Feminism in Multicultural Societies

An analysis of Dutch Multicultural and Postsecular Developments and their Implications for Feminist Debates

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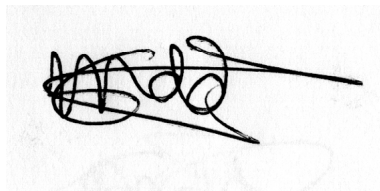**May 2010**

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Abstract

It was long assumed that both multiculturalism and feminism are connected to progressive movements and hence have comparable and compatible goals. However, both in academia and in popular media the critique on multiculturalism has grown and is often accompanied with arguments related to gender equality and/or feminism.

According to political scientist Susan Moller Okin for example there are fundamental conflicts between our commitment to gender equality and the desire to respect the customs of minority cultures or religions. If we agree that women should not be disadvantaged because of their sex, she argues, we should not accept group rights that permit oppressive practices. Okin's claims led to a complex and highly important debate both in academia and in public debates.

The main aim of this thesis is to explore in depth the different discourses about multiculturalism and feminism and develop a more inclusive and nuanced redefinition of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. The focus of the analysis will be on the Netherlands, where the debate has been intense and paradigmatic of similar debates in most countries. The first part of the thesis explores the literature on multiculturalism and feminism, and discusses the importance of for instance intersectionality, the politics of location and situated knowledges for a better understanding of the debates. The second part of the thesis is dedicated to fieldwork. A preliminary media analysis is undertaken to analyse the main aspects of the public debate as they appear in the feminist magazine *Opzij*. On the basis of this analysis, a series of focus groups with women belonging to organisations that are considered stakeholders in the debate (e.g. feminist, religious, cultural or sub-cultural) is organised.

The thesis provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between the concepts of multiculturalism and feminism. It argues that gender equality is often misused in islamophobic and anti-migration discussions, which also harms the position of minority women. Furthermore, it demonstrates that a more nuanced and inclusive interpretation of multiculturalism and feminism acknowledges the multiple layers of this debate, starts from intersectionality and includes critical accounts of secularism and religion, colonial history and subjectivity.

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Introduction   Challenging the Relationship between Multiculturalism and Feminism

At the end of 2004, two weeks after Theo van Gogh, the well-known Dutch filmmaker, was murdered, the Dutch Minister of Immigration and Integration had a meeting with approximately 50 imams. Before the discussion started things went wrong: one of the Imams refused to shake hands with the (female) Minister. "I am not allowed to shake the hand of a woman" (translation EM), he said (Soomer, 2004). The Minister was offended and did not even try to hide her anger. The following day all Dutch newspapers mentioned this 'hand-shaking-incident'; hardly any wrote about the actual conversation between the Minister and the Imams. The popular Dutch historian Geert Mak accused the Minister of making a show and misusing the situation: "she kept her hand up in the air for seconds. She didn't act like a minister of integration, assuming mutual adaptation" (translation EM) (Mak, 2005, pp 84-85). According to Mak this incident marked a fundamental shift in Dutch integration policy: "Who comes to this country, has to leave everything behind. Either you are Dutch or you are not" (translation EM) (Mak, 2005, pp 84-8).

   In the debate that followed, two positions were dominant in the popular media. There was a group of people who supported the Imam and criticized the Minister for deliberately increasing the division between 'us' and 'them'. The second group agreed with the Minister. They believed she was discriminated against on the basis of her sex. According to this group the incident was an illustration of two bigger problems in Dutch society: the lack of integration of Muslims and gender inequality in Islam.

   In a lecture on the debate on multiculturalism, anthropologist Gloria Wekker discusses the importance of taking into account the discourses that circulate in society and construct the ways in which we are persuaded to think and talk about the relationship between men and women, and between members of different ethnic groups (Wekker, 2005). The first thing we notice here then is how typical (ie confirming the dominant discourse) the 'hand-shaking-incident' was: a white/emancipated woman challenges the beliefs of a traditional/un-emancipated Muslim man. We might want to ask ourselves whether the media would have been just as interested if it was the other way around (a Muslim woman challenging the beliefs of a white/secular man). The second striking thing about the debate is the division between those who defended the

Imam and those who supported the Minister. Although women and minority rights have traditionally been seen as 'progressive' issues, they now seem to be opposites in the political debate. This might imply that women and minority rights are incompatible in some cases.

Susan Moller Okin addresses this question in her well-known essay *Is Multiculturalism bad for Women?* (Okin, 1999). She argues that if we agree that women should not be disadvantaged because of their sex, then we should not accept group rights that permit oppressive practices. The Dutch 'hand-shaking-incident' seems to be a quite innocent (if unfortunate) situation merely involving two (perhaps) stubborn people. But what if we are not talking about shaking hands anymore, but about more extreme cases such as genital mutilation, not being accepted for a job because you wear a veil, forced marriages or racial violence? In this project I aim to address these issues and the supposed tension between feminism and multiculturalism.

Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?

Both feminism and multiculturalism aim to protect the rights of groups; either women or minority communities. According to Okin, progressive people who are against all forms of oppression, assume too easily that multiculturalism and feminism are compatible (Okin, 1999). Cultures are suffused with practices and ideologies concerning gender, and most cultures facilitate control over women in various ways. Okin believes there are two essential problems that advocates of group rights for minorities have not adequately addressed. First of all, they tend to treat cultural groups as monolithic and pay little attention to the differences *within* these groups, most importantly the substantial differences in power and advantage between men and women. Advocates of multiculturalism also seem to ignore the private sphere. According to Okin, most (minority) cultures are patriarchal and most cultural customs aim to control women and keep them in the private sphere. She recognizes that women are also discriminated against in Western democracies, but argues that they are legally guaranteed the same opportunities and freedoms as men. Okin argues that women who come from more patriarchal cultures than the United States (or some other Western, basically liberal, state), should not be less protected from male violence than other women are (Okin, 1999).

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Okin published her essay together with about a dozen responding papers. I would like to argue that there are three main points of criticism of her arguments represented in those papers. First of all, the respondents claim that Okin's essay is rather judgmental and one-sided. She asks whether multiculturalism is bad for women, but only evaluates minority cultures, not Western liberal societies. Okin seems to argue that Western women have been emancipated and that women from minority cultures should just follow the same path, but her critics ask whether there is just one route to emancipation. A second issue is that Okin fails to recognize differences within groups except for those between men and women. According to her, one of the most important forms of oppression for women is (culturally based) sexual discrimination. Okin notes that other considerations, such as racial discrimination, need to be taken into account as well, but thinks that gender inequality in cultures should take priority. This assumes that different forms of oppression work independently from each other. However, other (particularly black) feminists have shown, that racism and sexism should be both analyzed and fought against together (see for instance Wekker, 1995). Thirdly, Okin has an ahistoric and static vision of cultures. She does not mention differences between generations or interpretations. There can be progressive forces within a culture that might be able to change certain habits and norms from the inside.

Rethinking Multiculturalism and Feminism

Okin's claims led to a complex and important debate, reaching beyond the book and responding articles discussed above. This thesis starts from this discussion as initiated by Susan Moller Okin, not only because her essay was highly contested, but mainly because it pointed out an essential issue in feminism. Not only in academia, but also in the popular media, the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism is receiving more and more attention and leads to serious clashes between feminists. Culture and religion are important to many women in the world, but can also be sources of oppression as Okin argues. Despite the fact that this issue is essential to feminism, the debate remains problematic. The different actors, interests and frameworks make it very difficult to develop a clear view of the problems and solutions at stake. The first aim of this project is therefore to elucidate the debate, primarily by asking different questions. I will approach the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism as a discursive

issue. Therefore my first research question will be: *How do people discuss the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism?* I will critically analyse the different positions, arguments and interests of the most important actors in the debate. The second and most important aim of this research is to redefine the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. After analyzing the relevant discourses in society and offering a comprehensive perspective on this issue, a critique on current debates on multiculturalism and feminism will be provided, in combination with an alternative perspective. Hence, the second research question is: *How can the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism be re- conceptualized?*

The research project is set in the Netherlands for two reasons. First, the debate in the Netherlands is rather heated and at the top of the political agenda; think for example of the violent occurrences in the recent past (the murder of the film director Theo van Gogh and the constant threats to kill politicians like Ayaan Hirsi Ali), but also of the recent dismissal of Tariq Ramadan, both as advisory of the city of Rotterdam and as Professor at the University of Rotterdam.[1] Secondly, I grew up and studied in the Netherlands, and am therefore familiar with Dutch political relations and history. Through my honorary work for women's organisations, I have great familiarity with the recent debate and excellent access to debate stakeholders in the Netherlands.

In that context the rationale for studying this specific country is twofold. First of all, due to my background and location, the Netherlands is the most logical starting point for my research. I am familiar with the political, social and historical context and can therefore explore parameters in the debate that only someone who has lived in this location can. In that sense it is as valid a starting point as any other location. However, as Braidotti, Esche and Hlavajova point out; research based on case studies can:

> "neither claim universality nor a particular status that is unique to itself. Its peculiarities are tempered by generic Western-European and global conditions, but they do not override them" (2007, p 19).

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[1] See for instance:
//www.nrc.nl/international/article2332245.ece/Rotterdam_fires_Tariq_Ramadan_over_Iranian_TV_show

Hence, this research is first of all based on my own location, but that does not mean that it is a solely a particular case. The debates about multiculturalism, integration, and migration are not only important in the Netherlands, but in many other (European) countries as well. And even though some of the historical, political and social contexts differ in these countries, other aspects of the debate are similar. The recurrent debates about headscarves and burquas in for example Britain, France, Germany and Belgium show that ideas about womanhood, gender equality, agency, cultural difference, and religious practices play an important role in public discourses all over Europe (and probably beyond). In that sense, the instruments that I employ to investigate and rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism are very relevant for other countries as well. Moreover, the particular aspects of the Dutch case make it an excellent learning case. Since the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh multiculturalism in general, and Islam specifically, has been high on the political agenda. A climate arose in which a so-called 'political correctness' was left behind and it was argued that people should be able to say everything they want about other groups in society.[2] Due to the abandonment of 'political correctness', we are faced with a debate which takes place almost without filtering. This makes the Dutch case particularly interesting for argumentation and discourse analysis as it represents a 'par excellence' debate on the issues that any similar debate around the world would also be based on. As I argue throughout this thesis, these harsh public debates need to be taken into account when one investigates the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. As this case study of the Netherlands will show, rather than bluntly criticising other cultures for their gender relations, a rethinking of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism needs to critically analyse the power relations at stake, and hence also take into account colonial histories. The Netherlands are an excellent starting point for this.

The thesis consists of four main parts. The first part of the research is a narrative analysis of the literature. The main argumentation and viewpoints in the debate as it is evident in the academic literature will be analysed. The second and third parts of the research are dedicated to fieldwork. A preliminary media analysis will be undertaken to describe the main aspects of the public debate as they appear in the feminist magazine

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[2] See chapter one for a more elaborate description of these debates

Opzij. This analysis starts on the day the director Theo van Gogh was killed (November 2, 2004) and ends a year later. On the basis of this analysis, a series of focus groups with women belonging to organisations that are considered stakeholders in the debate (e.g. feminist, religious, cultural or sub-cultural) are organised. The focus groups are semi-structured on selected themes such as culture, religion, current political issues etc, while also allowing for free association on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. Both the media sample and the focus group discussions are analysed through a combined methodology of argumentation and discourse analysis. This means that the structure and content of the arguments are placed at the centre of the investigation, as well as the rules and categories applied in the different discourses. The final part of the thesis reconceptualises the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, on the basis of the results of the empirical research and theoretical analyses.

Approaching Multiculturalism and Feminism

In the debate that followed the publication of Okin's essay, Saskia Sassen mentions the importance of *framing* an argument or discussion (Sassen, 1999). Small shifts in the frame of Okin's argument lead to important questions. Sassen asks us for example: "what if 'culture' cannot be made to pivot so exclusively on the oppression of women?" (Sassen, 1999, p 77). For many women the intercultural battles are just as important as the intra-cultural gender inequalities; criticizing their culture alone will not help them. Following Sassen's advice I want to develop an alternative framework and change the debate by asking other questions.

I find it important to start this investigation with Susan Moller Okin's controversial essay because it points out essential issues in feminist theory and activism that need to be addressed further. However, I would like to make it clear that feminism has a long history of thinking about difference and that Susan Moller Okin is not the first to address these issues. Okin's essay represents an important discussion within feminism at this moment, and her arguments need to be investigated in more detail, but they also have to be contextualised within a longer history of feminist thought about differences and power relations among women. In Chapter 3, I will outline how (mainly black) feminists have demonstrated the importance of differences between women and how it is not enough to look at gender alone to understand women's oppression. The

combination of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality (etc) together determine women's experiences. An analysis that separates these categories ignores the intersections of for example gender and ethnicity and therefore cannot truly understand the situation in which women live. Hence, I propose to make an intersectional analysis of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, which makes it possible to take into account several power relations at the same time, rather than separating them (Wekker, 2005).

Another important part of my approach towards this research is that I find it very important to recognise my own background and how this influences me. Adrienne Rich points out, in 'Politics of Location' that feminists have to recognise our location; we need to name the ground we are coming from and build a white Western feminist consciousness that is not simply centred on itself:

> "marginalized though we have been as women, as white and Western makers of theory we also marginalize others because our lived experience is thoughtlessly white, because even our 'women cultures' are rooted in some Western tradition" (Rich, 1987, p 219).

This thesis is the result of a search for a more nuanced way of thinking about multiculturalism and feminism. When I watch the news, I often hear white men arguing about why the headscarf is a problem. When I read feminist texts, both in academic works and in the popular media, I read why Islam is a possible threat to gender equality. On the other hand, I also know the work of black feminists who struggle against both sexism and racism, just as I have read the articles of Muslim women who argue that religion is a source of inspiration for their emancipation. Therefore, this is first of all a project about bringing these different arguments together: why are certain feminists concerned about the consequences of multiculturalism and how do others combine their feminist ideals with faith or solidarity with their community? My commitment to this probably originates from a certain void in my own vocabulary and thinking when it comes to these issues. I am a white, non-religious feminist, but do not adhere to the politics of secular feminists who condemn others women's faiths and cultures as problematic. On the other hand, I find it difficult to understand that some women do not fight patriarchal traditions, which are part of their culture or religion.

In my view, the current political discussions about migration and integration challenge feminism to develop a framework that combines inclusion with emancipation and affirmation of difference. My aim with this research project is to develop the vocabulary and analytical tools to better understand the complexity of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, and to develop more nuanced perspectives towards it. For my approach this has a number of consequences. First of all, power plays an important role in the analyses. Okin argues that multiculturalists have not paid enough attention to the power differences between men and women. I would like to emphasise that the differences between women and the different aspects of women's identities are also important for the discussion about multiculturalism and feminism. For that reason I propose contextualised and intersectional analyses of issues related to the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. A second aspect of the way my location influences the thesis' approach is in the importance it gives to women's experiences. As I explained above, I write this thesis as a non-believing, secular, Dutch woman who wants to develop a perspective on feminism that goes beyond this rather dominant position. In that context it is my aim to learn, with an open mind, from other women's experiences and perspectives on feminism and emancipation. Spivak taught us (1988) that given existing power relations 'the subaltern cannot speak' (or be heard), so it is not my aim to simply 'give these women a voice' or to represent their opinions or interests. Rather, I try to investigate and problematize dominant positions in the debate about multiculturalism and feminism and develop an alternative perspective on these issues, based on my conversations with women and what I learned from them.

Moreover, this project is interdisciplinary in approach. My own background is influenced by various disciplines (political science, history, gender studies, and philosophy) and the multi-layeredness of the subject of this thesis asks for interdisciplinarity. My gender studies background taught me to make situated analyses, investigate the complexity of different power relations and to acknowledge the intersections of the various aspects of our identities. The experience in political science was useful for the conceptualisation of the extensive empirical research. Finally, through various philosophical approaches, I developed the framework for the (normative) alternative to the current debates about multiculturalism and feminism. Hence, I not only bring together approaches from the humanities and social sciences, but also combine theoretical analyses with extensive empirical research. The reasoning behind this is that the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism need both the

creativity and radical ideas about changes from critical theory, but also the more practical informed arguments and experiences from people in the field. I believe that this combined approach will provide new insights that help to better understand the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

Thesis Outline

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will review the debate on multiculturalism and feminism as initiated by Susan Moller Okin; in the second part of this chapter I discuss the public debates in the Netherlands on the same issue. The main aim is to give insights into which arguments and statements that are made in these debates need answers in order to rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

The second chapter focuses on one of the two key concepts in this thesis: multiculturalism. It summarizes its main aspects, forms and interpretations and theorizes the role of 'sameness' and 'difference' in the conceptualisation of multiculturalism. Finally, the chapter gives more insight into the position of culture and religion within multiculturalism and evaluates whether multiculturalism could exist without culture. In this context alternative interpretations of the concept are put forward. The main aim is to demonstrate the multi-layeredness and complexity of multiculturalism.

The second key concept of this thesis, feminism, is subject of the third chapter. Here, I focus on the connections between feminism and diversity and argue that it is the combination of gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality etc that creates the oppression of women. Because these categories of difference arise together and influence each other, they should not be separated in analysis. Another key point for this chapter is accountability for one's background and the acknowledgment of whiteness as a colour and non-neutral position. Chapter 4 is the last theoretical chapter and discusses issues of experience and subjectivity. If feminists acknowledge the differences between women, they need instruments and theoretical tools to apply these women's distinct experiences in feminist theories and activities. Hence, the main aim of this chapter is to demonstrate why feminists have to take into account the experiences, strategies and arguments of religious women and/or women from minority cultures, even if those women do not fight for equality themselves.

The second part of the thesis presents my empirical work on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. I have conducted a qualitative analysis of the discourse in the Dutch feminist magazine *Opzij* on these issues and have carried out a series of focus groups with women from women's organisations. The aim of this empirical work was both to develop a more thorough understanding of the debates about multiculturalism and feminism, and to rethink the main issues, arguments and concepts in order to produce an alternative, more inclusive interpretation of multiculturalism and feminism. In the concluding chapter, the empirical and theoretical parts of the thesis will be brought together and analysed in order to present a re-conceptualisation of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. This alternative perspective starts from the complexity and multi-layeredness of the issues at stake and develops a more situated, intersectional and inclusive view of multiculturalism and feminism.

Chapter 1   Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? Discourses on Multiculturalism and Feminism in Academia and the Dutch public Sphere

Introduction

Multiculturalism and integration are recurrent themes in European public and academic debates. Often women and gender equality are central themes in these debates. Think for example of the headscarf bans in both French and Flemish public schools, but also of the statements by opinion leaders such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, who criticise gender inequality within Islam. In the article the 'caged virgin', Hirsi Ali argues that Islamic sexual morality keeps Muslim men, women and children in a "virgin cage", which prevents them from adapting their religion to Western values such as individualism and freedom (Ali, 2004, p 8). In the academic sphere, political scientist Susan Moller Okin claims in her famous essay *Is Multiculturalism bad for Women?* that if we agree women should not be disadvantaged because of their sex, then we should not accept group rights that permit oppressive practices (Okin, 1999a). According to Okin there are fundamental conflicts between our commitment to gender equality and the desire to respect the customs of minority cultures or religions. Hence, although women's and minority rights are traditionally seen as 'progressive' topics, they now seem to be on opposite sides in various debates.

Even though the debates about multiculturalism and gender equality in the (international) academic sphere are rather different to those in the (Dutch) public sphere, they also show resemblances, and in some cases have even influenced each other. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, for example, refers to the work of Susan Moller Okin to support her statement that emphasising the Muslim identity with the accompanying group rights harms Muslim women (Ali, 2002a, p 51). This chapter brings the academic debate on multiculturalism, as initiated by Susan Moller Okin, together with the Dutch debate on this issue. The main aim is to introduce both discussions and to present the issues, standpoints and arguments to which I will respond throughout this thesis. In the course of this chapter the assumptions and arguments on which the

public and academic debates are based and the way they are framed will become clear. I will subsequently analyse what is missing and how we can develop a more thorough and nuanced understanding of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

Gender equality and Cultural Diversity: Susan Moller Okin's Earlier Work

Most of Susan Moller Okin's work is on gender issues, very often related to human rights or social justice. After her book *Women in Western Political Thought* (1979) in which she argues that gender belongs at the core of political philosophy, she wrote the influential *Justice, Gender and the Family* (Okin, 1989). In this book she criticizes theories of social justice that do not take gender issues into account. By deconstructing the dichotomy between the public and the private sphere, she argues that theories of justice should be applied to the family and family life. Multiculturalism is not really an issue in this book, but she does mention the tensions between traditions and gender equality. Referring to (mostly) Western traditions she warns of the possible consequences of those traditions for the emancipation of women in our society. Subsequently, Okin's work deals more extensively with issues related to gender, culture and human rights (see e.g. Okin, 1994; Okin, 1998; Okin, 2000).

