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Keywords

The Netherlands, fieldwork, politics, Muslim immigration, nationalism

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Politically Charged, Politically Correct: Preparing for Landmines during Fieldwork in the Netherlands

Jennifer Long

The tone of Dutch political and public debate surrounding immigrant integration has recently experienced a dramatic decline, resulting in a worrying polarization between the native Dutch majority and Muslim minority. Right-wing politicians and the media have played a significant role in the rapid and pervasive turning of public and political opinions against *Muslim immigrants*, whom they have created as outsiders to the Dutch nation (cf. van Bruinessen 2006; Sniderman and Hagerdoorn 2007; van der Valk 2002; van der Veer 2006). The Moroccan and Turkish communities, who are predominantly Muslims, have been particularly affected by these developments (ECRI 2008:6). Certain national incidents, such as the murder of Dutch film director Theo Van Gogh, by a Dutch Muslim of Moroccan origin, have been used to vindicate these opinions, and establish a wider group of anti-Muslim supporters in the native Dutch majority. These factors have resulted in a substantial increase in Islamophobic¹ discourse in the Dutch political and public sphere.

Yet, this is not the only discourse that is fuelling the nation's political situation. Although never particularly nationalistic, the Dutch have recently become more nationally-oriented in response to the increased number of "non-Western"² Muslim immigrants living in the

Netherlands. This fear of the "Other" is evident in certain immigration policies, which have caused stigmatization and discrimination against members of minority communities living in the Netherlands. Therefore, dovetailed with the Islamophobic discourse is a movement towards solidifying a more distinct concept of the Dutch nation and culture, in the face of this *Islamic* difference. Together, these discourses find a wide variety and number of supporters from all walks of life in the Netherlands, who support either the Islamophobic or pro-Dutch national and cultural identity narrative.

This paper investigates the need for politically relevant, albeit politically charged, fieldwork in the Netherlands. In order to outline the politically tense atmosphere affecting the Netherlands today, I will provide an overview of immigration policy in the Netherlands starting from the 1970s to the present in order to reveal how nationalism has steadily grown in the Dutch political arena. This will be followed by a description of the level of Islamophobia and intolerance directed specifically at Muslims and immigrants living in the Netherlands. As will become apparent through these explorations, ethnographic investigation is the best means with which to fully understand how the Dutch majority and the Muslim minority are engaging with these discourses, and how each of these groups fit

¹ Islamophobic discourses come from Islamophobia which is defined as the fear or hatred of Muslims and/or Islam (Werbner 2005)

² Dutch immigration officials have defined non-Western migrants as those who are emigrating from Turkey, Africa, South America, and Asia (with the exception of migrants from Indonesia and Japan).

Indonesia and Japan are included in the western countries category because they are perceived to have similar socio-economic and -cultural positioning to that of the Dutch majority population. See: <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLEN&PA=03742eng&D1=0-4&D2=07&D6>

into the wider narrative of Dutch national cultural identity or the narrative of “Dutchness”.

The Dutch Nation through the Lens of Immigration

Frank Lechner (2008:282-287), a Dutch born sociologist, argues that there is no singular, widely understood national identity in the Netherlands because it is too fractured and diverse a narrative. Yet, since the late 1990s, there has been a call to immigrants to conform to Dutch cultural norms and values in order to integrate better into Dutch society. When looking at the pattern of immigration policies over the last 20 years one can see that the Dutch are working toward defining a more coherent understanding of their own national identity. As will become apparent, this national identification project affects both the Dutch majority and immigrant minority communities alike.

According to Said (2000:177), the creation of “us” and “them” categories helps legitimize the actions of the nation-state. That is, by creating discourses about “them” or who Said labels the “Other” (e.g. minority population), the modern nation-state appears as a “sovereign, territorially bounded and self-governing social collectivity” (Said 2000:177), which fulfills the narrative of the “imagined community” as being a nation that is culturally homogenous and most importantly, representative of the majority culture in the face of the “Other” (Werbner 2005:6). Therefore, the creation of an “Other” also strengthens the idea of the nation as a whole. In order to understand how the Dutch conceive their “Other”, I provide an overview of Dutch immigration policy as it demonstrates as much about *them* (Muslim immigrants) as it does about *us* (Dutch majority). Although this overview is not comprehensive, it will begin in the 1970s

and proceed into present day policies. The majority of this information is taken from Han Entzinger’s work (2003; 2006) unless otherwise acknowledged. Entzinger, a prominent Dutch sociologist, conducted research for the government on immigrant integration and so, is partially responsible for certain changes to Dutch immigration policy from the 1990s onward.

