martijn de Koning is an anthropologist and teaches in the Department of Islam Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen. At the University of Amsterdam he is involved in the NWO-funded project 'Forces that Bind and/or Divide', the research for which forms part of this article. He also works on the ERC-funded project, 'Problematizing "Muslim Marriages": Ambiguities and Contestations', at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Amsterdam. He has published on Moroccan-Dutch youth and identity, Salafism, Islamophobia and racialization, and activism. Together with Nadia Fakil and Francesco Ragazzi, he edited the volume *Radicalization in Belgium and the Netherlands: Critical Perspectives on Violence and Security* (I. B. Tauris/ Bloomsbury 2019). Email: m.dekoning@ftr.ru.nl. ORCID  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7343-529X>