The article *Gender Inequality and Cultural Difference* (1994) is an important step towards her arguments on multiculturalism. *Gender Inequality and Cultural Difference* analyzes the tensions between gender and culture from a broader feminist discussion of differences and essentialism on the one hand, and theories of justice and ideas on universalism and relativism on the other. Contrary to what the title might imply, the article does not really deal with *cultural* diversity, but more with differences and similarities in women's oppression. According to Okin, the experiences of women in poor countries are not really different from those in richer ones, indeed she says, "they are similar but *much* worse" (Okin, 1994, p. 430). Sexism, from this perspective, is an identifiable form of oppression whose effects are felt by women regardless of their race or class. What is needed from scholars, according to Okin, is a serious critique of the dichotomization of the public and private spheres and a transition of the unit of analysis from the household to the individual. Through these arguments, Okin aims to go against the anti-essentialist approach within feminism, which is more concerned with differences among women.

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Okin believes that the anti-essentialist approach will lead towards relativism and makes it impossible to develop any principles or theories of justice.

Jane Flax responded to Okin's article a year after publication, arguing mainly that Okin's view of gender is problematic. Okin claims that sexism is an identifiable form of oppression, but according to Flax there are no women who experience oppression unmarked by race or class (Flax, 1995). Flax believes that an adequate theory of justice and gender should take inequalities between women into account. Furthermore, she wants to warn of the dangers of "enlisting poor women from other countries as evidence in a dispute among women in the First World" (Flax, 1995, p. 437). She is concerned that this way the former remain mere objects for the latter, who "become the true subjects of the counter history" (Flax, 1995, p. 437). Or, to put it in other words, Western feminists describe the oppression of women in the developing countries and aim to save them from this situation, but in fact implicitly deny the agency of these women.

Flax asks Okin *why* justice would be undermined by thinking about difference. Why do we need universal claims about the oppression of women and most importantly: who gains from these beliefs? Flax claims that Okin's exclusive focus on women's similarities obscures not only their differences, but also the relations of domination between women. This way she says, First World women are put outside the social relations that produce poor women. Furthermore, Flax argues that Okin:

> "splits agency and determination so that the agency exercised by racialised and 'Third World women' and the determined aspects of First World women theorists are invisible" (Flax, 1995, p. 437).

Okin claims that poor women wouldn't be able to critically judge their lives (they tend to 'settle for very little'), but First World women, who also suffer from sex discrimination, *can* apparently distance themselves and critically analyse oppression. Another argument made by Flax that I would like to draw attention to here, is regarding the recognition of racism. Flax argues that while race issues mark all women's lives, white women can avoid recognizing this. In this ability of ignoring the effects of racism, Flax says, white women differ radically from non-white women: under no circumstances can black women do that. Therefore, Flax argues, in order to develop a truly equal and respectful theory of justice, we should recognise

differences, especially in power relations. Investigating the effects of racism on the 'perpetuators', instead of just the objects, would be an important start in her view.

Okin responded to Flax's comments, but the two authors do not seem to manage to connect with each other. While Flax tries to convince Okin with philosophical and political arguments about *how* to approach this issue, Okin (trained as a political scientist) is mostly focussed on empirical evidence. Okin claims that Flax is not criticising her on the basis of *what* she has done or said, but for *who* she is. Okin wants to do something about women's oppression and prevent a feminist "retreat into self-analysis (...), on the grounds that differences among women make it impossible for us to speak about anyone but ourselves" (Okin, 1995, p 445). Flax on the other hand, believes that Okin will never truly understand the lives of non-white women or help them in their struggles, as long as she doesn't recognize the different experiences of white and non-white women. Even though this dialogue between Okin and Flax does not lead to agreement, it is an important introduction to other discussions about multiculturalism, where many of these arguments can be recognised.

Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?

In 1999, Susan Moller Okin published the highly contested essay *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women*? This article is generally considered to be the start of the academic debate on the relationship between multiculturalism and gender equality. Feminists had of course been theorizing feminism and difference related issues for some time, but the essay written by Okin certainly re-opened these debates.. According to Okin, progressive people who are opposed to all forms of oppression tend to assume too easily that multiculturalism and feminism are compatible. She believes that cultures are suffused with practices and ideologies concerning gender and that most cultures facilitate control over women in various ways. Okin concludes that there is a fundamental conflict between our commitment to gender equality and the desire to respect the customs of minority cultures and religions. If we agree that women should not be disadvantaged because of their sex, we should not accept group rights that permit oppressive practices, she argues (Okin, 1999a).

Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? received enormous attention in both the general media and academia. However, Okin published a longer and more philosophical version of the famous essay on the relationship between cultural

diversity and gender equality in the journal *Ethics* in the same period that should also be mentioned. In this second article Okin analyses the subject more extensively and less provocatively, which can be seen from the more neutral title, *Feminism and Multiculturalism: some tensions*. Her main argument here is that:

> "there is a considerable likelihood of conflict between feminism and group rights for minority cultures, and that this conflict persists even when the latter are claimed on liberal grounds, and are limited to some extent by being so grounded" (Okin, 1998, p 664)

According to Okin both multiculturalists and feminists tend to ignore the tensions between cultural diversity and gender equality (Okin, 1998, 1999a). First of all, multiculturalists fail to adequately address the differences *within* cultures. They are likely to treat cultural groups as monolithic and pay little attention to the substantial differences in power and advantage between men and women, she says. Societies are *gendered* and according to Okin we should first look at the *content* of cultures (specifically at their beliefs and practices concerning gender) before we think about giving these groups special rights.

The second point of critique that advocates of multiculturalism seem to ignore is the private sphere. Home is the place where culture is practiced, preserved and transmitted to the young, Okin tells us. Therefore, the defence of cultural traditions will have much more influence on the lives of women and girls, since they spend most of their time and energy in preserving and maintaining the personal, familial and reproductive side of life. Furthermore, she argues that the distribution of responsibilities and power at home has a major impact on who can participate in the public sphere. The more a culture requires or expects from women in the private sphere, the less opportunity they have of achieving equality with men in either sphere (Okin, 1999a).

Feminists on the other hand, neglect the tensions with multiculturalism, according to Okin, because of an "excessive attention" to differences among women and a "hyper concern to avoid cultural imperialism that leads, at worst, to a paralyzing degree of cultural relativism" (Okin, 1998, p 665). Okin argues that she does not want to deny all differences between women, however she does believe that some feminists have gone too far in recognizing differences, resulting in a rejection of all

generalizations about women as essentialist.

Okin on Multiculturalism, Feminism and Liberalism

In her analysis of the conflicts between multiculturalism and feminism, Okin focuses on a specific kind of argument in favour of multicultural group rights, namely arguments based on *liberal* grounds. According to Okin, these liberal justifications of group rights for minority cultures are least likely to come into conflict with feminist claims and are therefore the most challenging to investigate (Okin, 1998). The major part of *Multiculturalism and Feminism: Some Tensions* (1998, pp. 670-681) is therefore dedicated by Okin to describing and responding to three main liberal arguments for group rights. This way she tries to show that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to justify group rights for minority cultures on liberal grounds, if one takes gender equality into account. Implicitly, she also seems to assume that if there is a conflict between group rights for minority cultures based on liberal grounds and gender equality, then there will always be a conflict between those rights and women's emancipation.

The first argument that Okin discusses comes from Margalit and Halbertal. They claim that human beings have a right to their own culture and that this right may justify the support of cultures that flout the rights of individual members (Okin, 1999a). According to these authors, group rights are essential for each group member to develop a "personality identity". They use the example of Israel's Ultra Orthodox Jews and Okin responds to that same example. According to Margalit and Halbertal, subsidies and privileges for this group are justified, because they help Orthodox Jews to survive in a mostly secular majority culture. According to Okin however, girls and boys in this group are raised in such a tight regime, with fixed roles and positions for both sexes, that it is impossible to justify support for this on liberal or feminist grounds.

The second argument for group rights comes from Kukathas, who is, in the eyes of Okin, clearly more liberal than Margalit and Halbertal. Kukathas is interested in cultures because they are important for the well-being of individuals. He doesn't believe that cultures should be actively protected, instead he thinks they should be 'left alone' by liberal states (Okin, 1998). Autonomy and free choice do not play a

role in Kukathas' argument: he believes that the only thing that matters is whether the individuals taking part are prepared to acquiesce in it. Okin responds to this idea by asking

"what if the 'acquiescence' by some in cultural practices stems from lack of power, or socialization into inferior roles, resulting in lack of self-esteem or a sense of entitlement?" (Okin, 1998, p. 675).

Kukathas does allow that individuals from a minority culture can appeal to the liberal state when it comes to harmful traditions. According to Okin however this argument doesn't take into account the enormous coercion that exists in the private sphere in family life. She believes that in reality this position would lead to a situation in which families can do whatever they want to individual members, as long as they do not get caught.

Kymlicka is the last author that Okin responds to in her article. He believes that culture is an important basis for individual freedom; since it often forms the basis for ideas about how to live one's life (Okin, 1998). He does, however, describe strict conditions for the justification of group rights. A culture must "govern itself by recognizably liberal principles, neither infringing on the basic liberties of its own members nor discriminating among them" (Okin, 1998, p. 677). Okin recognizes two problems with this argument. First of all, she says, fewer cultures than Kymlicka assumes might be able to claim rights under this condition. More importantly, Okin argues that Kymlicka's conditions might still not really protect girls and women in minority cultures. He wants to prevent overt and formal discrimination against women, but according to Okin most sex discrimination is not particularly overt and is often hidden in the private sphere.

Okin concludes her analysis with the statement that female members of a culture have no clear interest in its preservation. She even goes as far to say that:

"while a number of factors would have to be taken into account in assessing the situation, they [women, EM] might be better off, from a liberal point of view, if the culture into which they were born were either gradually to become distinct (...) or, preferably to be encouraged and supported to substantially alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women" (Okin, 1998, p. 680).

This harsh statement of Okin's has received much criticism. I will go on to discuss these, and other, responses to her essay and article, but I will first describe the issues raised by authors whose critiques were published in the same volume as Okin's essay, and then describe Okin's replies to these.

The Debate Widens: Direct Responses to the Essay

Okin's essay is published together with fifteen responses to her argument. Opalski briefly summarizes the arguments in the book into four different categories (Opalski, 2002). The first group of critics generally agree with Okin that there are conflicts between multiculturalism and feminism. However most of them think that, rather than giving up on multiculturalism, we should monitor minority cultures closely. Will Kymlicka is probably the most well-known theorist of this approach. He writes, in his reply to Okin, that both multiculturalism and feminism are engaged in a struggle for a more inclusive conception of justice (Kymlicka, 1999). He agrees with Okin that a liberal approach to multiculturalism should take gender inequalities into account, but doesn't believe we should therefore doubt the legitimacy of group rights. His thesis is clear: "Group rights are permissible if they help promote justice between ethno cultural groups, but are impermissible if they create or exacerbate gender inequalities within the group" (Kymlicka, 1999, p. 31). He pleads for a division of group rights: "internal restrictions" should not be allowed in a liberal society, since they restrict individuals within a group; "external protections" (e.g. language rights or guaranteed political representation) however, can and should be permitted.

The second group of critics disagrees with Okin on the grounds that:

> "she seems to preclude the possibility for developing culturally rooted brands of feminisms that, though different from hers, can nevertheless work for women's collective interest within a specific culture" (Opalski, 2002, p. 3).

Martha Nussbaum for example, argues that Okin simplifies the issue too much (Nussbaum, 1999). Concentrating on religion, she criticises Okin for not looking at the positives sides of religion and the good things it brings into human life.

Furthermore, she believes that Okin makes her own struggle for gender equality more difficult by alienating potential allies. Nussbaum proposes a different approach; she thinks minority religions should get special protection. However, this should be combined with laws that protect women in these groups, using the principle of the "substantial burden". When a law (for gender equality) doesn't impose such a burden on a person's free exercise of his/her religion, there is no problem. When it does, then different interests should be taken into account and evaluated.

A third argument raised against Okin's essay refers to the cultural imperialism implied in her defence of feminism against multiculturalism. She only evaluates minority cultures, not Western liberal societies. Bonnie Honig warns us not to conflate culture with 'foreignness' as not only minorities have cultures (Honig, 1999). Furthermore, she argues that we might want to ask ourselves whether liberalism and feminism are necessarily compatible. Feminism might not be entirely well-served by its association with liberalism, Honig says. An-Na'im adds "that all cultures should be held to the same standards, not only of gender equality, but also of all other human rights" (An-Na'im, 1999, p. 61). Okin's ultimatum that minority cultures should meet the standards set by the majority, is not fair while that same majority can take it's own time in achieving gender equality.

The final form of criticism claims that Okin has accurately depicted the clash between multiculturalism and feminism, "but that such a clash does not *need* to exist and that avoiding this clash does not require making casualty out of multiculturalism or feminism" (Opalsky, 2002, p. 3). Homi Bhabha, for example, argues that Okin's claims are based on a very restricted understanding of liberalism, and that combined with her sole focus on conflicts, she therefore produces a monolithic discourse on (minority) cultures (Bhabha, 1999). According to him, Okin fails to understand the lives and problems of migrants in Western countries because she only uses extreme stories, namely criminal charges from cultural defence cases. Bhabha instead proposes an approach, which is placed in the context of the lives of migrants in the West, and also takes into account discrimination and citizenship-related problems. Bhikhu Parekh uses a similar argument, stating that because Okin focuses on extreme cases, she ignores the complexities and problems involved in judging other cultures. Furthermore, he argues that by taking liberalism as a starting point Okin reduces multiculturalism to a discussion on group rights, which is, according to Parekh, only a small part of it.

Opalski's classification of the arguments against Okin's essay is a useful tool when one wants to get a better understanding of the different standpoints in this debate. However we can also divide most of the critiques between those focussed on Okin's understanding of multiculturalism or culture, and those focussed on feminism and/or emancipation. First of all, several authors criticize Okin for having an ahistoric and static vision of culture (e.g. Bhabha, 1999). She does not mention differences between generations, subcultures or political ideologies within a culture. Younger people, for example, might be a progressive force and can change certain habits and norms. By only recognizing the conservative people and visions of cultures, Okin strongly limits her own analysis and does exactly the opposite of what she wants to do: she excludes the minorities (or less powerful groups) within the minority, e.g. women.

The second type of criticism aims at Okin's definition of feminism. According to Al-Hibri, Okin is right to be concerned about her sisters, however she should be more careful and considerate. Even though Okin claims that she wants to include women from minority cultures in a dialogue, she also makes it clear that outsiders will probably be better critics of a culture (Okin, 1998). Parekh argues that Okin should pay more attention to what these women really want and how they perceive the situation. He thinks it is patronizing and wrong to decide for them what is best for them (Parekh, 1999).

The Debate Crystallizes: Okin's Reply

At the end of the book *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*, Okin responds to her critics. She recognizes two main lines of criticism and addresses three other issues raised in the responses (Okin, 1999b). Both of the criticisms she deals with refer to her definition of feminism. The first one is concerned that it is too narrowly oriented on women and gender inequality, rather than taking into account broader issues like human rights and socio-economic justice. The second refers to the 'intolerance' of her version of feminism; being hostile towards religion, and not appreciating things from the perspective of the Other. I believe Okin presents a rather narrow interpretation of the comments on her work (she does not discuss criticisms of her definition of multiculturalism for example).

The first section of her reply is entitled "*Recognition that the argument can and*

should be broadened". This title seems to imply that Okin agrees with this part of the criticism from her respondents. However, her interpretation of 'broadening the argument' differs from some of her respondents; prioritization is the key word here. Okin starts by saying that she does not accept the degree of gender equality reached in Western societies, as An-Naím claims she does, instead she believes that "liberal societies cannot reasonably expect minority cultures within them to surpass whatever level of equality between the sexes the majority culture has achieved" (Okin, 1999b, p. 119). One might wonder why Okin chooses to focus on 'other' cultures, instead of her 'own', but there is another question that is more important here: why does she separate the two (in this way)? Even though Okin claims that the current level of gender inequality in the West is not acceptable, but she does seem to be saying that liberal societies have progressed further down the road to equality and that minority cultures should follow 'the West' in this. According to some of Okin's respondents however, the situation is much more complex. Parekh for example tells us that most women might be better off with a dialogue in which different cultures can learn from each other, contrary to the one-way approach Okin proposes.

In the second part of her reply, Okin answers the criticism concerning the 'intolerance' of her version of feminism. This is one of the most difficult parts of this debate since it touches the relativism versus universalism opposition. In my view, none of the participants in the discussion truly believe that we cannot judge traditions of other cultures at all, and most of them condemn things like clitoridectomy. The differences arise when we ask more specific questions such as: how do we know or decide what is best for certain groups, like minority women? Okin is concerned about false consciousness. Especially when it comes to older women, who have been raised in very patriarchal cultures, she believes there is a good chance that they are not able to critically judge their lives.

The third issue Okin responds to in detail is the tension between freedom and autonomy in a liberal state, for instance regarding religion. Unfortunately she does not discuss the deeper criticism of using liberalism/liberal values as a basis for the discussion at all. At the beginning of her reply she points out that this debate can only take place because its participants live in liberal societies; so striking out at liberal values is not appropriate, according to her. I believe that participants in the debate didn't necessarily criticize these values, but rather how Okin used them as a starting point for this particular discussion. Okin finds Martha Nussbaum's comments more

important to respond to. Nussbaum discusses the tensions within liberalism when it comes to religious education. Should parents be free to send their children to a school where they are only taught one religion, or should all children be educated about all religions, as well as secularism, in order for them to make an autonomous choice about religion themselves? Okin believes in the last option, choosing (a certain interpretation of) autonomy over freedom.

The final point Okin discusses is Will Kymlicka's statement that multiculturalists and feminists should support each other since they fight similar struggles (Kymlicka, 1999). Even though Okin's response is very short, she mentions two rather important issues here. First of all she claims that a big difference between multiculturalism and feminism is that "the few special rights that women claim qua women do not give more powerful women the right to control less powerful women" (Okin, 1999b, p. 131). This rather provocative statement touches the heart of the debate. Not least because some Muslim women might say that this is exactly what Okin does with her essay, for example by saying that older women from patriarchal societies are not capable of critically judging their own lives. She gives herself the power to decide what is best for those women. Secondly, Okin ends her reply by saying that we need a multiculturalism that effectively treats all persons as each other's moral equals. She could have taken the criticism of her own work into account by also appealing for a similar kind of feminism.

The Debate Revisited

Several years after her famous essay was published, Okin wrote a new article on the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism. Evaluating the issue after an extended debate, she changed her argument considerably. In this article, *Multiculturalism and Feminism: No Simple Questions, No Simple Answers*, Okin responds to several important scholars who I have not yet mentioned.

Okin wrote *Multiculturalism and Feminism: No Simple Questions, No Simple Answers* in 2002 (for a conference), but it was only published in 2005, together with 15 other articles about conflicts within minority groups in a multicultural society (Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev, 2005). Three years after publishing the highly contested *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* and the lively debate that followed,

she believed it was time to "revisit the subject" (Okin, 2005, p. 69). Okin claims there has been some recognition of her argument that there is a tension or conflict between multiculturalism and feminism, but much disagreement about the precise nature of this and/or what we should do about it. In *Multiculturalism and Feminism: No Simple Questions, No Simple Answers* she mainly pays attention to the latter and aims to evaluate two different kinds of solutions. The first focuses on liberal values, the second on democratic processes. The inclusion of democratic processes in her analysis is new.