Overview of Dutch Immigration Policy

The Turkish and Moroccan communities are legacies of the so-called guest worker policies instituted in the late 1960s to early 1970s. These immigrant labourers found work in the industrial sector during a period of economic boom. The Dutch government allowed this migration because it was thought that these immigrants would return to their home once their jobs were made obsolete. At this time, the Dutch government’s immigration approach was non-existent. In fact, the authorities encouraged immigrants to keep their own cultural identity in order to better allow them to reintegrate to their countries of origin, upon their return. This approach included associations and consultative bodies for immigrants depending on ethnic background. It also created a structure of institutional separateness, which pushed these immigrants to the margins of society instead of allowing them to participate within the Dutch society. By the end of the 1970s the Dutch government acknowledged that contrary to earlier beliefs, most immigrants would stay in the Netherlands. As a consequence, the government changed its immigration strategy.

During the 1980s, immigration to the Netherlands increased in number and diversity. The Dutch saw an increase in the number of Eastern European immigrants to the Netherlands due to the end of the Cold War as well as an increase in the number of asylum seekers, most of whom gained

refugee status. Also at this time, the number of non-Western immigrants increased because of the original guest worker population living in the Netherlands. These workers brought their families to the Netherlands through settlement and family reunification programmes set up by the Dutch government. This increase in the number of immigrants was largely attributed to the growing trend of Dutch and foreign residents to find spouses in other countries and settle back in the Netherlands. Although the Dutch never used the term multiculturalist, most of the policies coming from the 1980s could in fact be labelled as such. It was also at this time that the Dutch began to see immigrants not in citizenship terms, but ethnic terms when distinguishing between them and the native Dutch population.

The restructuring of Dutch industry in the early 1980s left many low skilled workers without jobs, many of whom were immigrants. By the end of the decade, more than one third of all Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands were unemployed. Immigrants became a growing burden for welfare and social policy regimes; yet, mentioning this in public was widely considered to be politically incorrect, if not racist. This taboo draws from the Netherlands' Second World War experience where the open stigmatization of a religious group, namely that of the Dutch Jewish community, led to unprecedented genocide of that particular Dutch community. What resulted was a resounding silence about the declining socio-economic position of immigrants. This silence is something that would later come back to haunt all involved, as dissatisfaction continued to grow among the public.

As early as 1991, the leader of the Liberal Party (VVD) Frits Bolkestein triggered a public debate on the presumed incompatibility of Islam and "Western

values" which he considered to represent Dutch values. Bolkestein published an article in a national newspaper soon after the Rushdie affair in Britain³ and the *l'affaire du foulard* (the headscarf issue) in France⁴. Although this debate eventually calmed down, some uneasiness about the place of Islam in Dutch society remained. During the 1994 national elections, the VVD took the place of the reigning Christian Democrats party and succeeded in shifting the focus of immigration policies from respecting cultural diversity to promoting immigrants social participation. This new direction was most notably demonstrated in the renaming of immigration policies from minority policies to integration policies. From that moment on, immigrants' culture was seen largely as a private affair and providing jobs for immigrants became top priority.

Overall, the most important policy put in place in the 1990s was a Dutch language and civic education class that became mandatory for all non-Western immigrants because it was thought that their lack at Dutch proficiency prevented them from getting jobs. At this time, the cost of these courses was paid for by the government, and although unemployment rates amongst immigrants dropped over the

³ The Rushdie Affair refers to the incident where the author Salman Rushdie angered Muslims around the world by his irreverent depiction of the prophet Muhammad in his novel "The Satanic Verses". Rushdie even had a fatwa placed on him by the Iranian president at the time and because of this, certain relations between the UK and Iran ceased. Due to the violence of some of the "anti-Rushdie" demonstrations, Islam and Muslims were negatively portrayed in the media (see Said 1997).