The specific question Okin wants to answer in the paper is:

> "If a liberal state is discussing or negotiating with an internal cultural group, collective rights that seem to reinforce the inequality of the sexes within the group, if the women (including the younger women) of the group have been consulted and adequately represented during the course of the negotiations, and if they have stated in large enough numbers and in clear enough terms that they support their group's illiberal norms and practices that seem oppressive of them, what should the state do?" (Okin, 2005, p. 86).

Democratic and liberal values clearly conflict in this case. Okin says that where democracy seems to require that:

> "the group rights claims not be hindered and, rather, strengthened, by such finding, (...) liberalism (...) would have no more need to consult with the women of such a group than it need consult with slaves before it insisted upon their emancipation or with workers before it insisted upon their protection from deadly workplace hazards" (Okin, 2005, p. 86).

Okin responds to this dilemma by making an interesting classification. She still favours the liberal response in the case of "patriarchal religions that can make no good claims of past oppression" (Okin, 2005, p. 87). However, she changes her original view in the case of cultures that have recently suffered or still suffer from the oppression of colonial powers or of the larger society (Okin, 2005). In such a case, she now believes, women have many reasons to identify with their culture or religion and should therefore be consulted. I find this division rather peculiar. First of all, Okin

does not give any reasons why women from cultures that are not oppressed cannot or should not identify with their culture, neither does she go into the reasons why they would not like or deserve the same democratic power as women in (more) oppressed minorities. One might wonder in fact whether or not all minority cultures are not, in a way, oppressed by the larger society just because they are a minority. This would mean that all minority groups actually fit in the second category Okin mentions.

At the end of her conclusion Okin describes a rather interesting tension between on the one hand the democratic demands we expect minorities to meet, and on the other hand the democratic reality of the host society (Okin, 2005). How could for example the US congress, which consists of mostly senior, white males tell the leaders of a minority group that they should include women and other less powerful people from the community in decision making processes. Even though Okin recognizes this would be an awkward situation, she believes there are reasons to defend such actions: first of all, contrary to the traditional leaders, the congress men are elected; secondly, since the minority group wants to enforce new laws that differ from the norms in the wider society, they might be expected to provide more evidence. According to Okin this situation shows the challenges the democratic solution of the multicultural dilemma has to deal with. I would like to argue that this kind of conflict is, rather, a consequence of Okin's one-sided 'evaluation' of minority cultures, whether from a liberal or a democratic perspective: in an open dialogue between cultural groups it would be possible to discuss the representation issue in both groups.

To whom Okin was Responding

Okin's reconsidered view is mainly based on the articles/chapters of two authors: Monique Deveaux and Marilyn Friedman. She describes the work of both authors in detail, which gives a clear insight into how they have influenced her. I would like to discuss the arguments of both authors in order to show the different positions in this part of the discussions on multiculturalism and gender equality. I call it 'a part of the discussion' because all three authors seem to agree on the problems (to an extent) and only disagree on finding the right solution to these problems.

Marylin Friedman applies her theory of 'liberal autonomy' to solve the tension between multiculturalism and feminism. Her main aim is to find "common ground"

between liberal values and the values of cultural minorities (Okin, 2005). This way she hopes to avoid a situation in which liberal values are imposed on non-liberal cultures. According to Friedman there is no necessary conflict between liberalism and multiculturalism. In fact, many multiculturalists rely on liberal values such as individual autonomy, while many liberal societies have historically denied liberal values of equality and autonomy to various groups (Friedman, 2003).

The key word in Friedman's work is autonomy (Friedman, 2003). Both liberals and multiculturalists use this concept in their arguments. According to Friedman, both liberal and nonliberal cultures defend social practices with arguments based on consent:

"A crucial source of common ground between liberals and defenders of nonliberal cultural practices is thus revealed by the argument that cultural practices that violate women's rights are nevertheless permissible if the women in question accept them" (Friedman, 2003, p. 188).

Friedman mentions two conditions that have to be met here in order to have confidence in the women's capability of making a good decision. First of all, they have to be able to choose "among a significant and morally acceptable array of alternatives" and be able to make their choices "relatively free of coercion, manipulation, and deception" (Friedman, 2003, p. 188). Secondly, women must have been able to "develop, earlier in life, the capacities needed to reflect on their situations and make decisions about them" (Friedman, 2003, p. 188).

Even though Okin is attracted to Friedman's ideas, she also criticizes them (Okin, 2005). Two connected points are most relevant here. First of all, Okin says, Friedman's conditions are so stringent that it seems unlikely that many women (in any society) could meet them. The next problem is therefore: how to deal with those who do not meet these standards? According to Okin, Friedman's theory fails to be democratic when one tries to answer these questions. Women who cannot meet her high standards of autonomy appear to be excluded from decision-making processes.

Deveaux' theory is more democratically based. She argues that the best way to resolve tensions between:

"traditional cultural practices and liberal principles in socially plural, democratic states is to defend and strengthen deliberation and decision-making practices that reflect a radical principle of democratic legitimacy" (Deveaux, 2005, p. 340).

This means that female members of cultural groups should have:

"a direct say in these matters, through the expansion of sites of democratic contestation and the inclusion of women in formal decision-making processes" (Deveaux, 2005, p. 341).

According to Deveaux, such a democratic approach is a better way of dealing with cultural conflicts than the liberal one, because the latter lacks both legitimacy and the necessary grassroots structures for implementation. Furthermore the liberal approach does not give enough attention to the actual or *lived* forms of traditional practices (Deveaux, 2005). Her aim is therefore is to come up with a deliberative democratic approach which is less idealized and takes "interests and needs as its focus, rather than the normative and identity-based claims of cultural group members" (Deveaux, 2005, p. 343).

According to Deveaux there are three 'normative principles' political deliberation has to be bound by in order to be successful: non-domination, political equality and revisability (Deveaux, 2005). The first means that traditional leaders or any other political elite must not be able to silence others. The second goes a little bit further and states that there should be real opportunities for all citizens to participate in decision-making processes. This also means that participation should not be influenced by access to power and other resources. The final principle refers to the fact that it should be possible to revisit decisions when there are good grounds to do so. This principle has at least two advantages according to Deveaux; first of all it will probably make it easier to reach compromises, and secondly it acknowledges the fact that cultures and cultural traditions change over time.

Okin is largely sympathetic to most of Deveaux's arguments, which she shows by incorporating many of them in her own work. Her comments are therefore mostly practical: how to make sure that all three principles are met (Okin, 2005). Furthermore, she warns of certain problems or tensions this democratic approach has

to deal with: the situation of the US congress mentioned in the former section is one of these. However, none of Okin's comments truly contests the idea of using deliberative democracy as a solution to the dilemmas between multiculturalism and gender equality.

Some Remarks on the 'Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women?' Debate

The 'second debate' that followed Okin's reconsideration of her views on multiculturalism and gender equality was not only more nuanced, but also more specifically about the solutions (to already assumed tensions) and their connections to liberal and democratic values. However, in my view, the debate about multiculturalism and feminism, as initiated by Susan Moller Okin, is still limited and relies on very particular interpretations of the key concepts in this debate, mainly multiculturalism and feminism. In the following chapters, I will expand the discussion and reinvestigate both multiculturalism and feminist theories of difference. From there, I will broaden the perspective once more, by critically evaluating other important concepts in the debate, such as subjectivity and experience. But before moving on to these further theoretical debates on multiculturalism and feminism, I will change focus to the Netherlands.

This thesis aims to rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, by analysing different discourses on this subject. My empirical work is conducted in the Netherlands and should be placed in the specific Dutch context. For that reason, this chapter not only describes the debate about multiculturalism and feminism as initiated by Susan Moller Okin, but also introduces the public discourse in the Netherlands on this issue.

Feminism versus Multiculturalism?

A year after Okin published '*Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?*', the Dutch sociologist Sawitri Saharso opposed Okin's statements in an essay called *Feminisme versus Multiculturalisme?* (Feminism versus Multiculturalism?). This booklet is part of a series about politics, economy and culture in a multicultural society, published by

the Dutch organization FORUM (Instituut voor Multiculturele Ontwikkeling), which is an institute for multicultural development. Several opinion leaders in the Netherlands have written for this series.

Saharso claims that multiculturalism and feminism might not always be easily compatible, but that they are certainly not incompatible either (Saharso, 2000). They can be friends, she says, even though it is a friendship that needs to be worked on. According to Saharso there are two rather remarkable things about the (Dutch) debates on multiculturalism. First of all, very often, Dutch culture is set against 'the' cultures of foreigners. Secondly, most of the discussions on tolerance refer to gender relations. Saharso argues that in order to draw a line regarding tolerance towards others cultures, the defenders of Dutch culture often use 'women's issues'. She believes that cultures are too often described or seen as homogeneous groups. The reality however, is more complex: the majority is not as liberal and free as we think and the minority not as traditional. In both groups there are different voices. She cites a research project in Rotterdam that shows that there is no clear-cut conflict between cultures. Discussing themes like abortion and headscarves with younger people from several cultures, the differences *within* those groups appeared to be much larger than those *between* them (Saharso, 2000).

This does not mean however that Okin talks about a non-existing problem, Saharso argues. For example, there is a group of Turkish and Moroccan younger people that is against free choice of partners, furthermore, almost half of the autochtonous[3] Dutch population believes that 'foreigners' shouldn't be allowed to practice their culture and religion in the public sphere (Saharso, 2000). Therefore Saharso proposes a solution that acknowledges the differences, but does not reduce these to a 'clash of civilizations'. Saharso claims that most discussions are not about conflicts between

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[3] Saharso uses this term 'autochtonous' here. It literally means people originally 'from here'. I would like to note though that this term is usually used to refer to white Dutch people and hence has an implicit racial aspect. Wekker and Lutz argue that these terms are not only problematic because of these different meanings, but also note that the categories 'allochtonous' and 'autochtonous' are social constructions that define who is part of the nation and who is not, based on the construction of ethnic/racial differences. For more information on the use and connotations of these terms, see for instance: Wekker, G. and H. Lutz. 2001. 'Een hoogvlakte met koude winden. De geschiedenis van het gender- en etniciteitsdenken in Nederland'. in: M. Botman, N. Jouwe and G. Wekker (ed.). *Caleidoscopische Visies. De zwarte, migranten- en vluchtelingenvrouwenbeweging in Nederland.* Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen. pp. 27-28

traditional and liberal values; indeed very often they deal with tensions within the liberal ideology (e.g. autonomy and non-discrimination or equality). Opinion leaders can say that 'our liberal values are non- negotiable', but in reality they do not give us a clear-cut answer, she says. Saharso therefore believes that dialogue is the only option we have in solving the problems that arise in a multicultural society. This means reinterpretation of both majority and minority cultures and discussion about how to deal with conflicting values.

Saharso's essay was not just an answer to Susan Moller Okin; it also forms part of a broader debate in the Netherlands about multiculturalism. A rather provocative article written by the right-wing liberal Frits Bolkestein is generally seen as 'the start' of this discussion (Prins, 2002; Ghorashi, 2003).

Beyond Innocence: Neo-Realism in the Dutch Discourse on Multiculturalism

I would like to focus briefly here on the style of this debate. In *Voorbij de Onschuld* (Beyond Innocence) Baukje Prins argues that the harsh discussions about multiculturalism and Islam in the Netherlands show that since the 90s a new public discourse has arisen (Prins, 2004). According to Prins, this 'neo-realist' genre can be recognized by four main characteristics (Prins, 2002). First of all, authors or speakers in this discourse present themselves as persons 'who dare to face the facts' and openly discuss what is *really* happening. While they bravely choose to tell the truth, idealists only talk about what they *want to* happen. Secondly, neo-realists believe themselves to be representing 'normal people'; they say that, contrary to other politicians, they do not ignore the complaints and opinions of 'The Dutch'. Neo-realists claim we should listen to those people living in poor neighbourhoods in big cities, since they truly experience the problems with the multicultural society and are not "blinded by politically correct thinking" (Prins, 2002, p 6). A third characteristic of the genre is the belief that having 'a sense of reality' is an important part of the Dutch national identity. Being Dutch means you are open, straightforward and realistic. Finally, neo-realists can be recognized in their aversion for the political left. Authors in the genre regularly argue that it is time to end the power of left-wing elites that try to obscure the problems with migrants and Islam. With their politically correct and relativist ideas about cultures left-wing elites are supposed to have censured all discussions of

multiculturalism.

An essential element of the neo-realist discourse is the importance of emancipation in these debates. Even though none of the neo-realists seem to have shown any interest in feminism or women's rights before, they now use gender relations to define their own identity as opposite to the 'Other'. Prins shows that this strategy is older than we might expect; indeed it dates back to the nineteenth century (Prins, 2004). Europeans defended their dominant position in the colonies by referring to the dependence of 'indigenous' women as proof of the backwardness of the 'other' culture. It is interesting to mention here that European feminists also used this argument to defend their struggles for emancipation (see e.g. Burton, 1994; Grever and Waaldijk, 1998). This 'white (wo)man's burden' seems to have moved away from the colonies and to Western nations, but the reasoning of the neo-realists is very similar to the colonialists' arguments in the nineteenth century.

Besides the emancipation of women, gender in general is a very important element in the neo-realist debates. Not only are most of the discussions on issues that directly involve the lives and bodies of women, many arguments used also refer to gender relations. Prins states that most neo-realists aim their statements at male migrants; they have to change and live their lives according to Dutch norms and values. Women on the other hand are not talked *to* but *about*. They are presented as victims of their culture and / or religion. Neo-realists often claim to rescue or save these women from their traditional lives and conservative men. This way, male migrants are presented as troublemakers and female migrants as people in trouble (Prins, 2004).

Neo-realism in Practice: Beginning to Challenge Multiculturalism

Despite the long history of immigration, which was closely linked to colonisation, most accounts of Dutch migration history start with the arrival of the so called 'guest workers' in the 1950s (Ghorashi, 2003). These people, mostly from Turkey and Morocco, were seen as temporary migrants who came to the Netherlands to work for a few years. When the government realized that most of these people would not go back to their country of birth, integration policies became an issue. However, this was not until the 1980s, when many migrants had already lived in the country for several decades. In these years, policy was mostly based on the idea that migrants should

integrate into Dutch society, while maintaining their own identities: 'integratie met behoud van eigen identiteit' (Ghorashi, 2003). The beginning of the 'neo-realist' discourse can be connected to the first statements against this approach towards migrants and other cultures (Prins, 2002).

As mentioned before, the article written by Frits Bolkestein is generally considered to be the start of a long range of debates about minorities in the Netherlands. Even though many already believed that more attention should be given to the integration of migrants, the words of Bolkestein shocked the country (Prins, 2002). His main thesis in *Integratie van minderheden moet met lef worden aangepakt* ('Integretation of minorities should be handled with guts') is that multiculturalism should be limited (Bolkestein, 1991). Western principles like freedom and equality are to be protected by all means, in his view. Furthermore, he argues that more attention should be paid to the integration of minorities: because it is such a difficult problem, we have to deal with it with courage and creativity. There is no room for taboos or easy way outs (Bolkestein, 1991, p. 188). According to Prins, Bolkestein didn't criticize the goal of the Dutch government (emancipation of immigrants), but their approach. He argued that the current isolation of migrants in the Netherlands was caused by overprotection (Prins, 2002).

Bolkestein's article probably received so much attention because it touched on issues that used to belong to the extreme right or the Centre Democratic Party (CD) in the Netherlands (Ghorashi, 2003). He wanted to 'leave politically correct thinking behind' and proposed an approach of complete integration of migrants. These ideas strongly resembled those of the CD, but Bolkestein presented them more carefully and reached a lot more people. Another possible reason for the popularity of his argument is that he challenged the previously dominant "toleration of differences" discourse by arguing that Islamic and Western values are incompatible and that Islamic migrants could endanger Western achievements, (Ghorashi, 2003).

A New Phase: Multiculturalism, both Drama and Illusion

A second article that deeply influenced the Dutch debates on multiculturalism, migrants and Islam was written almost ten years after Bolkestein's. In 1999, the director of the Dutch Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (SCP; an independent scientific

institute that conducts research and advises the government) published an essay called *De Multiculturele Illusie* (The Multicultural Illusion). Schnabel's article is mainly based on the results of an SCP research project and his main theses are that the Netherlands are not multicultural and cannot, will not and should not be so (Schnabel, 1999). 'Multiculturality' (Multiculturaliteit) is neither a realistic nor a desirable option, he says (Schnabel, 1999, p. 8). His claims are rather ambiguous, since he both tries to argue that any development towards a 'mixed culture' is undesirable, but also believes that it is not likely to happen for several reasons (Gowricharn, 1999). He starts from the same thesis as Bolkestein (Western and Islamic values are incompatible) but he takes his argument a bit further.

De Multiculturele Illusie not only describes what Schnabel considers to be the proper approach to the integration of migrants into Dutch society, but also aims to start a normative discussion on the value of different cultures. Schnabel describes Dutch or Western culture as modern, secular, individualized and accommodating when it comes to giving space to minorities (Schnabel, 1999, p. 10). "New-comers" on the other hand are not always positive about Dutch culture (Schnabel, 1999, p. 10), nor is their culture as accommodating (Schnabel, 1999, p. 10) as the Dutch. Finally, Schnabel believes that the cultures that migrants bring to the Netherlands have probably no meaning or importance to others (outside their own cultural group), except when it comes to music or food (Schnabel, 1999, p. 11).

According to Schnabel, the solution to these issues lies in a political/cultural system with three layers. The first layer consists of the general public culture; basic political and cultural values in this area are not negotiable. This layer should therefore be monocultural, according to Schnabel. The second layer occupies school, work and other forms of participation in society. This section can be multicultural in a strictly limited way: people can choose the school they send their children to, but not whether they send their children to school or not. The last area is more private and deals with issues such as relationships, sexuality, music, clothing etc. This layer can be multicultural as long as choices do not influence the functioning of the first or second layer (Schnabel, 1999). Briefly summarized, this means that (except for a few exceptions in the second layer) people can only live according to their cultural values in the private sphere. As will become clear in the next chapter, such an approach, in which minority cultures are not recognised in society, can deeply influence the lives and self-image of individual members of these groups. Furthermore, it would far from

solve Okin's points about gender equality, since people can still hold on to certain patriarchal values, albeit in the private sphere.

Shortly after Paul Schnabel published *Multiculturele Illusie,* a more left-wing oriented journalist and commentator wrote another much-talked-about article, called *Het Multiculturele Drama* (The Multicultural Drama). Paul Scheffer approaches the 'multicultural problems' differently from the two right-wing liberal authors that I mentioned before. His main concern lies with the mostly left-wing elite who seem to ignore the growing socio-economic gap between the born-Dutch and immigrants (Prins, 2002). During the twentieth century the Netherlands have done a lot to end social inequality, which makes it very difficult to understand that no one seems to be concerned about the 'ethnic lower class' (*etnische onderklasse*) that is coming up, Scheffer says (Scheffer, 2000). Unemployment, poverty, dropping out of school and crime are huge problems among minority groups in the Netherlands and will be a growing burden on Dutch society, he argues further. He continues his analysis by asking how it is possible that it has come to this, and how we could change the situation. In this part of the article his ideas come closest to those of the previous authors.

Scheffer argues that the Dutch system of pillarization[4] cannot help the emancipation and integration of migrants. There are too many differences, he says (Scheffer, 2000). Many people in the Netherlands expected that integration would just be a matter of time, but the opposite is happening according to Scheffer: "We are now living with the third generation of migrants and the problems keep growing" (Scheffer, 2000). Another problem that Scheffer mentions is the lack of national identity in the Netherlands, which makes integration for migrants even more difficult:

> "We don't say anything about our borders, we do not treasure our past and use our language without care. (...) A society that disavows itself has nothing to offer to migrants. (...) And someone who does not know what is being taken, has got nothing to give" (Scheffer, 2000).

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[4] Briefly summarized this means that the political and social spheres were organized through vertical pillars (Peters, 2006). The different pillars (Catholic, Calvinist, Socialist, and Liberal) were clearly divided and identifiable segments: there were Catholic, Protestant and Public schools, Protestant, Catholic, socialist and liberal broadcasting companies, sport clubs, newspapers and labour unions. See chapter 2 for a more elaborate description of the Dutch pillarization system.

Scheffer concludes by saying that 'we' need to rethink our integration and immigration policies, as the current ones enhance inequality and cause alienation.

According to Baukje Prins, Paul Scheffer's article is a perfect example of the neo-realist genre. Just like Bolkestein, Scheffer was praised for his brave analysis of the problems with Dutch multicultural society. Furthermore, he too focuses on national identity as a possible solution to these problems. Thirdly, Scheffer criticizes the left-wing elite for not dealing with the problems and being too nonchalant about it. Finally, he refers to the fact that the ideas and experiences of 'normal people' were often ignored. However, even though we can recognize all the characteristics of neo-realism in Scheffer's articles, there are differences too. For example, his main aim is the social-economic emancipation of immigrants; while others, such as Bolkestein and Schnabel are mostly concerned with cultural integration. Prins therefore argues that Scheffer's article can be described as more politically correct; he is a 'neo-realist with a social edge' (Prins, 2002).

A Feminist enters the Debate

Even though all of the above-mentioned authors referred to gender (in)equality as one of the problems with multiculturalism/Islam/minority cultures, none of them saw this as the main issue. In 2001 however, one of the Netherlands well known feminists spoke out. In an interview with a national newspaper on International Women's Day, Ciska Dresselhuys (at that time chief editor of the popular feminist magazine *Opzij*)[5] says that women who wear headscarves cannot work for her:

> "In a coffee shop I do not endure sexism, circumcision is a taboo for me and editors with a headscarf can not work for *Opzij*" (Dresselhuys, 2001).

Dresselhuys' words led to a serious discussion in the Netherlands, mainly because it was illegal for her, as an employer, to judge possible employees on their appearance,

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[5] See chapter 5 for a more detailed description of *Opzij* magazine and chief editor Cisca Dresselhuys

but also, because her claims pointed out an essential issue in current feminist thought: the relationship between religion and feminism.

Baukje Prins and Sawitri Saharso responded to Dresselhuys a week later, in the same newspaper. They argue that the editor of *Opzij* tells Muslim women to choose their own lifestyle, as long as it is the same as Dresselhuys' (Prins and Saharso, 2001). In the interview Dresselhuys claims that feminism is not culturally bounded, but according to Prins and Saharso she prooves exactly the opposite with her statements. Dresselhuys believes that the headscarf is a sign of women's oppression; any woman wearing one cannot therefore be a feminist. Even when women claim to wear the piece of clothing because of religious beliefs, they can't persuade Dresselhuys. She strongly believes that her view on the headscarf is the only right one (Prins and Saharso, 2001). Prins and Saharso argue that feminists should recognize the fact that there is an internal tension within feminism between the struggle for equality and autonomy. We should respect both concepts and when a conflict arises we should discuss it (Prins and Saharso, 2001).

From September 11, to Pim Fortuyn

After September 11 2001, Islam and Muslims become even more important subjects of discussion than before. The discourse on multiculturalism hardens, in the Netherlands as elsewhere. On September 29th, Sylvain Ephimenco published 'a letter to all Muslims in the Netherlands' in a national newspaper. The Dutch-French publicist asks Muslims to move away from their voluntary isolation (*zelfgekozen isolement*) and to stop acting like victims (Ephimenco, 2001). He fears that what is open to discussion now might not be so tomorrow: "I am afraid that as more incidents will happen, your willingness to listen to opposing voices will decrease" (Ephimenco, 2001, p. 12). He often refers to Muslims' so called sensitivity and pride. Ephimenco proceeds by saying that Muslims should recognize the fact that a group of fundamentalist Muslim fighters has arisen and that it can be difficult for outsiders to distinguish those from the "peaceful Muslims". Therefore, he wants Muslims to acknowledge this 'malicious tumour': "no one has ever gone better by denying the syndromes of its disease" (Ephimenco, 2001, p. 14). It is both surprising and dangerous, he says, that Muslims are "hardly introspective". He ends his 'letter' by

saying that he feels that having an open discussion about problems within Islam is often seen as xenophobic. He, however, believes that we are in a 'state of emergency' and that direct action is required (Ephimenco, 2001).

One of the most remarkable and influential happenings in the Netherlands after September 11, however, was the election of Pim Fortuyn for the right-wing populist party Leefbaar Nederland (LN: Liveable Netherlands). Fortuyn, an ex-Marxist sociologist, was mostly known for his columns in the news magazine *Elsevier,* where he discussed things like the welfare state, Islam, the European Union and immigration policies (Prins, 2002). Prins describes Fortuyn as the champion of neo-realism; his work has all the characteristics of it. Furthermore, she argues, he radicalized the genre in the Netherlands, which resulted in a more extreme form of it: hyper neo-realism (Prins, 2002).

Just like other neo-realists, Fortuyn claimed to understand the experiences of 'normal people'. And just like the others, his attitude towards these people was ambiguous: on the one hand he wanted them to be taken seriously because he believed that they knew what was going on, but on the other hand he also claimed that these people needed a strong leader, someone who could be both a father and a mother to them (Prins, 2002). Another element of neo-realism (the importance of national identity) comes across in his statements about the growing influence of the European Union, his 'warnings' against the 'Islamization' of the Dutch culture and his pleas against migrants (Prins, 2002). Thirdly, in much of Fortuyn's writing one can recognize his hatred of the 'progressive elite'. The book *De puinhopen van acht jaar paars* ('The ravages after eight years 'Paars' government') is a clear example of this. In this work he describes and analyzes the problems in the Netherlands and concludes they are a direct result of the liberal-social democratic government (Paars). Waiting lists for healthcare and safety issues are examples of 'the ravages' he describes (Fortuyn, 2002).

Fortuyn truly radicalized the neo-realist genre by constantly breaking taboos. This aspect of neo-realism was very important to his style. Fortuyn for example always told people that they could trust him because he 'said what he thought and did what he said' (Prins, 2002). In a famous interview he shocked the country by saying that the first section of the constitution (which forbids discrimination) ought to be deleted (Prins, 2002). This statement clearly crossed a line that had not been crossed before. While other neo-realists 'only' wrote about problems with Islam, migrants and

multiculturalism, Fortuyn also made 'equality' subject of the neo-realist struggle against political correctness. After this interview, in which he also said that the Netherlands are 'full' and that Islam is a backwards culture, Fortuyn was dismissed from the party LN (Prins, 2002). He founded a new party to participate in the elections, but on May 6th 2002, a little more than a week before the national elections, the right-wing politician was murdered after giving a radio interview. The perpetrator was an animal rights activist and the murder does not seem to have been directly motivated by Fortuyns' view on Islam.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Debating the Relationship between Gender Equality and Islam

 In November of 2004, the Netherlands was struck by another murder when the controversial film director Theo van Gogh was killed in the centre of Amsterdam. The film '*Submission*' which he had just made with the Dutch-Somalian politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali is generally seen as the direct reason for this political murder. A letter was left on the body of Van Gogh, announcing a Jihad in the Netherlands against enemies of Islam. It also mentioned that several Dutch politicians would be 'next on the list', Ayaan Hirsi Ali being one of them. These events made Hirsi Ali world famous, and by now she is well known for her critical views on Islam, especially concerning women's rights. I would like to discuss the work of Ayaan Hirsi Ali more extensively, because her work brings many of the characteristics of the neo-realist genre together in a rather interesting (and maybe unexpected) way. Furthermore, I believe she is one of the most important opinion leaders in the Netherlands on the subject of Islam and gender equality. These two aspects together make her work essential for an analysis of the debates on multiculturalism and feminism in the Netherlands.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali came to the Netherlands as a refugee in 1992. She studied political science at the University of Leiden, and soon after her studies started working for the study bureau of the Social Democrats (PvdA) (Bracke, 2004). In 2002, she left the PvdA, with lots of media attention, to become a Member of Parliament for the right-liberal party (VVD). According to Ali, the social democrats were only paying lip service to women's rights, particularly when it came to rights for women in immigrant and Muslim communities (Ali, 2002b). During this period Ayaan Hirsi Ali started to publish her ideas on Islam, women rights and multiculturalism in the Netherlands. In

May 2006, Ali reached world headlines again because of a scandal about her asylum. A Dutch television documentary showed that she had lied about her name, age and her escape to the Netherlands. The minister of Integration and Immigration soon announced that these lies made Ali's passport invalid. A month later, the minister changed her decision and said that Ali could keep her passport, because apparently she was allowed to use the name Ali according to Somalian law. A few days later the government collapsed because one of the coalition's parties withdrew its support following these events. Ayaan Hirsi Ali left the country anyhow, to start a new career in Washington.

An Alternative Voice?

At first sight Ayaan Hirsi Ali is not likely to fit within the framework of neo-realist debates that Prins describes (Prins, 2002; Prins, 2004). Most importantly this is because neo-realists are usually white men who claim to represent the lower classes by 'acknowledging' the problems of the Dutch multicultural society. Ali on the other hand, is a black, female refugee who criticizes the religion and culture she grew up in. However, if we do not look at the author, but at the texts she produces, we can clearly recognize elements of neo-realism in her arguments and statements.

   In a speech Ayaan Hirsi Ali gave in Berlin (*The right to offend*), immediately after the Danish 'Cartoon Affaire'[6], one can clearly recognize neo-realist elements. First of all she frames the discussion around the cartoons as a disagreement between cowards and people with 'guts'. According to Ali, the Prime Minister of Denmark acted correctly when he refused to meet with representatives of the 'Islamic regimes', and she wished her own prime minister had such guts (Ali, 2006). We should defend our freedom, and therefore defend "our right to offend", she claims. Others, who do not agree with this and do not want to be associated with the cartoons, are cowards in her opinion. In other words, different opinions on the affair are not accepted as a disagreement, but put down as a fearful response.

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[6] In September 2005, A Danish newspaper published 12 editorial cartoons, most of which depicted the prophet Muhammed. This led to a series of protests around the world, some of which ended in violence. For more information on the background and consequences see for example: Bolette Blaagaard. 2007. 'Gender or Discrimination. Rethinking the Cartoon Controversy'. *Historica*. 30, 2

The second element of Ali's speech that can be defined as neo-realist is the way she justifies her statement of 'the right to offend'. Baukje Prins called the first chapter of her dissertation, 'New Realism: I take them seriously, so I quarrel' (Prins, 1997). According to Prins neo-realists associate respect for the other party with manly, brave behaviour: having the nerves to break taboos. Freedom of speech is very important in this context. Very often neo-realists claim to have been silenced for years by left-wing elites that did not allow any critique of other cultures. Ali's mission to defend "the right to offend" is directly connected to this idea that 'we' need to defend freedom of speech and even the right to offend others. Whether these quarrels and offences hurt other people does not seem to matter.

Struggling on Behalf of Muslim Women

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is one of few authors in this debate for whom gender is actually a key issue. Her main argument is that Islam is a potential threat to the emancipation of (Muslim) women. For this reason liberal democracies should not accept possibly harmful traditions out of respect for other cultures or religions.

Ali usually talks about one specific group: Muslim women (or Moslima's, as they are often called in the Netherlands). When Ali talks about these women, she often refers to them as victims; they are women who need help and support. Forced marriages, circumcision and headscarves are signs of the backward position of women in Islam that Ali writes about. In 'Hoezo uiting van trots?' (What do you mean expression of pride?) she discusses the 'headscarves debate(s)'. According to Ali, wearing a headscarf can never be an expression of one's identity; on the contrary, she says, it is always a manifestation of submission to men (Ali, 2004b). She describes how Muslim women claim that they wear a scarf to show who they are, or to be able to go to work, but argues that women are fooling themselves with these reasons.

The 'headscarves article' is one of the many in which Ali claims that Muslim women suffer from such 'false consciousness'. In 'De Maagdenkooi' (The Caged Virgin), she argues that there are three categories of Muslims in the West (Ali, 2004a). First of all, there is a silent minority that is not very religious anymore and knows that Islam has no future, but does not really do anything about it. The second

group is described by Ali as 'hurt'; people in this group feel upset about the attacks on their religion and believe that the problems in their lives lie outside Islam. The last group consists of progressive Muslims who want change. According to Ali, relativists who tell them not to offend other people hinder this group. This categorization is mainly interesting because it shows Ali's views on Muslims: there is no category of Muslims who are voluntarily and consciously religious. For Ali, Muslims fight their religion, either actively or silently, or they are naïve, hurt people that still think that their problems have nothing to do with Islam.

Ali follows this categorization by arguing that she herself used to be in the silent group. She accepted the life she was living, and did not believe she could change anything. Now she knows she can, and she wants to show other women that they can too. Women who say that they believe in Allah and want to wear a headscarf just do not know any better, according to Ali. They have made oppression a part of their lives and have accepted it as such (Ali, 2004a). She compares this attitude with slaves who *chose* to stay in slavery when they had the choice of leaving. It seems from this remark that Ali does not see religious Muslim women as conscious subjects; if they believe in Allah and want to live their lives as Muslims, they only do so because they do not know any better.

Islam versus the West

Another important element of Ali's work that I would like to address here is the division she makes between the 'secular and Enlightened' West on one side and a 'backwards' Islam on the other. This 'us' versus 'them' thinking is an important element of neo-realism (Prins, 2004). Terms like secularism, progress, justice and freedom are associated with the West while things like gender inequality, religious fundamentalism, backwardness and abuse of power are connected to Islam and Islamic countries. Neo-realists are often afraid that Muslim migrants will bring these concepts *back* to the West. The word 'back' is important because it implies a linear development in history. Among others, Ayaan Hirsi Ali argues that Muslims should start looking at their religion more critically and work on issues that the West has *already* dealt with a long time ago.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali often claims that Islam and Muslims are *behind*. They need to catch up with the changes the West has gone through in the last few centuries, especially after the Enlightenment. This is the main theme of 'De Maagdenkooi' (The Caged Virgin). Questions Ali wants to answer are: "what stops Muslims from progression?", "why can they not catch up with the West?" and "why can they not just participate in Western societies?" (Ali, 2004a, p 8). According to Ali, the answer to these questions lies in Islamic sexual morality. This keeps men, women and children in a maagdenkooi (virgin cage). For this reason, Ali argues, Islam needs Enlightenment; the religion must change and adapt Western values like individualism and freedom.

Both men and women are victims of traditional values in Islam, but women are truly oppressed and need to be helped by the West, Ali claims. In 'Moslima's, eis je rechten op!' (Muslim women, stand up for your rights!), Ali explains why she is so critical of her former religion (Ali, 2002a). First of all, she wants to stop the inhumane treatment of women and girls in Islam. Secondly, she believes that without improvement of the position of women, Muslims will remain in a backwards position in society. Here we can recognise previously described arguments: Islam is backwards - most importantly because Muslim women are not being treated equally - and needs to change. In order to achieve this, Muslims should follow the course that the West has already taken.

In these debates about the division between the Enlightened West and backward Islam, Western culture remains invisible (Prins, 1997). Only the Other culture needs to change. This unmarked position of white culture or people is also referred to as 'whiteness'. White is seen as the norm and white people as 'raceless' (Frankenberg, 1993). According to Ruth Frankenberg, it is important to recognise that both white people and people of colour live racially structured lives, and that white people are 'raced', just as men are 'gendered'. In her articles, Ayaan Hirsi Ali clearly focuses on Islam and Islamic culture. White, or in this case Dutch, culture is considered normal, or the norm. Baukje Prins shows that this kind of analysis creates a hierarchy between a modern, civilised culture (which acknowledges 'universal' norms) and a traditional culture with particular traditions and values. This way, discussions about multicultural society are defined in terms of 'limits of tolerance': how far can we go in allowing minorities to hold on to their beliefs? Such thinking makes an equal intercultural dialogue difficult.

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Doomed to Vulnerability: Critique of the Dutch Debate on Multiculturalism

Three months after the murder of Theo van Gogh, the Dutch historian Geert Mak published a political/historical leaflet about the days after the death of the controversial publicist and filmmaker (Mak, 2005a). In this work he analyzes the reaction of politicians, opinion makers and journalists, but also reports on what happened on the streets. Comparing the situation with other historical periods, he argues that the Dutch intellectual and political elite responded to the situation with complete panic: fear and other emotions dominated the debates. For example, a few days after the murder the national news started with headlines like *"Nederland Brandt*!*"* (Holland is on fire!), and the vice prime minister even said that country was in a state of 'war' (Mak, 2005a).

Of course this was not reality. According to Mak most Dutch people were indeed shocked by what had happened, but it was mostly the political and journalistic world that was on fire. He argues that usually in such situations of crisis, the intellectual elites try to stabilize the situation. He used Spain as example, where (eight months earlier) terrorists had killed 200 people. The media there remained civilized when it came to Muslims and purposely did not blame Islam. In the Netherlands on the other hand, the murder of Van Gogh resulted in extreme xenophobia, stirred up by journalists and politicians, Mak says.

On television and in newspapers, the debates about the multicultural society radicalized: people asked whether this was just an isolated incident or whether there was something more structurally wrong (Mak, 2005a). Many politicians were convinced it was the latter: Holland had a problem with immigration, integration and Islam. According to Mak the murder brought three things together: extreme religious violence, a politically complicated publicist and a controversial film. Many politicians however, only discussed the first question and framed it as 'a problem with Islam'. Both the film and the ideological background of Van Gogh were kept out of the debates; sometimes it was even taboo to mention them. Furthermore, none of the debates about Islam responded to a 'real danger', Mak argues. There were hardly any practical discussions about how to deal with terrorism or fundamentalist Muslims (Mak, 2005a). The low budget of the security serviced or the poor cooperation

between the police and the security services were barely an issue. Fear was the only thing that seemed to matter: how many Muslims are possible terrorists and how can we catch them in an early stage, were the subjects of these days, according to Mak.

Foreign journalists could not believe what was happening. Many of them argued that Dutch papers published articles that could have never been published in Britain or the US, Mak says. A Danish newspaper warned of a scenario comparable to Kristall nacht in 1938; the Belgian prime minister spoke about an imminent civil war in the Netherlands; the army in the US labelled the country as "dangerous area", and the Russian government asked the Dutch government for clarification (Mak, 2005a). According to Mak the Dutch elite had lost their minds, and the inability of foreigners to understand what was going on shows how bad the situation was.

Conclusions

In 1999, Susan Moller Okin wrote the rather provocative article *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women*? According to Okin, there is a "considerable likelihood of conflict between feminism and group rights for minority cultures", even when the latter are based on liberal grounds. Her statements were (and still are) much debated, both in academia and in the popular media. Some authors agree with her, others think she was too harsh. Most criticism has been aimed at her limited definition of feminism, or referred to the cultural imperialism implied in her argument. Several years after she wrote the essay, which started the debate, Okin revisited the subject and significantly changed her argument. Instead of taking just liberal values into account, she now stated that democratic values are important as well. This second article has led to a considerably different discussion than the first. Where the original article mainly dealt with defining the possible problems and tensions, Okin is now mostly interested in finding the right solutions. Even though this practical approach might be useful, it has considerably narrowed the debate.

In the Netherlands, the subject is very often discussed within a larger frame of migration, Islam and integration issues. Baukje Prins describes the media discourse on multiculturalism as 'neo-realist'. Breaking taboos, representing the 'normal Dutch people', and criticizing 'the' left-wing elite are essential characteristics of this genre. The first article that could be described as neo-realist was written by the right-wing

liberal Frits Bolkestein, who argued that migrants ought to integrate into Dutch society. After Bolkestein, other opinion leaders discussed the integration of migrants as well and expanded the debate around the so-called incompatibility of 'Muslim' and 'Western' values. Ayaan Hirsi Ali could be seen as one of the last 'heroes' of this neo-realist discourse. Even though her background makes her very different from all the other neo-realists, her work includes almost all of its significant elements.

Much of the critique of Okin has been related to her interpretations of feminism and multiculturalism, furthermore the lack of attention to the experiences and opinions of the women she writes about has also been attacked. In the following chapters, I will theorise the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism further, by critically evaluating the key concepts in this debate. This will both make it possible to broaden the debate as started by Okin, but will also give more insights into the specific framing of the public discussions in the Netherlands.