⁴ The headscarf issue in France refers to the case in Creil (a small town close to Paris) where three young female students came to school wearing a headscarf and were refused entry by the school authorities in 1989 (Göle 2007). This eventually developed into a nationwide ban of all conspicuous religious symbols worn in public primary and secondary schools in 2004.

course of the 1990s, non-Western immigrants still received 40 percent of the distributed welfare. Whether or not immigrants' lower socioeconomic position created tension between Dutch native and immigrant communities, the topic of immigrant integration into Dutch society became more frequent within public and political debate.

In January of 2000, Paul Scheffer, a prominent member of the Labour Party wrote an article entitled "The Multicultural Tragedy" which discussed the failure of the Dutch multicultural programme and impending doom of an ethnic underclass of non-Western immigrants who did not feel attached to Dutch culture and society and who were also unwilling or unable to integrate. What Scheffer did was voice a concern that many Dutch people felt, but did not express about continuing immigration and a rapidly growing Muslim population. It appeared to Scheffer that the only way out of the current predicament was to again change immigration policy to a more assimilative approach. It should be noted that if Scheffer had written his article ten years earlier, he would have been considered a racist and his article and views tossed out of parliament. Now however, Scheffer found himself speaking for a silent majority of Dutch natives and his views taken seriously. Scheffer's outcry is generally seen as the dramatic turnaround of the Dutch public debate and Dutch policymaking regarding immigration and integration. It was in this climate of increased sensitivity regarding immigration in general and Islam in particular, and following the events of September 11th, 2001, that Pim Fortuyn stepped into the spotlight.

Pim Fortuyn taught sociology at the University of Groningen and Erasmus University in Rotterdam. However, once his contract was discontinued, Fortuyn began public speaking tours and writing for the

right-wing newspaper *Elsevier* concerning the malady of the current Dutch government (Entzinger 2006:129). It was at this time that Fortuyn became involved in politics, which eventually lead to him starting his own political party called List Pim Fortuyn (Lijst Pim Fortuyn, LPF). With Fortuyn at its head, LPF was set to participate in the May 2002 national elections. Fortuyn's platform was primarily directed against the contemporary immigration procedures which he saw as too liberally oriented and which ignored the concerns of the common (Dutch) people. Throughout his campaign, Fortuyn championed his right to freedom of speech (Article 7 in the Dutch constitution) to the point of breaking Article 1 of the Dutch constitution, which forbade discrimination based on life principles, political preference, race, sexual orientation, or religious belief. Fortuyn did this by portraying Islam as the largest growing threat to the Netherlands at the time (Buruma 2006:39). According to Fortuyn, Islam was a religion that was fundamentally opposed to the Netherlands' liberal and sexual policies and one that would compromise Dutch women's right to equality (van de Veer 2006:115). Fortuyn conveyed these ideas using his flamboyant nature, political savvy, and charisma that shook up the usual humdrum of the Dutch parliament. While his views and showmanship made him a popular figure in the media, Fortuyn was thought to have little chance at winning many seats in the upcoming national election on account of his overly right-wing political platform.

Then, on May 6th 2002, a short time before the national election, Fortuyn was shot and killed by a Dutchman who believed him to be a threat to the Netherlands' minorities. In the wake of his assassination, Fortuyn's LPF was voted into office, grabbing 17 percent of the vote. This party outcome marked the first time in over a

century that a populist agenda won a significant number of seats in Dutch parliament (van de Veer 2006:115). Although the LPF collapsed within three months due to bickering amongst the party members, Fortuyn had left his mark on politics and within greater society. This can be seen in the changes to political and public opinion, which became more nationally oriented and in general attitudes toward immigration, which became more conservative. After the LPF fell, the newly elected government led by Jan Peter Balkenende remained true to the populist agenda of curtailing immigration and developing a more strict plan for integration among immigrants (Lechner 2008:136). They also wanted the mutual respect for minorities to be based on fundamental Dutch norms and values (Lechner 2008:136). At this point, immigrants were held solely accountable for their lack of integration into Dutch society (Entzinger 2006:131). This is also when nationalism began to take hold in the political agenda.