Chapter 2   Conceptualising Multiculturalism, Culture, Religion and the Acknowledgement of Difference

Introduction

> "Most cultures are suffused with practices and ideologies concerning gender. (…) Suppose (…) that there are fairly clear disparities in power between the sexes, such that the more powerful, male members are those who are generally in a position to determine and articulate the group's beliefs, practices and interests. Under such conditions, group rights are potentially, and in many cases actually, antifeminist. They substantially limit the capacities of women and girls of that culture to live with human dignity equal to that of men and boys, and to live as freely chosen lives as they can" (Okin, 1999a, p 12).

Susan Moller Okin argues that everyone who endorses equality between men and women should at least be sceptical about special group rights for minority cultures (in Western liberal societies). Unless (young) women are fully represented in the negotiations about these rights, "their interests may be harmed rather than promoted by the granting of such rights" (Okin, 1999a, p 24). Susan Moller Okin is not the only one who believes that special rights for minority cultures specifically, and multiculturalism in general, might be harmful to women. The Dutch-Somalian Ayaan Hirsi Ali, for instance, follows a similar argument in her work, though she focuses on Islam specifically. As described in the previous chapter, she claims that Muslim women are caught in a virgin cage, mostly because of Islamic sexual morality (Ali, 2004a, p 9). Granting Muslims special rights would only make things worse for Muslim women, Ali argues.

Both authors point out serious issues related to culture and/or religion. Practices such as circumcision or forced marriage are problematical, especially in relation to (the struggle for) gender equality. However, there is also a growing group of women who believe that culture and religion are important parts of people's lives, and should not be rejected as a whole because of these problems. Furthermore, some women argue that gender alone is not enough to explain women's oppression, and that ethnicity, sexuality and class are also important factors in this. In this chapter I will

explore the concept of multiculturalism. What is multiculturalism? How has it been conceptualised? And what is its connection to cultural and religious differences? These are the main questions that will structure this chapter. The chapter begins with a basic description of the main characteristics of multiculturalism and finally outlines the complexities and practical issues connected to the concept. The main aim of this chapter is to provide more clarity and create a more thorough understanding of this concept in order to broaden our perspective on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

Conceptualising Multiculturalism

In general the term multiculturalism is used to describe the ideology that values the existence of different cultures in a certain society and aims to protect these by, for instance, proposing laws to safeguard their languages or traditions. However, multiculturalism is defined in various ways, and can refer to various interpretations, depending on context, time or place. In the next section I shall outline different forms and the important issues related to this concept, but first I will present a number of general points we need to take into account when we theorize multiculturalism. First of all, it is important to recognise the difference between multicultural societies and multiculturalism (Parekh, 2006, p 6). The first term is descriptive and refers to societies that include two or more cultural communities. The second term is normative and refers to the response to the existence of different communities by welcoming the different cultures and making them part of society. In this sense, both France and Britain can be called multicultural, but whether they are also 'multiculturalist' is open to discussion. Hence, multiculturalism is about the ideological reaction to the empirical situation.

David Goldberg describes multiculturalism as a response to monocultural politics and policies: "Broadly conceived, multiculturalism is critical of and resistant to the necessarily reductive imperatives of monocultural assimilation" (Goldberg, 1994, p 7). Therefore, he argues, we first have to look at the history of monoculturalism, if we want to get a better understanding of current forms of multiculturalism (Goldberg, 1994, p 11). Focusing on the history of universities in the United States, he describes how in the nineteenth century a discourse of universality arose. Combined with an

immigration policy that aimed to "Keep America White", this led to a monocultural ideal that became institutional practice: "it was virtually impossible without extreme marginalization to think and do other than in and through its terms", Goldberg (1994, p 4) argues. Multicultural policies should be seen as a counter force to these monocultural developments.

Finally, I would like to emphasise the importance of recognising the different forms of (dealing with) cultural pluralism. How a society deals with minority groups (who demand recognition of their identity and accommodation of cultural differences) is the 'multicultural challenge', according to Will Kymlicka (Kymlicka, 1995, p 10). A society is multicultural, he argues, if:

"its members either belong to different nations (a multination state), or have emigrated from different nations (a poly-ethnic state), and if this fact is an important aspect of personal identity and political life" (Kymlicka, 1995, p 18).

Hence, depending on the history of the 'host' country, and the demands and wishes of minority groups, societies respond very differently to the 'multicultural challenge'.

Multiculturalism: the Politics of Recognition

Before I elaborate further on the different interpretations of multiculturalism, I want to put forward another important characteristic of multiculturalism: the politics of recognition. This concept has become so important for multiculturalism that it is often confused with it. In the introduction to the previous section, I mentioned that multiculturalism is generally described as an ideology that aims to protect various cultures in one society. According to Charles Taylor, the demand for recognition is the basis for multicultural politics. Recognition, he argues further, is essential to the happiness of human beings.

The assumption behind this argument is that identity and recognition are closely connected and that:

"our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, (...) and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or

society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves" (Taylor, 1994, p 75).

According to Taylor, recognition is not just about respecting others; a courtesy we owe people. Mis-recognition can cause deep wounds and self-hatred. For this reason, Taylor says, recognition is a vital human need. Furthermore, it is seen as an "appropriate mode" for a healthy democratic society, e.g. because withholding recognition can be interpreted as a form of oppression (Taylor, 1994, p 81).

According to Taylor, two principles are at the basis of the politics of recognition (Taylor, 1994, p 82). Firstly, the 'equal dignity of all citizens'. There are enormous differences in the interpretation of this idea of universal equality: in some cases it only includes civil and voting rights; in others also socio-economic ones. However, in general, the principle of equal citizenship has been largely accepted throughout the West, Taylor argues. The second principle connected to recognition has to do with politics of difference: we have to recognise the unique identity of every single group. These two principles could sometimes come into conflict:

> "Where the politics of universal dignity fought for forms of non-discrimination that were quite 'blind' to the ways in which citizens differ, the politics of difference often redefines non-discrimination as requiring that we make distinctions on the basis of differential treatment" (Taylor, 1994, p 83).

Thus, contrary to the first premise; the second argues that respecting equality might sometimes involve treating people differently.

The challenge of multiculturalism, according to Taylor, is to deal with the marginalization of minorities without giving up the basic political principles of the majority. How do we want to approach others? And, on what grounds? According to Taylor we need to open up to comparative cultural studies of the kind "that displace our horizons in the resulting fusions" (Taylor, 1994, p 102). With this he means that the majority should be open to being influenced by other cultures, when appropriate.

Different Forms of Multiculturalism

In the previous section I have touched upon various important aspects of multiculturalism. Yet a clear description of the term is not given. This section will provide more clarity on the possible meanings of the concept in different contexts. I believe that because multiculturalism refers to such a multilayered and complex term, it is important to distinguish its different forms and manifestations. Only when we recognise the various interpretations of multiculturalism can we start a debate about the value or importance of this concept.

Peter McLaren recognises four types of multiculturalism: conservative, liberal, left-liberal and critical multiculturalism (McLaren, 1994, p 47). This specific categorisation is useful for this chapter, for it emphasises the role of sameness and difference in the various forms of multiculturalism. These concepts are also highly important for this thesis because they are closely related to discussions about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. Later in this chapter I will return to the (history of) the relationship between difference and sameness in relation to equality, but first I want to elaborate on the different interpretations of multiculturalism, starting from the categorisation of McLaren.

Conservative multiculturalists deal with the integration of minorities by putting forward a common culture to which all groups can be added on. This approach, which is mainly associated with the work of Charles Taylor, is highly criticised by McLaren. He believes that for conservative multiculturalists, minority groups are nothing more than 'add-ons' to the dominant culture:

> "before you can be 'added on' to the dominant United States culture you must first adopt a consensual view of culture and learn to accept the essentially Euro-American patriarchal norms of the 'host' country" (McLaren, 1994, p 47-51).

However, if we want to understand the logic behind this interpretation of multiculturalism, we have to develop a better understanding of it and clearly define its starting points. The main argument of conservative multiculturalists such as Charles Taylor is that societies should develop one overlapping culture, based on the norms and values that the groups in such a society share (Taylor, 1988). Thus, instead of

allowing for differences within a society, the focus in this approach lies on finding similarities. According to critics such as McLaren however, in practice conservative multiculturalism means that people from minority cultures have to assimilate to the dominant culture. This is first of all related to the fact that conservative multiculturalists usually do not recognise their own colour as an ethnicity and thus posit white as the invisible norm (McLaren, 1994).

The second form of multiculturalism that McLaren defines is liberal multiculturalism. The starting point for this interpretation is the belief that all cultures are equal. Supporters of this view argue that inequality between cultural communities is (mainly) caused by social and educational opportunities, not cultural difference. To achieve a higher level of equality; cultural, social and economic restraints should be modified. Thus, liberals believe that all cultures are equal. However, they often do not see the need to provide special rights for minorities, because in their view the autonomy of the individual is most important. Kymlicka, who is considered the most important representative of this position, argues that minority rights should be integrated as much as possible into the national culture (Vasta, 2006, p 7). Thus, a liberal state has no obligation to preserve cultures, unless this is necessary for integration and participation of individual minorities.

According to Ellie Vasta, the main problem with liberal/universalist multiculturalism is that it privileges majority cultures. Following Tempelman, she argues that even though there is room for negotiation in this position, in general liberal ideas are considered as sacred. Anyone who refuses to convert to these principles is condemned. McLaren agrees with this and mentions a related problem with the liberal approach to multiculturalism: it often results in ethnocentric and universalistic policies, based on the norms and values of Anglo-American political and cultural communities (McLaren, 1994, p 51). To sum up, liberal multiculturalism approaches all cultures as equal and believes that minorities should be protected. However, liberals prioritise individual autonomy over group interests. This means that special rights can be acknowledged, but only when they help individuals to participate in a national culture. Liberals are open to dialogue, but certain values (especially the autonomy of individuals) are non-negotiable. If we compare the liberal and conservative approaches, we can recognise both similarities and differences. The main differences are that (contrary to conservatives) liberals explicitly start from the

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equality of all cultures and that they treat people mainly as individuals, instead of as members of a group.

The third approach to multiculturalism that McLaren distinguishes is the 'left-liberal' approach. While 'liberals' strongly believe in equality of cultures in the sense of 'sameness', 'left-liberals' emphasise 'cultural difference'. Thus contrary to liberals, they believe that cultural differences are important and that people cannot be solely regarded as individuals. Furthermore, they start from the belief that differences between cultures are responsible for different behaviours, values, attitudes and social practices and are not receiving enough attention from other approaches (McLaren, 1994, p 51). The value of personal experience is central to this approach. The position assumes that people speak and think from certain perspectives and that cultural background is an essential factor in a person's standpoint. Thus, for example, women know how to deal with issues like abortion, and African-Americans have a better understanding of racism because they experience it themselves.

The problem with this left-liberal approach is that it starts from a rather essentialist view on culture and marginalized positions. Or, to use the words of McLaren; it exoticizes 'Otherness'. By essentialising cultural differences left-liberals ignore the historical and social or political 'situatedness' of these differences (McLaren, 1994, p 52). The assumption is that an oppressed person can (automatically) offer a special authority from which to speak. According to McLaren however, we should investigate how identity and experience are constantly being produced by "shifting and conflicting discursive and ideological relations, formations and articulations" (McLaren, 1994, p 52). In other words, we have to recognise the fact that these identities are not fixed, but changeable and that politics of location do not guarantee 'political correctness'. I will return to this issue in more detail in chapter 4.

According to McLaren, liberal and left-liberal multicultural approaches do not do enough to achieve social transformations. They either focus too much on cultural difference (and let go of the struggle for equality) or on equality (and neglect differences between people). Therefore, he proposes a more critical multiculturalism based on resistance (McLaren, 1994, p 53). The starting point for this position is the idea that representations of race, class or gender are the result of larger social struggles over signs and meanings. These signs are, McLaren argues:

"essentially unstable and shifting and can only be temporarily fixed, depending on how they are articulated within particular discursive and historical struggles" (McLaren, 1994, p 53).

Critical multiculturalism does not see diversity as an end goal, but argues that it should be affirmed within a commitment to social justice. Both difference and identity should be approached as products of history, culture, power and ideology and not from essentialist logic.

Bhikhu Parekh could be considered as one of the primary representatives of McLaren's critical multiculturalism (Vasta, 2006). The interesting thing about his work is that he argues for the recognition of cultural diversity in various areas of society (political, educational, legal etc), but at the same time defines cultures as dynamic and changeable. Dialogue and negotiation are central to his approach.

Equality: Sameness or Difference?

As became clear in the previous section, interpretations of (the boundaries of) sameness and difference in relation to equality are essential when we think about multiculturalism in general, and the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism specifically. Does equality mean that we all have the same rights, or should we all have the right to be different? And, if we have the right to be different, how do we transform differences between groups into a 'politics of difference'? Since the 1980s, feminist discourse has been considerably shaped by longstanding debates on the concepts of equality and difference: these discussions have opened feminism to new levels of analysis and reflection about the role and significance of feminism in our societies at large (Bock and James, 1992).

If we look at the history of the 'difference and equality debates' among feminists we can recognise two main positions (Bock and James, 1992). First of all, feminists have struggled for the right to be equal. Women fought for equal treatment and equal rights and wanted gender differences to be erased. Other feminists criticised this approach towards a 'gender-neutral society' and emphasised that women should not have to assimilate to a society in which values were based on male norms. Instead, they argued, there should be more room for 'female approaches'. Furthermore, some

feminists criticised the dichotomous relations between difference and equality in certain feminist analyses. One of the aspects of this critique is the idea that there are many differences; gender is only one of many other components that structure subjectivity (Violi, 1992). Hence, the debates about difference and equality were not only about the relationship between men and women, but also about sameness and difference between women.

These discussions about sameness and difference are also very important in the field of multiculturalism and essential to the debates about feminism and multiculturalism. In this section I will present four main arguments about difference and sameness, as described by some of the most influential theorists on multiculturalism: Bhikhu Parekh, Will Kymlicka, David Goldberg and Brian Barry. I selected these authors because they represent important positions in the debate. The first two are in favour of a 'politics of difference', while the last two criticise the concept.

Towards the Recognition of Difference

Bhikhu Parekh is a true advocate of the 'politics of difference'. He argues that people are culturally embedded:

> "they grow up and live within a culturally structured world, organise their lives and social relations in terms of its system of meaning and significance, and place considerable value on their cultural identity" (Parekh, 2006, p 336).

Parekh also mentions less individualistic arguments for the politics of difference. For instance, since there are many cultures with their own system of meaning, all of them are "inherently limited" (Parekh, 2006, p 337). This makes dialogues between cultures about their differences "mutually beneficial" (Parekh, 2006, p 337). Finally, he argues that cultures are internally plural. For this reason, dialogues can help them to define their own identities (Parekh, 2006, p 337).

If we think about equality, Parekh argues, we have to recognise that people are both similar and different: they share a common human identity, but in a culturally mediated way (Parekh, 2006, p 239). This means that if we treat people the same we

grant them "equality at the level of their shared human nature" (Parekh, 2006, p 240), but "deny it at the equally important cultural level" (Parekh, 2006, p 240). Equality for Parekh implies equal freedom and equal opportunities to be different. Thus, when the differences are irrelevant, people should be treated the same, but if the differences matter, they should be fully recognised (Parekh, 2006, p 240). However Parekh is not very clear on who can decide (and when) which differences are relevant and which are not.

According to Parekh, we can divide equality into three main elements; sensitivity to difference is important for all of them. The most basic one is respect. Respecting a person involves respecting the way he/she gives meaning to his/her life. This involves, Parekh argues, locating and contextualising a person's background and "interpreting his conduct in terms of its system of meaning" (Parekh, 2006, p 241). The second element Parekh describes is equal opportunity. To show how different treatment could be required in order to have equal opportunities Parekh uses the example of religious schools. "A Sikh is free to send his son to a school that bans turbans, but for all practical purposes it is closed to him" (Parekh, 2006, p 241). Hence, even though this restriction doesn't officially stop Sikh children from joining the school, in practice it does. Thus, in certain cases, general restrictions can influence the opportunities of particular groups. Finally, Parekh examines equality of power: equality before the law and equal protection of the law need to be interpreted in a culturally sensitive manner. As an example for this he mentions the relatively harsh punishment in Germany for people who deny the Holocaust. In this case, specific laws are developed in order to protect the Jews against anti-Semitism (Parekh, 2006, p 242).

Like Bhikhu Parekh, Will Kymlicka is also in favour of a politics of difference, but he looks at the issue from a liberal perspective. In *Multicultural Citizenship* he argues that many of the demands of cultural minorities are consistent with liberal principles such as individual freedom and social justice (Kymlicka 1995, p 193). Even though he understands that some liberals would prefer to focus on individual rights or the connection between all human beings, he does recognise the importance of 'politics of difference'. According to Kymlicka, we should be aware of the influence of national politics on the lives of individual members and how some people can feel disadvantaged or alienated because these politics do not take cultural differences into

account. Therefore, he believes that minorities should be granted special rights, without these, he argues: "talk of treating people as individuals is itself just a cover for ethnic and national injustice" (Kymlicka, 1995, p 194). In other words, we cannot strive for equality without taking differences into account.

Besides the importance of minority rights to minority groups, Kymlicka also mentions another reason why liberalism should take a stand on this issue. He argues that minorities will play a valuable role in the development of theories of justice and believes that liberalism must find answers to their questions if it wants to survive (Kymlicka, 1995, p 194). In the new democracies in Eastern Europe, Kymlicka argues, minority issues cause major political discussions. At the moment only xenophobic nationalists and religious extremists seem to come up with answers and solutions, while liberals and liberal theory "offers confused and contradictory advice on this question" (Kymlicka, 1995, p 194-5). Hence, according to Kymlicka, a liberal answer to the issue of minority rights is necessary and liberals should prioritise the development of such an answer. Even though this is a rather strategic argument for accommodating 'cultural difference', it does show how important the issue is (world-wide) according to this author.

Kymlicka tries to give some of the answers to the problems himself in *Multicultural Citizenship.* In order to overcome the tension between the rights of individuals and groups, he clearly describes which conditions minority rights should meet: "minority rights should not allow one group to dominate other groups; and they should not enable a group to oppress its own members". He argues further that liberals should "seek to ensure equality *between* groups, and freedom and equality *within* groups." (Kymlicka, 1995, p 194). Therefore, he concludes that we should not allow 'internal restrictions' (e.g. civil laws) as group rights, since their aim is to restrict the freedom of individuals within a group, but 'external protection' (e.g. language rights) is a group right that is compatible with liberal values (Kymlicka, 1999, p 32).

Critics of the Politics of Difference

Contrary to Parekh and Kymlicka, David Goldberg and Brian Berry both criticise the politics of difference. In *Culture and Equality,* Brian Barry discusses multiculturalism

from an egalitarian perspective (Barry, 2001). He argues that multiculturalism is not the answer to the problems of minorities, indeed it might make things worse: "the whole thrust of the 'politics of difference' (…) is that it seeks to withdraw from individual members of minority groups the protections that are normally offered by liberal states" (Barry, 2001, p 326). Furthermore, according to Barry, multiculturalism does nothing to change structures of unequal opportunities and outcomes, "it actually entrenches it by embroiling those in the lower reaches of the distribution in internecine warfare" (Barry, 2001, p 326). In other words, Barry has two problems with multiculturalism and its politics of difference; firstly they go against liberal values of equality and freedom of citizens and secondly, politics of difference do not help to overcome the socio-economic problems of minorities, which are, according to him, these groups' biggest problem.

The claim that liberalism is 'difference blind' is a virtue according to Brian Berry. Thus, contrary to Will Kymlicka he argues that liberalism and politics of difference do not match. Ethnic or cultural identities, according to Barry, do not:

> "give rise to valid claims for special treatment, because within a liberal state
> all groups are free to deploy their energies and resources in pursuit of
> culturally derived objectives on the same terms" (Barry, 2001, p 318).