Much of the policy changes in the early 2000s concerned integration, asylum-seekers, and lowering the number of immigrants coming into the country. The new Minister of Integration, Rita Verdonk, stated that Dutch citizenship involved speaking the Dutch language and observing basic Dutch norms (Smeets 2004:21 as referenced in Lechner 2008:163). Therefore, the Dutch language was deemed one of the deciding factors of national social cohesion (Bjornson 2007). To this end, the government discontinued all minority language programs in Dutch schools. New-comers from the category of non-Western immigrants were required to take (and pay for) civic integration courses as well as pass a test in order to receive permanent residency permits (Doomernik 2004:34). Although these integration courses were not new to the immigration program, the cost of

the exam, information package, and permit increased significantly; in addition, the cost of the program had to be paid before entering the country (Vink 2007:346). These policy changes were followed by a proposal of a new bill that would have required “old comers” who received welfare benefits to take these courses. Although this bill was never passed, the message was loud and clear: that immigrants should integrate (according to Dutch standards) if they wanted to take part (or advantage) of the system.

In addition to civic integration education, the government created policies to slow family reunification and marriage immigration practices. This was seen to be a necessary step after a report was released which found that 75 percent of Turkish and Moroccan Muslims living in the Netherlands returned home to marry and then brought back their spouses to live with them in the Netherlands (van Selm 2005). Therefore, policies went into place that only allowed people above a certain income level to bring spouses from abroad. In a similar vein, the Dutch government passed a law that took away the automatic residency granted to asylum seekers whose claims had been under review for three years or more in order to decrease the number of asylum seekers that were naturalized into the country. Furthermore, in the private sector, the government dissolved the requirement that all employers must report the number of minorities they employed (Lechner 2008:163-4), thereby leaving less opportunity to combat racial discrimination in the workplace.

These measures disproportionately affected immigrants from Morocco, Turkey, and the Antilles Islands. In this way, the integration of immigrants into Dutch society came at the expense of immigrants’ cultural diversity and a certain amount of their individual autonomy. Unfortunately there is

little information published concerning the thoughts of Dutch Muslims at the time of these policy changes. Accounts by scholars range from those approving of the changes to immigration policy to others condemning the changes, however, few reports, articles, or otherwise utilize the voice of Muslims living in the Netherlands⁵.

These changes to policy were punctuated by another event that again deepened the perceived divide between the Muslim population and the Dutch majority: the murder of Theo van Gogh. In 2004, a Dutch-born Muslim fanatic, Mohamed Bouyeri murdered van Gogh for directing an anti-Islamic film entitled *Submission*. The murder itself was particularly gruesome, involving van Gogh being shot and stabbed in broad daylight while he was cycling on his way to work. Bouyeri added religious elements to the crime by attaching passages from the Qur'an to van Gogh's body and also by claiming that his reasons for committing this crime were due to van Gogh's and his companions' misdeeds against the Qur'an (Buruma 2006:4-6). According to Peter van de Veer, a well-known Dutch anthropologist, the murder of van Gogh triggered a nationwide panic (2006:111). While not all accounts share van de Veer's level of drama, indeed Buruma acknowledges that "most people kept their cool" (2006:7), the majority of accounts agree that after this event, life between Dutch natives and Dutch Muslims fundamentally changed. The debate about the Muslim presence in the Netherlands has maintained a high level of energy and the discussion most often concerns their questionable allegiance to the Dutch nation.

⁵ The literature to which I am referring, are those sources published in English. This is not to say that accounts, which use Muslim voices, are not available in Dutch or Arabic. See Sunier 2005 and Bjornson 2007 for exceptions.

After the murder of van Gogh, certain policies were introduced that according to the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance⁶ (ECRI) were in direct violation of human rights policies. For example, the Municipality of Rotterdam gained permission from the Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment to ban people who do not meet a specific level of income from living in certain neighbourhoods within Rotterdam. This policy, called the Urban Areas (Special Measures) Act, allows municipal authorities to ban "persons who do not have an income from employment from residing" (ECRI 2008:23) in what are already seen as disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The Equal Treatment Commission (*Commissie Gelijke Behandeling*, CGB) found that although this policy is only used as a last resort and for a temporary period, it did indirectly discriminate members of Turkish and Moroccan origin (ECRI 2008:23). Yet, non-Western immigrants and their families are not the only communities who are affected by these policies and the atmosphere that they create.

A greater awareness of national belonging can be seen in the outcome of the most recent elections held in October 2006. During the 2006 national election, politicians who supported a tough nationalist approach to integration policy, and who paid particular (negative) attention to Muslim immigrants, received approximately 17 percent of the vote. If this number appears small, it should be remembered that 17 percent only represents those voters who believe in an extreme nationalistic or right-wing political platform and not those political parties who still hold a hard stance

⁶ The ECRI is the Council of Europe's monitoring body, combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and intolerance in greater Europe, from the perspective of the protection of human rights. See: http://www.coe.int/t/E/human_rights/ecri/

on immigrants and immigration, which represents a larger portion of voters.