Citizens in liberal states are in general free to live their lives the way they want; certain things are not allowed, but for good reasons, Barry argues. For instance, people have to wear helmets when they ride on a motorcycle to protect themselves, and changing this rule for certain cultural groups means that those groups will be less protected than others, with the permission of the state. Furthermore, in some cases special rights disadvantage certain groups *within* the minority (e.g. women, elderly, and gays) therefore, according to Barry, diversity politics *between* groups might endanger the diversity *within* groups (Barry, 2001, p 327).

Finally, Barry believes that multiculturalism will not really improve the lives of people of minority groups. Indeed, he says, it directs attention away from more important problems (Barry, 2001, p 321). Most integration problems are caused by socio-economic factors; focusing on culture might lead to misdiagnosis of the problems and even "destroy the conditions for putting together a coalition in favour of across-the-board equalisation of opportunities and resources" (Barry, 2001, p 325).

For example, when minorities focus on getting their 'own' schools publicly funded, they will weaken their position to negotiate more general issues such as redistribution of income or improvement of the quality of public schools (Barry, 2001, p 325).

David Goldberg criticises politics of difference on rather different grounds from Barry. He argues that even though identity and difference politics can help to emancipate certain groups in society, they can also be 'deathly exclusive', he says (Goldberg, 1994, p 13).

Thus, Goldberg recognises the value of identity and difference but also warns of the dangers. First of all, he argues that even though the politics of difference might have created more space for different identities, they are implicitly based on the standard of integration. Whiteness remains the norm, and the Other can often only integrate. A fusion of the various cultures is usually no option in this framework. Secondly, there is the danger of 'culturalism'. Political economy has almost entirely disappeared from analyses concerning multiculturalism. Attention for cultural identities is important, Goldberg argues, but it should not result in covering up political and economic factors in the marginalization of certain groups. Finally, Goldberg believes that the identity/difference approach has developed a very thorough critique of universalism, but fails to analyse "the relativistic implications of a non foundational and non-essentialising multicultural commitment" (Goldberg, 1994, p 15).

Taking these problems into account Goldberg proposes a different argument for multiculturalism, based on the principles of 'heterogeneity' and 'incorporation'. Generally, homogeneity is claimed to be necessary for every community: to keep the group together a set of homogenising values is required. However, Goldberg argues that homogeneity is not as naturally or socially important as is often claimed. On the contrary, "the social condition of the Homo sapiens is prevailingly migratory" (Goldberg, 1994, p 21). Goldberg goes further by saying that in order to establish a homogenous society, heterogeneity needs to be repressed. Furthermore, homogeneity assumes that communities are static. At a certain point in time it is decided that a group needs to be protected, without taking the heterogeneous and complex history of that group into account. This, according to Goldberg, results not in heterogeneity, but in homogeneity. In order to facilitate heterogeneity, we need hybrid interaction, Goldberg argues. This involves:

"dual transformations that take place in the dominant values and in those of the insurgent group as the latter insists on more complete incorporations into the body politic and the former grudgingly gives way. Incorporation determines the grounds of integration and marginalization for it empowers those once marginalized in relations to the dominant (…). It extends transformative power (…) not simply to appropriate cultural expressions of the Other into the canon while holding the Other at a nonthreatening distance. Rather, it seeks to undermine and alter from within the dominant" (Goldberg, 1994, p 9).

Hence, Goldberg proposes an approach which focuses on power relations, and aims to empower the marginalised by taking into account both cultural differences and socio-economic differences. This latter interpretation of multiculturalism connects closely to the resistance or critical multiculturalism that I discussed in the previous section. I would argue that this more complex approach towards multiculturalism would also make it possible to develop a nuanced vision on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. But the main aim of this chapter is not to reconceptualise multiculturalism. First the various dynamics, assumptions and concepts that are related to (the discourses about) multiculturalism need to be brought to the fore. This knowledge will then function as an important analytical tool in the chapters discussing my empirical research, upon which the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism is reconceptualised in the final chapter.

Defining Culture within Multiculturalism

In the previous sections, I have outlined the basis characteristics and interpretations of multiculturalism. Here, I would like to change the perspective and concentrate on the concepts of culture and religion and their relationship to multiculturalism. What is the place of culture and religion in multiculturalism and do we need the notion of culture in order to develop multicultural politics? In order to produce a nuanced perspective on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, these questions need to be answered.

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As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, multiculturalism is generally considered to be an approach that responds to the fact that people from various cultures live in one country. This response takes many different forms, and starts from different assumptions about the meaning of equality, cultural difference and the relation of individuals to a (cultural) group. In some of the interpretations I have described above, culture plays an essential role; in others it seems less important. Furthermore, some authors have a rather fixed and essentialist perspective on culture, while others consider it to be much more flexible and dynamic. But how can we talk about multiculturalism without having culture at the centre of these debates?

Gerd Bauman argues that multiculturalism is about redefining culture. Instead of approaching culture as something we have and are members of, we should see it as something we make and are shapers of (Bauman, 1999). He prefers a discursive and 'processual' approach to culture and a theory of culture that sees differences as relational, rather than absolute. Tariq Modood takes this approach further and argues that we should found multiculturalism on the basis of 'difference', rather than 'culture'. The accommodation and recognition of differences, rather than cultures has various advantages (Modood, 2007). First of all, it makes it possible to take into account that differences are not just constructed from the 'inside' of a minority group itself, but also from the 'outside', by the treatment and representation of this group. According to Modood, minority groups have been and are being treated and perceived as different. From that perspective it is important to note that people are collectively targeted and should hence respond as a collective as well. Or to put it differently, Modood replaces the concept of culture with difference and acknowledges that there are two forms of difference at play in multicultural societies: positive difference (the sense that groups have of themselves) and negative difference (stigmatization of or discrimination against groups). Hence, if we want to develop a productive interpretation of multiculturalism, we have to recognise that there is:

> "a sense of groupness at play, a mode of being, but also a subordination or marginality, a mode of oppression, and the two interact in creating an unequal 'us-them' relationship (Modood, 2007, p 37).

Anne Phillips also proposes an interpretation of 'multiculturalism without culture' (Phillips, 2007), but she takes a different approach from Modood. Where Modood

proposes to move the attention from culture to difference, Phillips aims to reclaim the concept of culture. So even though her book is called *Multiculturalism without Culture*, her approach is more about multiculturalism with a different view of culture:

> "There has been too speedy a move from a problematic multiculturalism to a transnational cosmopolitanism; I see the latter as inadequate, even with the additions that turn into a 'rooted', 'vernacular', or 'critical' cosmopolitanism. Culture matters, as part of the way we give meaning to our world, as an important element in self-ascribed identity, and as one of the mechanisms through which social hierarchies are sustained." (Phillips, 2007, p 15)

In short, Phillips argues that multiculturalism can still play an important role in the struggle for more equality, but has to develop a much more dynamic interpretation of culture, in order to prevent other injustices, such as gender inequality. This means that cultures are important for multicultural politics, but only because they influence the lives and experiences of individuals. Phillips wants to protect individuals, not group, and hence only gives attention to culture in relation to the experiences of individuals, rather than because her goal is to protect culture itself.

By explaining these authors' views on the relationship between multiculturalism and culture, I want to demonstrate that the straightforward definition of multiculturalism is difficult to uphold when we examine the broad range of scholarship on this issue. Not only are there many different forms of multiculturalism, but there are competing interpretations of culture at play, and more importantly, the relationship between culture and multiculturalism itself is rather contested. I would argue that a more critical perspective on culture and a broader focus (on difference, rather than culture alone) could provide more nuanced views on what multiculturalism is, and can do, and how it relates to feminism. In other words, by critically evaluating the notion of multiculturalism in this way, we develop a better understanding of the complexities of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

Defining Religion within Multiculturalism

The relationship between multiculturalism and religion is highly complex. First of all, the connection between religion and culture is difficult to define, and secondly, the debates about multiculturalism in Western Europe have almost completely transformed into discussions about Islam and Muslims. In the previous sections, I already described the multicultural approach of, for example, Tariq Modood, who founds his multiculturalism on the basis of difference, rather than culture. Such an interpretation of multiculturalism makes it possible to incorporate other axes of difference in addition to culture alone. This is very important, because as I have argued above, many public debates on multiculturalism are very often actually about religion or religious groups.

Two important issues connected to this are: (1) a transformation in the discourse about migrants: from guest workers to Muslims and (2) a (re)new(ed) definition of national identities, very much related to secularism.[7] If we analyse these developments from a Dutch perspective, we see that both emerged after the depillarization[8] process in the Netherlands and resulted in the fact that discussing cultural recognition and integration actually meant discussing Islam (Peters, 2006). The "Islamization of migrants" can be connected to many factors, for instance the rise of political Islam in Muslim countries, but also the growing visibility of Islam in Europe in general and in the Netherlands specifically (traditional clothing of Muslim women, mosques etc):

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[7] The following articles contain interesting analyses of the changing discourse in the Netherlands: R. Peters. 2006. ''A dangerous book': Dutch Public Intellectuals and the Koran'. RSCAS Working Paper No 2006/39. European University Institute. Also online available: http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/r.peters/bestanden/Dangerous%20book.pdf and M. Bruinessen. 2006. 'After van Gogh: Roots of Anti-Muslim Rage'. Paper Presented at the seventh Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence, Italy. Also online available: http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/ws10-2006MM-van-Bruinessen.pdf

[8] Until the 1960s, the Netherlands was a pillarized society. Briefly summarized this means that the political and social were both organized through vertical pillars (Peters, 2006). The different pillars (Catholic, Calvinist, Socialist, and Liberal) were clearly divided and identifiable segments: "there were Catholic, Protestant and Public schools, Protestant, Catholic, socialist and liberal broadcasting companies, sport clubs, newspapers and labour unions" (Prins, 1997, p 112). There was hardly any contact between people from the different pillars, only the political elites worked together. The idea behind this was that the differences between religious and ideological groups in the Netherlands could be respected without jeopardizing the political system (Lijphart, 1984).

"all these factors contributed not only to the sudden realization of the Dutch that their country now hosted a substantial number of Muslims, but also to the identification of these migrants in religious, rather than ethnic terms. As a result, their culture was also understood and defined as essentially Islamic" (Peters, 2006, p 3).

Peters also argues that the Islamization of migration made it possible to express xenophobia in a socially more acceptable way: criticism of the influence of religion. In this context, Dutch culture is often described as liberal, tolerant and secular and as under threat from a backward and intolerant (for instance towards women or gays) religion. Both of these developments suggest that an analysis of multiculturalism in the Netherlands should not only focus on cultural issues in general, but also (and maybe especially) on religion (specifically Islam).

According to Tariq Modood, the appropriate response to the challenges Western societies face due to the presence of and discrimination against Muslims, should be as follows:

"1. The extension of a politics of difference to include appropriate religious identities and organizations.
2. A reconceptualization of secularism from the concepts of neutrality and the strict public/private divide to a moderate and evolutionary secularism (…).
3. A pragmatic, case by case, negotiated approach to dealing with controversy and conflict (…)." (Modood, 2007, p 78-79)

Modood argues that the inclusion of the demands of religious groups might encounter specific problems; first of all the fact that these demands can be considered to be an attack on secularism. However, as Modood rightly demonstrates, secularism as a clear-cut ideology does not exist in practice; if we look at the application of secularism in different Western countries, we see a broad range of interpretations of this concept, especially when it comes to the public/private divide in relation to religion. According to Modood, if we let go of the strict version of secularism (according to which religion and faith should be kept outside of the public sphere) and think through a more pragmatic understanding (as it is already applied in many countries), we should be able to combine multicultural politics and secularism..

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Hence, according to Modood, the meaning of secularism in our societies should be rethought and theorized and needs to be taken into account when we think about multiculturalism.

I agree with Modood that if we want to develop an interpretation of multiculturalism which is not based on essentialist views of culture, but on difference, and hence incorporates religious differences, we need to rethink and theorize the concept of secularism. I will return to this discussion in the final chapter and rethink multiculturalism further in relation to the recent scholarship on secularism, and the 'postsecular turn'.

Beyond Multiculturalism

In the previous sections I have shown that different forms of multiculturalism start from different concepts of culture, difference and equality. I have also demonstrated that certain multiculturalist theorists developed interpretations of multiculturalism without culture. Starting multicultural politics from the concept of difference can give us the opportunity to pay more attention to other differences besides culture as well as to take into account the differences between groups. One of the axes of difference that has become increasingly important in recent years is religion, and hence the concept of secularism. I would like to take this a bit further and discuss how we can theorise beyond multiculturalism. Let me start by saying though that according to some multiculturalist thinkers, there has been "too speedy a move between a problematic multiculturalism and a transnational cosmopolitanism" (Phillips, 2007 p 15). Phillips argues that culture remains important in the struggle for justice; even if individuals do not have any interest in defining themselves culturally, they cannot escape the discrimination visited on 'their group'. It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to further describe the debates about cosmopolitanism and its different interpretations and views on achieving more equality. However I do want to defend one particular interpretation of (what is at least related to) cosmopolitan approaches that aim to move away from cultural differences. Paul Gilroy's concept of 'conviviality' stays close enough to the concept of multiculturalism to have an influence on this thesis' conception of this term and is at the same time distanced enough to supply various important critical notes.

With his concept of 'conviviality', Gilroy aims to begin, where, in his view, multiculturalism has broken down (Gilroy, 2004). He describes this concept as:

> "the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture and ordinary feature of social life in Britain's urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere" (Gilroy, 2004, p XI).

This way, he tries to move away from the term 'identity', which, he argues, "has proved to be such an ambiguous resource in the analysis of race, ethnicity and politics" (Gilroy, 2004, p XI). It might be argued that a focus on cohabitation is a rather limited perspective on how we want to deal with our multicultural societies. However, in a time in which the idea of the crash of civilizations seems to prevail, it can also shed new light on the issues at stake.

Starting from the idea of 'convivial culture' gives us the opportunity to develop a response to multiculturality at a local level; to start from below, instead of above and to take various differences and power relations into account. The key for Gilroy lies in the recognition that European culture is not the same as 'white culture'. We need to be able to see, he argues, how migrants and the dynamics of European history have together shaped cultural and political habits and institutions in Europe (Gilroy, 2004). Such a counter-history can, according to Gilroy, not only help to produce a new understanding of multicultural Europe, but also help to discover the emancipatory possibilities of convivial culture. Furthermore, we should make a thorough and critical analysis of racism in Europe and acknowledge its influence in our societies:

> "it was racism and not diversity that made their arrival into a problem" (Gilroy, 2004, p 166).

Even though Gilroy himself claims to move away from the concept of multiculturalism, I would argue that his views on 'conviviality' are an excellent inspiration in the development of a more dynamic, critical and at the same time applicable interpretation of multiculturalism. Its value to multiculturalist theory, I believe, lies first of all in its thinking from below (contrary to many multiculturalist theories that start from a governmental level). This makes it possible to recognise what multiculturality means on a daily basis; how people actually deal with

difference; what role migrants have in our societies, and how racism influences all of these. This combined approach of looking at daily interactions and making a critical analysis of racism, might also be an appropriate response to populist right wing politicians who claim their racist politics defend the people who live in multicultural neighbourhoods.

Conclusions

Susan Moller Okin argues that all cultures facilitate control over women in various ways and hence are a possible danger to gender equality. She concludes therefore that there is a tension between multiculturalism and feminism. Such a statement suggests a particular understanding of what multiculturalism and feminism are. In this chapter I have discussed several possible meanings and interpretations of multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism can generally be considered as a normative response to a multicultural society. This response can take many different forms and starts from various ideological backgrounds. Take for instance the conservative, liberal, left-liberal and critical forms of multiculturalism, as categorised by McLaren. These multiculturalisms all have different ideas of what culture is and how it determines people's lives and what equality means and how it should be achieved. Certain theoreticians argue for an equality based on sameness. They believe that all citizens are equal and should have the same rights and opportunities. Others emphasise the differences between people and defend a politics of difference in order to achieve equality, believing that sometimes people need to be treated differently to be equal.

After investigating these different forms of multiculturalism, I further analysed the connections between multiculturalism and other important concepts, such as culture, religion and secularism. It appeared that multiculturalism does not only take different forms that start from different interpretations of culture, but also exists without culture as its main starting point. Anne Phillips grounds her multiculturalism on the rights of individuals, while Tariq Modood proposes to start from the concept of difference rather than culture. Such theories of multiculturalism make it possible to develop more nuanced and dynamic understandings that include protecting the rights of minorities *within* minority groups. The work of Paul Gilroy, with his concept of 'conviviality', moves the attention of multiculturalists even further away from culture

and rights, and into daily interactions between people. I would argue that if we want to rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, these theories form the starting point. Multiculturalism is a fluid concept, defined in many different ways depending on the context of a debate and the perspective of the author. In the next chapter, the concept of feminism will be further analysed: what is feminism, what are the main aims of feminist struggles and how can we connect it to multiculturalism and the recognition of difference?

Chapter 3   Feminism and its Different Axes of Analysis: From Sexual Difference to Intersectionality

Introduction

"While virtually all of the world's cultures have distinctly patriarchal pasts, some – mostly, though by no means exclusively, Western liberal cultures – have departed far further from them than others. Western cultures, of course, still practice many forms of sex discrimination. (…) But women in more liberal cultures are, at the same time, legally guaranteed many of the same freedoms and opportunities as men. (…) This situation, as we have seen, is quite different from that of women in many of the world's other cultures, including of those from which immigrants to Europe and North America come." (Okin, 1999a, p 16-17)

Because most non-Western cultures are more patriarchal than Western ones, Okin argues, granting rights to minority groups will tend to harm the interests of women rather than promote them. In the previous chapter, I investigated the concept of multiculturalism and its possible interpretations; here I focus on feminism. If Okin argues that minority group rights might harm the interests of minority women, what then are these women's interests? And what is the interpretation of feminism that lies beneath this statement? In Okin's view, feminism refers to:

"the belief that women should not be disadvantaged by their sex, that they should be recognized as having human dignity equal to that of men, and that they should have the opportunity to live as fulfilling and as freely chosen lives as men can." (Okin, 1999a, p 10)

Like multiculturalism, the meaning of feminism is anything but easy to define. Feminism has meant, and still does mean, different things to different women throughout the world and over different periods of time. Generally, we could say that feminists give characteristic meaning to 'sexual difference'. Often, the different responses of feminists to sexual difference have been divided into three categories: 'equality', 'difference' and 'deconstructionist' perspectives (Buikema and Smelik, 1993). The 'equality approach' aims to end all social and cultural inequality between

men and women and to have equal rights for men and women. The 'difference approach' on the other hand, focuses on the differences between men and women. Feminists who think from this perspective do not want to make women equal to men by integrating them into a 'man's world', but aim to make more space for women and female approaches. Hence, their struggle for equality is not centred on sameness, but on difference. If we compare these approaches in the discipline of history, we see the first approach focuses on 'important women' who may not have received the attention they would have if they were male. Through this approach a historian demonstrates that women have also played important roles in history, as, for instance, politicians or revolutionaries, and works to integrate them in historical descriptions. Through the 'difference approach' however, a historian would focus on other areas of life and, for example, emphasize the importance of taking into account the private sphere in analyzing history. The final approach in this categorization system is deconstruction. This approach is related to poststructuralism and postmodernism and has two main starting points: that binary oppositions can be transcended and that the idea of the autonomous subject is an illusion (Buikema and Smelik, 1993). This approach would emphasise deconstructing the binary between men and women, and the meanings of the terms female and male.

Another way of categorizing different feminist approaches is by dividing them on the basis of the questions that are being asked. This also leads us to three categories. The first group can be recognized by its reference to empirical questions: why/how are women oppressed? Criticism of dichotomous constructions of social spheres, such as the public/private domains, is central to these analyses (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p 5). The second perspective focuses on the differences between women and men. Research on this theme has usually been referred to as the 'sex and gender debate'. Authors in this field deal with questions around the ontological basis of differences *between* men and women; are these determined socially, biologically or are they a combination of the two? Within the third category that Yuval-Davis describes, the differences *among* women and men are investigated. Black and ethnic minority women have indicated that mainstream (white) feminist research has been 'ethnocentric' and 'westocentric' and that for example race and ethnicity should be included in feminist analyses.

Neither of these categorizations is fixed and/or exclusive, nor should they be regarded as progressive. But they can be useful instruments in the analysis of feminist

issues. When we compare the above categorizations of feminism, we can recognize at least one important difference between feminist approaches: those which aim to emancipate women through fighting for equal rights and hence focus on sameness, and those who focus on the differences between men and women, and between women, and want more space for these differences. If we want to make meaningful statements about the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism, we have to theorize the connections between sexual difference and other axes of difference further, addressing questions such as how gender and ethnicity are related, and how we can undertake an analysis that takes gender and ethnicity into account simultaneously. We also need to ask, what is whiteness and how does it relate to debates about multiculturalism and feminism?

Feminism and Difference

The debates about 'difference' among feminists have a very different history from those among multiculturalists. Where the latter always wanted to reach equality through recognition of differences, mainstream feminists first of all dismissed the differences between men and women in their struggle for equality (Chanter, 1998, p 267-268). In the 1980s however, more and more feminists criticised this approach, and argued that:

> "by focusing on the fact that women can measure up to men, feminists conceded inadvertently that men's traditional roles are more valuable than women's traditional roles." (Chanter, 1998, p 268)

These writers claimed that women differ from men and consequently require different treatment. Here we can recognise the multiculturalist approach as described by for instance Bhikhu Parekh: sometimes treating people equally, means treating them differently. But, as I discussed above, this 'difference' approach does not only take into account the differences between men and women, but also between women. And these differences between women are particularly at stake when we think about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. If we want women to be equal in the way Okin argues, we have to consider the question: equal to whom? It is not

always clear what a society, which puts an end to domination and androcentrism, should look like (Bock and James, 1992).

Flax has defined gender as a:

> "historically variable and internally differentiated relation of domination. Gender connotes and reflects the persistence of asymmetric power relations rather than 'natural' (biological/anatomical) differences." (Flax, 1992, p 193)

This means that although there are power relations between men and women, there are no universally shared differences between men and women; these differences are always differentiated by factors such as class, sexuality, race, nationality and religion. Or as Flax puts it: "No 'women' exist who have experiences of oppression (or dominance) unmarked by race and class" (Flax, 1995, p 436). Therefore, if we want to develop a better understanding of the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism, we need to theorize the differences between women, and the complicated constitution of gender.

Revisiting Difference

In 1851, Sojourner Truth delivered the groundbreaking speech 'Ain't I a Woman?'. In this talk she argues that people make statements that are supposedly about women in general, but are in fact only about a specific group of (white, middle class) women:

> "That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place. And ain't I a woman?" (Truth, 1851)[9]

According to many women of colour, mainstream (universalist) explanations of gender inequality simply weren't adequate. Their lives and experiences, such as those

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[9] Truth, Sojourner, 'Ain't I a woman?', speech delivered at the Women's Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851. See for example: http://www.feminist.com/resources/artspeech/genwom/sojour.htm

described by Sojourner Truth, were not just determined by their sex or their skin colour, but by the connections between them. Sojourner truth was treated as a *black* woman.

In 1977, the Combahee River Collective from Boston published *A Black Feminist Statement* on this issue. Like Truth, the writers of this statement argue that different forms of oppression influence each other, and that the *synthesis* of sexism, classism and racism, is what creates the life circumstances of black women (Combahee River Collective, 1977, p 232). Because of this, black feminists often did not feel 'at home' in the traditional liberation movements. They realised that they needed to develop a politics that was "antiracist, unlike those of white women, and antisexist, unlike those of black and white men" (The Combahee River Collective, 1977, p 233).

The women of The Combahee River Collective first organised on the basis of their combined anti-racist and anti-sexist positions; later they also included heterosexism and economic oppression in their politics (The Combahee River Collective, 1977, p 234). Their most important point is that black women not only suffer from the sum of sexism and racism (and class oppression), but that these systems of oppression also influence each other. Furthermore, they explain why and how their political struggle differs from those of white women:

> "Our situation as black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race, which white women of course do not need to have this with white men (...). We struggle together with black men against racism, while we also struggle with black men about sexism." (The Combahee River Collective, 1977, p 235)

A Black Feminist Statement ends with another concern of the women involved: racism in the (white) women's movement. They describe how little is done by white feminists to understand and fight their own racism. Even though the Combahee River Collective believes that this change should come from those women themselves, they (the Combahee River Collective) will continue to demand accountability.

Since the 1970s, the term 'universal sisterhood' has become more and more problematised by feminists. The apparent common identity of women was revealed as being based on white, middle-class women's experiences (Ang, 2003, p 191). Maybe

all women suffered from sexism, but that does not mean that the sexism all women experience is the same. But what then does this mean for feminism and feminist solidarity? And are there other important factors to take into account besides class and race? If we want to understand how difference works in a European context, we have to take the specificity of European history into account. Critical race studies have done tremendously important work, but these need to be adapted to the specific European context in order to be useful in analysing European issues. This means we have to start taking into account the factors that have been important for the construction of European whiteness, for example the role of eugenics and anti-Semitism.

Griffin and Braidotti describe how, with the rise of European colonial empires, a 'science' developed that tried to justify the subjugation of other 'races' by 'proving' their inferiority. The concept of 'biological inferiority' was not only used to describe other racial groups, but also women or people from the lower classes. With the help of Eugenics a complex hierarchy of races was developed, with Aryans as the most superior. However, Griffin and Braidotti also claim that in order to get a better understanding of European racism and whiteness, it is important to go beyond the black-white (or race) dynamic. Or, to put it bluntly: biological racism alone does not explain why gypsies, communists, homosexuals and Jews were sent to the gas chambers (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002, p 226). Griffin and Braidotti argue that *intra-group* differences are at the heart of European racism: not just the relationship between 'black' and 'white', but the definition of white itself. These differences are not only based on colour, but also on culture or ethnicity, and should be the main focus of European research on racism and whiteness. However they warn us not to exclude race from our analyses completely, for even though much of European racism is based on ethnicity; biological arguments have been, and sometimes still are used to 'racialise' these cultural differences. If we relate this to the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism, we can see the importance of ethnicity in general, and religion specifically, as markers of difference in Europe. And it is currently Islam and Muslims who receive most attention. I will return to this in later chapters, but here I want to briefly demonstrate how religion and gender intersect, by focussing on Islam.

Unveiling the Oriental Woman

The image of the Orient is probably the deepest and most recurring image of the European Other: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self" (Said, 2003, in: Said, 1978, p 3). According to Said, the idea of the superiority of the West compared to non-Western cultures and peoples in general, and the Orient specifically, is perhaps one of the most important aspects of European culture. Generally, Orientalism can be described as a discourse based on a distinction between 'the Orient' and 'the Occident'. Both images are constructions with a particular history, which have created traditions of thought and vocabularies:

> "Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, (…) there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character." (Said, 1978, p 7-8)

This way, an image is created of the world separated into two (unequal) halves: the Orient and the Occident.

Elaborating on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Yeğenoğlu shows us how the image of the Oriental woman intrigues Westerners even more. The Muslim veil speaks especially to the imagination. The idea of modernity is a central concept in these discussions about the Middle East or Muslim women, and is often connected (positively) to the supposed Enlightenment in Western societies and (negatively) to the backwardness of Muslim countries. The assumption in such Oriental texts is that if backward Islamic countries want to modernise themselves and adopt liberal values such as freedom, then they have to break down their cultural, religious and political systems (Yeğenoğlu, 2002, p 82). Differences between the Middle East (or Muslim societies) and the West are presented as though they were on a time-line, in which the latter are supposed to be backward:

> "their temporality and dynamism are not understood to be simply different. This difference is negated, denied, pushed back in a temporality which is construed in linear and progressive terms." (Yeğenoğlu, 2002, p 83)

In this way, the West is connected to modernity and the East to tradition and religion. This is a persistent image in discussions about women or gender equality. Women have become a symbol for the 'backwardness' of Islam or the Orient.

The position of Muslim women in general, and veiling specifically, has also been important themes for Western feminists. The veil, Yeğenoğlu argues, is:

> "taken as the sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire tradition of Islam and Oriental cultures and by extension it is used as a proof of oppression of women in these societies." (Yeğenoğlu, 2002, p 8 4)

From this perspective, Western feminists who want to free Muslim women from their veils are attempting to force their own ideas about liberation on these women. This way, Western women seem to confirm their own identity as free women while presenting Muslim women as the oppressed Other. One of the consequences of this is that the agency of the Muslim women is ignored, or not recognised. Furthermore, no attention is given to the possible different meanings of traditions. Even though most outsiders see the veil as a sign of oppression, more and more Muslim women are now claiming that the veil can be empowering. They argue that veils can have many different meanings: they can be a woman's own choice or forced upon her; they can liberate or imprison; mark piety or political statements; and reduce a woman's space or facilitate her professional activities (Cooke, 2002, p 154).

Against the Production of a Singular Subject

In 'Unbinding our feet: Saving Brown Women and Religious Discourse', Kwok Pui-lan argues that the mission of 'saving brown women' is not only an important part of the colonialist ideology, but is also entrenched in white women's consciousness, from where it returns in current Western feminist discourses on religion (Pui-lan, 2002, p 630). For example, in Antoinette Burton's research we can clearly see how white

women used the supposedly 'backward position of indigenous women' to promote their own emancipation (Burton, 1994). One of the consequences of this approach to emancipation is the construction of women from the colonies as 'victims of their brutal men'. Not only is their suffering under imperialism not taken into account, they are also presented as ignorant poor women who need help from Western saviours (Pui-lan, 2002, p 67). Referring to the work of Spivak, Pui-lan argues that brown women are not allowed to speak: "the subaltern woman has been written, represented, argued about, and even legislated for, but she is allowed no discursive position from which to speak" (Pui-lan, 2002, 67).

In her famous essay 'Under Western Eyes', Chandra Talpade Mohanty discusses the "production of the 'Third World Woman' as a singular monolithic subject" (Mohanty, 1988, p 61). She argues that the relationship between the idea of Woman, as a "cultural and ideological composite Other constructed through diverse representational discourse" (Mohanty, 1988, p 62), and women as, "real material subjects" (Mohanty, 1988, p 62), is one of the central issues in feminist scholarship. But even though many feminists claim that this is not a relationship of direct identity or correspondence, they do not seem to make this distinction for women in the 'third world' (Mohanty, 1988, p 62). According to Mohanty two things cause this:

> "assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand, and inadequate self-consciousness about the effects of western scholarship on the 'third world' in the context of world system dominated by the west on the other." (Mohanty, 1988, p 63)

She argues that (overly simplistic) comparative analyses of 'sexual difference' not only create homogeneous descriptions of the lives of women in the third world, but also systematise their oppression (Mohanty, 1988, p 63).

According to Mohanty, Western feminists have to situate themselves more, and examine their role in the global economic and political framework. She focuses her criticism on three elements of (Western) feminist analyses: women as monolithic category of analysis; methodological universalism, and the construction of the 'third world woman'. The first part of Mohanty's criticism attacks the usage of the category 'women' as a homogeneous group for analysis:

"all of us with the same gender, across classes and cultures, are somehow socially constituted as a homogeneous group identifiable prior to the process of analysis (...) Thus what binds women together is a sociological notion of the 'sameness' of their oppression." (Mohanty, 1988, p 65)

It is here, Mohanty argues, that the distinction between women as represented in society, and women as real life subjects, is lost. The error is that instead of investigating the social and political circumstances that make certain groups of women oppressed, a variety of cases of 'oppressed women' is used to 'prove' the oppression of women as group (Mohanty, 1988, p 66). This kind of analysis is easy to recognise, because women are always referred to as objects. She argues.that in order to really challenge existing structures, we should try to get a better understanding of the complexity and contradictions of social relations.

The second element of Mohanty's criticism is 'methodological universalism' (Mohanty, 1988, p 75), or the use of certain methodologies to demonstrate the cross-cultural oppression of women. In such analyses, concepts like reproduction and the sexual division of labour are used to explain women's oppression, without looking at the socio-historical context. The meaning of a certain development, Mohanty argues, depends on the value given to the content or the background of that development in a certain society. Both in the US and in Latin America for instance, there is a rise of female-headed households (Mohanty, 1988, p 76). In the first country this is a result of the growing independence of women (who choose more and more independently how to live their lives), in the latter however, the development is related to poverty. Hence, the same statistics have completely different meanings. According to Mohanty, researchers who fall into this trap confuse the descriptive potential of concepts such as labour division with their explanatory power.

The last thing that Mohanty goes in to is connected to both of the previous ones. The concept of 'The third world woman' is created by referring to women as a category of analysis, already constituted and placed within religious, political, economical, familial and legal structures (Mohanty, 1988, p 78). This assumption of women as a homogeneous and oppressed group is always problematic, but even leads to more problems when it is used in a context of western women writing about third world women, Mohanty argues. By contrasting the representation of women in the third world with western feminisms' self-representation in the same context, we see

how western feminists become the true 'subjects' of history. Third-world women, on the other hand, never rise above the 'object' status (Mohanty, 1988, p 79). As I already mentioned above, such a perspective denies the agency of the women from the so-called 'third world' and neglects to give attention to the resistance of these women.

How to Approach Difference

Most feminists agree that there are differences among women, but there is much disagreement about the possible consequences of and approaches to these differences. Some argue that too much focus on the differences between women is highly problematic for the feminist movement, and might result in relativism. Others are of the opinion that difference should not automatically be seen negatively or regarded as a source of conflict, and that feminists should accept that they cannot provide all the answers to all problems, and acknowledge instead that women sometimes turn to other political movements in order to improve their life circumstances (Ang, 2003). Kum-Kum Bhavnani adds that women's studies should combine the politics of difference with a politics of possibilities (Bhavnani, 1997, p 49). She emphasises that feminists should realise that there are important differences among women, but also acknowledge that these differences are not 'natural', but socially/politically created, thus:

> "My suggestion is to argue that feminisms can represent both current realities about women and our lives (that is, a politics of difference) and *simultaneously* represent the hope that such differences of interests may not always be the case." (Bhavnani, 1997, p 49)

According to Bhavnani, one of the best ways for scholars from the industrial countries to examine the interconnections of ethnicity, gender and class, is to focus on feminist work from the third world about these women's lives, struggles and movements (Bhavnani, 1997, p 48), because analyses like these encompass most, if not all, categories of inequality. This is necessary, she says, because despite all the

discussions about difference in women's studies, women of colour are still excluded in many different ways (Bhavnani, 1997, p 31).

Intersectionality

In an article on anti-discrimination doctrine and feminist theory, the American lawyer Kimberly Crenshaw shows how race and gender intersect, and identifies some problems with mainstream anti-discrimination policies (Crenshaw, 1989). Even though many feminists had already referred to connections between race and gender, this was probably the first time the term 'intersectionality' was introduced (McCall, 2005). Crenshaw argues that even though racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do so in feminist and anti-racist practices. Therefore the interests and experiences of women of colour are often not taken into account. Furthermore, she suggests that the single-axis framework of anti-discrimination theories marginalises and even erases women of colour in the conceptualisation and identification and of race and sex discrimination:

> "in race discrimination cases, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex- or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139).

Just adding black women to the current framework cannot solve these issues; according to Crenshaw the intersectional experience of women of colour is greater than the sum of racism and sexism. For example, observing intersectionality in a study of battered women's shelters she found that most women who sought protection were not only victims of violence, but very often unemployed and poor. This means that shelters that serve these women cannot afford to only address the violence these women experience, they must also confront other forms of domination that might hinder their ability to get out of the abusive relationship in the first place.

To show how complicated the experience of women of colour is, Crenshaw compares their lives with a traffic intersection, where traffic comes from different directions. As mentioned before, black women can experience discrimination in ways that are both similar to and different from those experienced by white women and

black men (Crenshaw, 1989). An example of this is rape. Historically, rape has been analysed as a manifestation of male power over female sexuality. However, by looking at rape from this perspective, we tend to ignore the use of rape as racial terror:

> "when Black women were raped by white males, they were being raped not as women generally, but as Black women specifically: their femaleness made them sexually vulnerable to racist domination, while their Blackness effectively denied them any protection." (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 151)

Following Crenshaw, many scholars have used the term 'intersectionality'. According to McCall however, there has been little discussion on *how* to study intersectionality (McCall, 2005). What exactly is intersectionality and how can we use it in scientific research? Gloria Wekker and Helma Lutz provide a clear description of what intersection theory is: a way of analysing cultural texts and social relations (Wekker and Lutz, 2001). The main argument of the theory is that everyone is situated at an intersection, which means that our lives are always influenced by our gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class and nationality. Furthermore, these categories influence each other; gender is always racialised, ethnicity is closely connected to class etc. Intersection theorists argue that you can never investigate gender independently from other axes of difference. According to Wekker and Lutz we should also be conscious of the fact that this method of analysis is radically different from the kind of analyses we are used to, which means it will not be easy to change our old habits of thinking in binaries.

The lawyer Mari Matsuda has developed an instrument to bring intersection theory into practice (Wekker and Lutz, 2001). To understand the connection between different forms of oppressions better, she uses the method of 'asking the other question':

> "when I see something that looks racist, I ask: what are the interests of patriarchy in this? When I see something that looks sexist, I ask: what is heterosexist about this? And when I see something that looks heterosexist, I ask what the class interests in this are?" (cited in Wekker and Lutz p. 41, my translation)

McCall has delineated the three main methodological approaches to intersectionality, which she defines as, "the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations" (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). The first approach is *anticategorical* and is based on the idea that social life is too complex to make fixed categories: one will only produce inequalities, while trying to define the differences. The second, *intercategorical* approach uses existing categories to explicate the fact that those categories are socially constructed, ever-changing and ever-enhancing inequality. The last approach that McCall describes is *intracategorical*, which falls conceptually midway between the *anticategorical* approach that rejects categories, and the *intercategorical* approach that uses them strategically. The *intracategorical* approach criticizes both the boundary-making and boundary-defining process, as the *anticategorical* approach does, but like the *intercategorical* approach it also acknowledges the fact that categories do have a meaning in our society. The special aspect of this last approach is that it usually focuses on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection.

Crenshaw also divides intersection into different categories and distinguishes structural from political intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Structural intersectionality refers to the way in which the location of a person at the intersection of race and gender produces that person's experiences in life. As mentioned before, the way women of colour experience domestic violence or rape is different from white women's experiences. Political intersectionality refers to the fact that women of colour are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting agendas:

> "the need to split one's political energies between two sometimes opposing political agendas is a dimension of intersectional disempowerment that men of colour and white women seldom confront." (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1249)

Hence, by referring to the term political intersectionality, Crenshaw shows how difficult it can be for black women to develop an anti-racist women's movement and an anti-sexist black movement.

Intersectional theories teach us that various axes of difference influence our lives and experiences. These axes always influence each other and cannot therefore be separated analytically. The racism that a black man experiences differs from the

racism that a black woman encounters, and the sexism that white women have to deal with is not the same as the sexism against black women. Among other things, this means that feminists cannot tackle first one axis of difference, followed by another one. Instead, we have to make more nuanced analyses of the oppression different women experience and develop instruments to fight these different power relations and oppressions. It can be rather difficult to think through intersectional frameworks (especially when one theorises the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism), but it is necessary to recognise the complexity of the issues at stake and adjust our analytical instruments accordingly. This includes an appropriate analysis of one's own background and standpoint. We are all positioned at an intersection and we are all influenced by our gender, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability etc.

Politics of Location

In order to avoid viewing women as one homogeneous group,we should recognise their location. We need to name the ground we are coming from and build a feminist consciousness that is not simply centred on universalist perspectives of the category of women. In her famous essay 'Notes toward a Politics of Location', Adrienne Rich takes an important step in this struggle for accountability (Rich, 1987, p 211). As a white woman, she argues that white women have to become more aware of their position:

> "marginalised we have been as women, as white and western makers of theory, we also marginalise others because our lived experience is thoughtlessly white, because even our 'women cultures' are rooted in some western tradition." (Rich, 1987, p 219)

One of the main points of the 'Politics of Location' is that we should avoid easy generalisations:

> "If we have learned anything in these years of late twentieth-century feminism, it's that 'always' blots out what we really need to know: when,

where, and under what conditions has the statement been true." (Rich, 1987, p 214)

This clearly shows that Rich does not plead for a relativist approach; instead she tells us to ask these extra questions before we make a statement. The first thing (white) feminists have to do, according to Rich, is to ask who 'we' mean when 'we' talk about 'us'/'women'. 'We' called ourselves radical feminists, Rich says, and we wanted liberation for all women, but the problem was "that we did not know whom we meant when we said 'we'," (Rich, 1987, p 217). There is no liberation movement that starts from 'I', but neither is a movement collective if it speaks for an illusionary 'we'. Therefore, the women's movement needs to change; it needs to recognise the differences between women, and women need to be accountable for these differences.