One could view the more recent events in the Netherlands as a right-wing or conservative social movement. It is important to acknowledge that the statistics and the discourses of right-wing or conservative movements show only a very narrow picture of the situation. Furthermore, the danger lies in *dismissing* these right-wing and conservative narratives as “irrational” (Eldering 1985:666-667) and thinking that these discourses do not hold any influence within the public or political spheres. To interpret such ideologies as an extremist point of view or as fringe phenomena obscures the rational choices made by individuals. Furthermore, while racism and prejudice are not reasonable responses to community conflict, ignoring these responses might also overlook some partially legitimate grievances that help to fuel populist opinion (Berlet and Lyons 2000:14 as cited in Edelman 2001:303). It also hides the fact that right-wing bigotry and scapegoating are firmly rooted in the mainstream social and political order (Edelman 2001). Therefore, in the face of difference, nationhood has become a more important identity for certain Dutch natives and has become a more pervasive discourse within the Netherlands, overall.

According to Lechner (2008), the Netherlands has no single definitive version of what constitutes their national identity. Yet, this is not an issue because while national identity discourses function to exclude, and at times dominate, other cultural identities of those living within the nation (Appadurai 2006:41-43), they are not the only identification available to those living within the Netherlands (for example, one’s gender or religious affiliation could be a category of identification). Therefore, national identity can coexist with other identities and have a variety of

understandings, whilst reinforcing a greater identification with “the nation” and, in certain circumstances, segregating and excluding those dissenting identities. Thus, the idea of Dutch national and cultural identity can be a starting point from which to filter and frame other identities and experiences of both Dutch natives and non-natives living within the Netherlands.

As was evident from the progression of Dutch immigration policies from multiculturalism to integration to assimilation, Muslim immigrants play a dual role in the creation of the Dutch national identity. Muslim immigrants are asked to assimilate into the Dutch national cultural identity while at the same time, they are being used as a reference (as the “Other”) to help define Dutch national identity. In order to better understand how these policies affect both the majority and minority population and their relationship with one another, I will discuss the current state of Islamophobia in the Netherlands.

The Pervasiveness of Islamophobia in the Netherlands Today

The facts about Islam in the Netherlands today are as follows: Islam has had a growing presence in the Netherlands since the 1970s; Muslims currently make up six percent of the Netherlands population and their numbers continue to grow; it is said that Muslims will outnumber the native Dutch in their three largest cities within ten years (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007:13). For some members of the Dutch parliament and of the public, the number of immigrants living in the Netherlands is already too large. It is too large because Muslim values, as informed by the Islamic religion, are perceived to be inherently incompatible with those liberal and secular values which are said to characterize Dutch society. Therefore, according to these supporters, there is a real *clash of the*

civilisations occurring in the Netherlands, which was exemplified in the murder of Dutch film director Theo van Gogh.

In a report released in February 2008, the ECRI found that Islamophobia was becoming a growing trend in the Netherlands (2008:36-38); "Muslims of the Netherlands have been the subject of stereotyping, stigmatizing and sometimes outright racist political discourse and of biased media portrayal and have been disproportionately targeted by security and other policies" (ECRI 2008:36-37). While these negative accounts coexist among other accounts that provide a more diverse, balanced, and positive representation of ethnic minorities, there is a persistent, negative representation of Muslims and immigrants in the press and on the television (van der Valk 2002:7). This is a distressing state of affairs for a country that was once, and in certain respects still is, known for tolerance.

It is important to ask how these perceived incompatibilities are affecting the communication and interaction between these groups at the grassroots level. In the most tense period directly following van Gogh's murder, the Netherlands witnessed a sharp rise in racist violence targeted at Muslims (ECRI 2008:37). There was an increase in violence against Muslim institutions, such as mosques, Islamic schools, and property damage, which included racist graffiti on shops owned by Muslim proprietors. Reports of racist insults seemed ever pervasive, for example, on the streets, on public transportation, and during sporting events. Leaflets expressing anti-Muslim sentiment increased in circulation. To this day, Muslim immigrants experience discrimination in different areas of life, including employment or access to public places (ECRI 2008:39).

Furthermore, there is evidence that these divides are becoming increasingly

intensified. This is evident though the increased numbers of youth hate groups such as the *Lonsdale* group who were responsible for neo-national activities and the *Hofstad* group, who were said to be a militant Islamic group. There has also been a dramatic increase of hate propaganda over the Internet from pro- and anti-Muslim groups and from pro- and anti-Dutch nationalist groups (ECRI 2008:38). While these examples appear to represent the negative attitudes of individuals or a very small group of people, there are other examples of more sweeping trends among the public, for example, in the housing and education sector.

As of 2004, minority students comprised over 30 percent of the total population at the schools in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague (Lechner 2008:141). The high percentage of minority students is attributed to proximity of minority housing to the school as well as the phenomenon of "white flight". "White flight" occurs when Dutch parents send their child to a school outside of their local area in order to avoid "black schools" which are predominantly filled by immigrant students. This also seems to be the case when looking at the demographics of cities. In Amsterdam, non-Western ethnic minorities comprised 39 percent of the population in 2004 and it is suggested that in the year 2030, this percentage will be above 50 (Lechner 2008:139). These demographic patterns are produced by the tendency of minorities to settle in cities (Lechner 2008:142) and the growing trend of the Dutch majority to move to suburban areas.

There is much discussion of the Moroccan, Turkish, and other Middle Eastern populations segregating themselves from the majority population, into what has come to be called "dish cities" (Buruma 2006:21). Dish cities are named for the satellites that line the rows of houses that

connect these immigrants to the satellite television and Internet from their home country. The inhabitants of these enclaves are thought not to have integrated, which is usually determined by their (in)ability to speak the Dutch language. From these trends, it would appear that Muslim and non-Muslim populations are separating themselves to a certain degree. These trends also show evidence of action on the ground level that mimics the xenophobic and racist discourse seen in the political sphere. What is obvious at this point is that the construction of national and cultural identity or “Dutchness” is a volatile business, and in order to investigate the current situation, it is important to acknowledge the politically charged nature of this environment and those involved, and how this affects potential research projects, like my own.

Politically Charged: Conducting Fieldwork in the Netherlands Today

My research will investigate how Dutch native and immigrant communities live and communicate together while engaging in discourses of nationalism, belonging and Islamophobia. This research seeks to understand how individuals who identify as being a ‘native’ or ‘non-native’ accept or deny certain aspects of these narratives and create their own understandings of who belongs and who does not belong to the Dutch nation⁷. In order to accomplish this, my study will incorporate these discourses in addition to the broader social field in which they operate (Edelman 2001:311). As anthropologists tend to study marginalized people (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007:117),

⁷ The idea of belonging to the nation has important implications in that those understood to belong have better access to national resources (for example, social, political and financial standing, better quality of life, and more employment opportunities) than those who do not.

there is a need for anthropologists to pay more attention to a nation’s majority population. Indeed, scholars have called for more research involving the Dutch majority population in order to understand their involvement in these affairs (Entzinger 2006). Furthermore, anthropologists and other social movement scholars have largely skirted the issue of right-wing collective action, largely because researchers tend to study those movements of collective action, which they identify with and support, or which have an attractive cause (Edelman 2001:301-302). This leaves a gap in the literature of less attractive social movements, like Islamophobia in the Netherlands.

It is important to look at the idea of nationalism at this point in time because although some academics have argued that we live in a post-national world (for example, Appadurai 1996) this assumption is over-simplified and over-stated. As is apparent from above, the Netherlands has begun to search for a more distinct and salient national identity in the face of “otherness”, which has created an opportunity for unification among those identifying as non-Muslim immigrants. These processes however have also negatively affected non-Western immigrants and their families in real ways (see ECRI findings above). Therefore, an investigation into the resurgence of national identity in the Netherlands will show the larger process of community relations, the effects of group affiliation or ascription, and the level of cohesion within the Dutch community.

Within the current era of globalization, the idea of the nation is more sophisticated than once theorized because “the nation” is no longer thought to be bound to its geographical borders or ignorant of its many moving parts, that is: the influence of supranational media outlets, communication technologies, and the

movement of those associated with a particular nation both within and outside of its physical territory. Furthermore, for the Netherlands, the external forces of the European Union and the Netherlands' place in the international realm influences their conceptions of what constitutes the Dutch nation. Therefore, the appropriateness of ethnographic fieldwork in this context lies in the ability to see the process of identity construction, in many different social locations, that is, on a local, national, transnational, and international scale.

There were relatively few ethnographic studies carried out (and published in English), on the relationship between native Dutch and Muslim immigrants communities; however, since the mid 2000s, social scientists' interest in this area has greatly increased (Bjornson 2007; Hagendoorn, Veenman and Vollergh 2003; Margry and Roodenburg 2007). Notably, the Ethno-barometer project looked at matters of cultural diversity in 2005 using focus groups that included native Dutch residents and Moroccan immigrants, in Gouda. This study found that the relationship between these perceived dichotomous groups was not as antagonistic or fragmented as presented in the media or by alarmist politicians but that Dutch natives believed immigrants had sole responsibility for integrating into society (van Bruinessen 2006). In 2006, a sociological survey found similar beliefs in the majority of its native Dutch respondents who thought that immigrants should culturally assimilate in both their private and public lives, while the immigrant respondents believed integration was only necessary in their public life (van de Vijver *et al.* 2006:114). However, while the authors concluded that "public attitudes towards multiculturalism ha[d] not undergone appreciable changes in the last five years" (van de Vijver *et al.* 2006:102), they failed to give any explanation for the preceding

gap and misperceptions between groups. As evinced by the preceding evidence, the current relationship among Dutch communities merits further investigation, and in my opinion, further ethnographic investigation as it is best suited to address the complexity of this situation. The following is a discussion concerning the strengths and potential drawbacks of ethnographic research in the Netherlands.

Why Ethnography?

An ethnographic investigation allows for an analysis beyond statistical evidence as it is based on research that focuses on how people engage with larger discourses in everyday life. It is through participants' lived experiences that I will come to understand how individuals, with particular group affiliations, interact with one another and how their experiences have affected their relationships and points of view, over time. In my opinion, this is something left out of sociological surveys, which tend to provide only a snapshot of the situation instead of the storyline that ethnographic investigation offers. Therefore, ethnography will allow me to *dig deep* into the current situation in the Netherlands, which is important in a field that is as tense and politically charged as it is. Through studying lived experience I am also able to see where and how social and political discourses affect different groups and individuals and how these discourses and the institutions that create them change in importance over time. Furthermore, ethnography allows me to negotiate the categories of "native Dutch majority" and "Muslim immigrant". By using ethnographic methods, I will be able to see how these people transcend and complicate these categories imposed on them by the media, the Dutch government, public discourses, and one another, in their everyday lives.

Moreover, because this project involves following social and political events within the political and public arena in the Netherlands (which over the last five to ten years has at times proven to be quite tumultuous), ethnographic investigation allows me to remain flexible in the event that a new and important topic surfaces. This is an important feature of this methodology since I will be conducting research during the year 2010 when there will be a national election and the Dutch soccer team competes in the FIFA World Cup. In the past, these kinds of events have proven to increase demonstrations and feelings toward Dutch nationalism (Lechner 2008). Therefore, depending on their significance to my interlocutors, I am capable of following the lead of any influential players or events, discourses, or themes, as they arise, once I am in the *thick of things*. It is this flexibility that makes ethnography best suited toward my intended study.

Finally, by conducting ethnographic fieldwork, I am able to incorporate reflexivity into my research concerning my own position as a Canadian born, middle class, white, female researcher, with Dutch heritage. This reflexivity is important to keep in mind as my personal background and experiences will surely affect my access and interpretation of certain situations and people. It is also a possibility that my opinions of Islamophobia or Dutch nationalism might again affect my access to certain informants and information. Although I do not agree with Islamophobic statements and attempt to remain neutral concerning Dutch nationalism, I may find it hard when, and if, asked for my opinion and allegiances.

In conclusion, there is much evidence of the growing dichotomy between the native Dutch and Muslim populations in the Netherlands today. The current tension between community groups provides an

adequate background into which people question their national identity and belonging to the larger group. This situation necessitates further investigation and in my personal opinion, further ethnographic analysis, in order to understand the complexities of the situation and to avoid the pitfalls of oversimplifying or over-identifying the level of the current dichotomy between these groups.

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