Besides avoiding easy generalisations, another important aspect of the 'politics of location' is 'locating yourself'. No longer will Rich quote Virginia Woolf's, "as a woman I have no country"; as a woman she does have a country, she argues. Her aim with the 'politics of location' is to show how she can be accountable for where she comes from:

> "I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place of history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create." (Rich, 1987, p 212)

This means that the search for accountability does not start with a geographical place, but with one's body. While thinking about her body, Rich argues that she sees many things: scars, three pregnancies and the teeth of someone that goes to the dentist twice a year, but the most obvious features of her body are probably her white skin and the fact that it is 'female' (Rich, 1987, p 215). Because white is the dominant skin colour, it seems that it has had no influence on her life: her white identity was neutralised by the assumption that white is no colour. Therefore, she argues, it is important to note that locating yourself in your body, means more than just stating the basic facts. If one really wants to be accountable, it involves "recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go" (Rich, 1987, p 215-216). Hence, the 'politics of location' are not about numbering your bodily features or geographical

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background; but about trying to understand the consequences of these for your life, experiences and standpoints.

Rich's essay has been very important for feminist theory, but it has also received criticism (see for instance Kaplan, 1994). Black feminists especially have argued that even though Rich is trying to become accountable for her position, her essay also confirms and reinstates the power relations that she is writing about. Black feminists had been stating similar arguments for years and yet it is Rich's essay that has become canonized and world famous. Rich's 'politics of location' do however provide us with two important tools for feminist analysis. I would like to argue that especially in the debates about multiculturalism and feminism, it is essential to ask in what circumstances our statements are true and how our own background has influenced our questions, approaches and answers.

Critical Whiteness Studies

In the previous sections, I have demonstrated how our identity is composed by the intersection of various axes of difference. In order to better understand how oppression works, more complex analyses are therefore needed, that take into account the intersections of, for example, ethnicity and gender. I have also discussed how race is always gendered, just as gender is racialised. Among other things, this means that both white people and people of colour live racially structured lives; white people are "raced", just as men are "gendered" (Frankenberg, 1993). For this reason it is important to prevent generalizations and always consider when, where and under what circumstances a statement is true and how your own background influences your questions, approaches and answers. This also includes being accountable for your own 'location' and the acknowledgment that a person can be marginalised on the basis of one axis of difference and yet marginalise others on the basis of another. However, in order for white people to be accountable for their whiteness, more knowledge is needed about what whiteness is, and what it does, and to understand "the racialness of white experience" (Frankenberg, 1993, p 1).

One of the most well-known books about whiteness is Richard Dyer's *White* (1997), in which he studies the representation of white people in white Western (visual) culture. Dyer's aim in *White* is to describe and analyse the racial imaginary of

white people. He does this not just to fill in the gaps (most work on race is still about non-white people), but also for a more political reason. There is something at stake, he says, in continuing to ignore white racial imagery:

"as long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen or named, they/we function as human norm." (Dyer, 1997, p 1)

There is no more powerful position than just being 'human', Dyer argues. Contrary to non-whites, who can only speak for their race, 'we' can speak for the whole of humanity since 'we' do not seem to represent a race. This way 'we' see and present ourselves as the norm, standard or the ordinary. This does not mean that 'we' are not represented, but that 'we' are not represented as *whites*. Instead 'we' are portrayed as people who are gendered, classed, sexualised or abled (Dyer, 1997, p 3). White people are taught that everything 'we' do and achieve can be based on our individuality:

"it is intolerable to realise that we may get a job or a nice house (...) because of our skin colour, not because of the unique, achieving individual we must believe ourselves to be." (Dyer, 1997, p 9)

Responding to the criticism of feminists of colour, Ruth Frankenberg investigated how feminism had failed to challenge racism, and sometimes even abetted it. Her research mostly deals with two main aspects of whiteness: firstly, the significance of race in white women's lives and how it shapes those women's perspective on race, and secondly, the influence of race discourses on these women's lives (Frankenberg, 1993). According to Frankenberg, whiteness consists of a set of linked dimensions:

"First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint', a place from which white people look at themselves, at others, and at society. Third, whiteness refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed." (Frankenberg, 1993, p 1)

One of the main aims of her research is to show how white women's experiences are shaped by racism: challenging the notion that racism is something external to us, rather than a system that shapes everyone's daily lives, experiences and sense of selves (Frankenberg, 1993, p 6). An interesting, but also complicating, part of her work is what Frankenberg herself calls the lacunae in perception. She wanted to find out how race is lived, or seen by white women, but more often she had to deal with what is not seen or experienced (Frankenberg, 1993, p 9). She argues this has to do with standpoint: because of our privileged position 'we' do not see what the consequences of race are in our lives.

White women (just like women of colour) are marked by their location in the racial order' and these women's senses of self, other, identity and worldview are also racialised (Frankenberg, 1993). But Frankenberg also recognises the possibilities of change and influence in the race discourses. White women that were involved in interracial relationships, for instance, were much more conscious of race relations, and problematised discourses about race. Therefore, she concludes how important it is to give attention to the construction of 'white experience' and its connection to discursive orders, because it "may help make visible the processes by which the stability of whiteness is (...) secured and reproduced" (Frankenberg, 1993, p 240). Only then we can try to transform the meaning of whiteness specifically and race relations in general, Frankenberg argues.

Griffin and Braidotti add to these important conclusions that our conceptualization of difference is essential for dealing with race and ethnicity in Europe (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002). We need to make whiteness visible as a colour, but also to redefine the concept of whiteness in order to take into account that in Europe one's colour does not automatically determine one's socio-cultural position. In other words, we have to acknowledge that culture, nation and religion have often been more important markers of difference in Europe than race. Furthermore, since whiteness in Europe has been so closely connected to nations and nation-states, Griffin and Braidotti argue, we also have to redefine European identity in a 'post-nationalist' way (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002, p 234). The authors propose a political strategy that approaches European identity as an open and multi-layered project, not as fixed or given (Griffin and Braidotti, 2002, p 234).

Conclusions

Susan Moller Okin argues that most non-Western cultures are more patriarchal than Western cultures and that protecting these cultures will harm the interests of women rather than promote them. One can contest this statement on different levels, but in this chapter I have investigated the relationship between feminism and difference. Can we really separate women from their cultures, as Okin does?

The feminist research I have described shows that gender and ethnicity are connected: gender is ethnicised and ethnicity is gendered. The women from the Combahee River Collective explained in 1977 how the connections between race and gender created their oppression. Their specific experiences made it difficult for black women to fight the subjugation they encountered: the women's movement was blind to racism, and the anti-racist movement did not recognise sexism as an equally important source of oppression. But sexuality, class, and ability interact with gender. And in the recent debates about multiculturalism and feminism, religion (read Islam) plays an important role as well. Orientalist perspectives on Islam and women influence many of these debates, and Muslim women are generally considered as unfree and oppressed. Moreover, their agency is often denied. Different conceptualisations of agency are the subject of the next chapter; here is it important to recognise the connections between culture, religion and gender.

Chandra Mohanty demonstrates how Western feminists have created a singular subject of 'third world women'. Their differences and agency are ignored because they are investigated as a monolithic and subjugated group. In order to be able to acknowledge the differences between women, I discussed three sets of theoretical frameworks. Intersectionality teaches us that all identities are based on the intersection between various axes of difference. Separating gender from ethnicity in an analysis would therefore make it impossible to truly understand how gender or ethnicity works. In order to understand the sexism that black women have to deal with, we have to take into account the mechanisms of racism, and if we want to understand the racism black women experience, we also need to look at sexism. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that whiteness is a racial position as well. White people often consider themselves as race-less; this way, their position is neutralised and universalised. In order to break through the dominance of whiteness, we need to understand more about what it means to be white in a racist world. White

feminists can address this by positioning themselves in relation to their research. They have to ask themselves under what circumstances their statements are true and how their background and experiences have influenced them. The next chapter will discuss this issue of experience and how it can be used in feminist research.

Chapter 4   Experiencing feminism: Experience and Subjectivity in the Debates about Multiculturalism and Feminism

Introduction

"Liberalism, grounded in the equal rights of individuals, (...) would have no more need to consult with the women of such a group than it need consult with slaves before it insisted upon their emancipation or with workers before it insisted upon their protection from deadly workplace hazards" (Okin, 2005, p 86).

Susan Moller Okin argues that certain cultural practices and beliefs can be harmful to women and that liberal democracies should not encourage these through multiculturalist policies. The views of the women involved are in this context irrelevant, and need to be ignored when these women have been raised in a strict patriarchal society. In the latter case, women can accept certain cultural traditions because they lack power, are socialized into inferior roles or simply lack the self-esteem to fight against them (Okin, 1998, p 675). In chapter one I discussed Ayaan Hirsi Ali's argument that Islam is a potential threat to the emancipation of (Muslim) women and that the headscarf is a sign of women's subordination within Islam (Ali, 2004a). She describes how Muslim women claim that they wear a scarf to show who they are, or to be able to go to work, but states that women are fooling themselves with these reasons.

Both Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Susan Moller Okin believe that women in liberal societies should be protected from harmful traditions in their religion or culture. They argue that Muslim women living in Western democracies should have the same rights as other women in their country, and ought to be able to live their lives without fearing circumcision or other possibly harmful customs. I have analysed the concepts of multiculturalism and feminism and have demonstrated that multiculturalism is a multi-layered and dynamic concept that can be interpreted in different ways. In that context, I argued that Okin's conceptualisation of multiculturalism is rather limited and ignores interpretations that take into account power differences within cultures, including gender relations. Furthermore, I argued that gender and ethnicity both

influence women's lives and cannot be analysed separately. In this context I outlined an interpretation of feminism that incorporates theories of intersectionality and where feminists should be accountable for their own background and prevent generalisations in their work and activities. Here I want to build on this interpretation of feminism and discuss the role of experience and subjectivity in the debates about multiculturalism and feminism. If feminists are accountable for their own location and take into account the differences between women, how then can they apply women's specific experiences in their research and activities?

The argument that multiculturalism specifically, or culture and religion in general are a threat to gender equality and should therefore not be supported by feminists, seems to at least partially ignore the will of the women involved. This appears to be contradictory to feminist ideals of the autonomy of women. However, according to some feminists, women occasionally need to be protected from patriarchal cultures and religions, even if it is against their own will. In this context, it is often argued that women might not always be able to make a good judgment because they suffer from false consciousness. Invisible premises of what subjectivity and experience are, play an important role in the current debates about multiculturalism and feminism and need to be made visible and questioned, in order to rethink these discussions properly. In this chapter, I will therefore investigate these notions of experience and subjectivity. My main aim is to show why (white/secular) feminists ought to listen to the arguments, experiences and strategies of other women involved in this debate, and to explain what the best approach to this would be. But first, I want to focus on the history behind Okin's argument. The thought that religion/culture in general, or Islam specifically cannot coexist with the struggle for gender equality is not new, nor unproblematic; Okin is not the first white feminist who wants to 'save' women from other cultures. This history needs to be taken into account when we think about multiculturalism and feminism. I do not mean to argue that because white feminism has a possibly problematic history, white women (or men) should not be able to criticise other cultures or religions, but I do believe we should be careful and conscious of the background and context in which we talk about these issues.

'Burdens of History'

The mission of 'saving brown women' is not only an important part of the colonialist ideology, it is also entrenched in white women's consciousness and returns in current Western feminist discourses on religion (Pui-lan, 2002, p 630). The 'White Man's Burden, or the notion that the West has a responsibility to bring Christian civilisation and its values to non-Western countries, has a gender aspect. First of all, it is mostly white *men* who feel the urge to save brown *women* from their *men*. But white women also believed they needed to save others. According to Pui-lan the role of women in the colonies was far from innocent (Pui-lan, 2002, p 66). White women were disadvantaged because of their sex, but benefited from their class and colour. Indeed, as women, "they were charged to reproduce domesticity in a strange land and to be guardians of Western morality and religious piety" (Pui-lan, 2002, p 66), but they also appeared to be "clinging more to their class and racial privileges, and displaying more racial intolerance than the white men did" (Pui-lan, 2002, p 66). Furthermore, white women often used the supposedly 'backwards position of indigenous women' to promote their own emancipation (Burton, 1994).

One of the consequences of the above-mentioned approach to emancipation is the construction of women from the colonies as 'victims of their brutal men'. As I explain in chapter 2, these women's suffering under imperialism is not taken into account and they are also presented as ignorant, poor women who need help from Western saviours (Pui-lan, 2002, p 67). Referring to the work of Spivak, Pui-lan argues that brown women are not allowed to speak: "the subaltern woman has been written, represented, argued about, and even legislated for, but she is allowed no discursive position from which to speak" (Pui-lan, 2002, p 67). In order to avoid the colonial ideology in current research, Pui-lan makes several important recommendations: do not present the other culture as unchanging or timeless and try to recognise the variation of, for example, certain traditions according to religion, class or ethnicity and finally, listen to the women involved. In other words:

> "A postcolonial interpretation does not name all men as the enemy in an essentialist manner, but acknowledges that some men and women have more power than others. It simultaneously challenges colonial discourse on *sati*,

footbinding, and genital mutilation, as well as patriarchal constructions that reinforce gender hierarchy. Such postcolonial rewriting is one of many learning devices to glean new insights from our 'common' history." (Pui-lan, 2002, p 70-72)

Dube adds to this that "postcolonial feminist spaces are inscribed within the worldwide international relations of domination, suppression and resistance" (Dube, 2002, p 117). She argues that we have to take into account oppression of the past as well as the present, and the influence this has on colonized women. Among other things, this means we have to be aware of differences among women and we should not attempt to organise the world according to Western standards, but try to recognise the strategies of resistance of formerly colonized women and acknowledge how important religion and culture can be, especially in a process of de-colonialization (Dube, 2002, p 115-117).

Islamic Feminism

Many women from all over the world do not feel that their culture/religion is a threat to their emancipation, but an inspiration. Islamic (or Muslim) feminists are an important example here and their strategies, experiences and arguments should play a more prominent role in discussions about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. It is not only because feminists ought to learn from history that more understanding of (and possibly solidarity with) other women's struggles is necessary, but also because, for example, Islamic feminists demonstrate through their struggles that feminism can be interpreted in various ways and is not limited to secular/white interpretations.

Islamic feminism is a product of people for whom both religion *and* gender equality is important and whose views on emancipation are inspired by their religious beliefs. The struggle for gender equality within Islam is not grounded in a certain geographical area. It is developing in various parts of the world, both originally Muslim and non-Muslim. However, it arose first in countries where Islamism has a long history, with a growing female middle class and a tradition of feminism. Often too, Islamic feminism is a response to secular feminist movements (Badran, 2006, p

48). The term 'Islamic feminism' is not uncontested. Some Muslim women connect the term feminism to the West and imperialism and some Western feminists reject the possibility of women struggling for equality within a patriarchal institution (Cooke, 2002). Others would go against this and defend the term.

In many cases Islamic feminism is based on the Qur'an, for instance by reinterpreting holy texts (Badran, 2006, p 49). Barlas argues that change from within is possible, but requires a shift in how people interpret and practice Islam and a willingness to read liberation from the same scripture that male authorities now use to discriminate against women (Barlas, 2005). According to Barlas, it is important to note that who reads the Qur'an and in which context highly influences what is read into it. She aims to make visible the relationship between knowledge and its means of production. Furthermore, she argues, that the Qur'an is often not read according to the hermeneutic principles required by the Qur'an itself (Barlas, 2005). First of all one ought to read the Qur'an in the light of a proper understanding of God; for instance God would never do anything to harm human beings. Secondly, the Qur'an asks people to read it for its best meanings. Among other things this means that it emphasises reading the text as a whole, and in context and not to confuse it with its interpretations. Barlas re-read the Qur'an starting from these principles and argues that it does not represent God as male and warns against "following the ways of the father". Additionally, she argues that through such a reading, the so-called misogynist verses can also be interpreted in many different ways.

But even though more and more women are now active in this process of reinvestigating religious sources, they are in a complex position. Very often, Muslim women are represented as victims or 'lesser human beings'. Because of the multiple representations of Muslim women, these women have had to develop 'multiple critiques', Miriam Cooke argues. Or, in other words:

> "a multilayered discourse that allows them to engage with and criticize the various individuals, institutions, and systems that limit and oppress them while making sure that they are not caught in their own rhetoric" (Cooke, 2002, p 151).

They discuss gender roles in their local and religious communities; challenge conventional interpretations of holy texts and traditions and at the same time defend

their religious and national communities. According to Cooke, Muslim women create new histories and knowledges about their own lives and criticise the many accounts that are often produced *about* them, without consulting them. Debates about veiling are an important example of the struggle of Islamic feminists. Where most outsiders see the veil as a sign of oppression, more and more women are now claiming that the veil can be empowering. Furthermore, they show that veils can have many different meanings: they can be a woman's own choice or forced upon her; liberate or imprison; mark piety or political statements; reduce a woman's space or facilitate her professional activities (Cooke, 2002, p 154). By emphasising these different meanings, Islamic feminists can create new, contingent and dynamic subject positions.

Recognising the possible problems with the term, Cooke uses the concept of Islamic Feminism to describe the double-edged struggle of Muslim women who are committed to both their religion and women's rights:

> "They are claiming that Islam is not necessarily more traditional or authentic than any other identification nor is it any more violent or patriarchal than any other religion. They are claiming their right to be strong women within this tradition, to act as feminists without fear, so that they may be labelled Western and imitative. They are highlighting women's roles within their religious communities, while at the same time declaring common cause with Muslim women elsewhere who share the same objectives." (Cooke, 2002, p 145)

This means that Islamic feminists have a lot of enemies; both among Muslim men who do not want to lose their privileges and among those who criticise Islam by calling it 'unfriendly to women' (Badran, 2006, p 48). One of the ways of 'playing back' to the men in their own communities is to refer to the strategies they themselves used in the anti-colonial struggles (Cooke, 2002). They are studying the same texts that 'their men' used to counter the West, and point out that they are in danger of making the same mistakes as the West.

By studying the strategies and arguments of Islamic feminists, it becomes possible to develop a more comprehensive understanding of feminist struggles in general. The concept of 'multiple critiques' for example points out that Muslim women not only

suffer from oppression in which gender and religion intersect; they also try to develop different forms of criticism through which they fight both those who believe that they are victims of their religion and those who interpret Islam in a misogynist way. Hence, even though Susan Moller Okin argues that some women lack the self-esteem and possibilities to fight patriarchal customs in their culture/religion, there are also many who do fight these, albeit in their own way and from within that community. But that leaves the question of how to decide when a woman is fighting for her own interpretation of equality while holding on to her faith, and when, as Okin suggests, a woman is holding on to certain traditions because she does not dare to, or thinks she cannot, change them.

Standpoint Theory

Feminists have extensively theorized the use of experience in research. When women's studies departments started to emerge in the 1970s, one of their first points of critique was the fact that other fields had not incorporated women as subjects of research (McCall, 2005). One of the main aims therefore, was to 'add women' to the leading research agendas across the full range of disciplines. Later on, the 'simple' addition of women to the research process did not seem to be enough to fight the male bias in science. Feminist scholars then introduced 'gender' as analytical category (Harding, 1991). Women's distinct experiences became an important part of the feminist agenda. This led, among other things, to a feminist critique of mainstream scientific methods. According to many feminists these methods claimed to be objective and value-free, but were in fact excluding women, and thus only telling 'half of the story' (Harding, 1991). Furthermore, they argued that the exclusion of women was not a matter of 'bad science', but more 'science-as-usual'. In other words, the problems are inherent in the scientific method and cannot be solved without changing these methods. This feminist alternative to mainstream science is known as 'standpoint theory' and starts from the experience of women.

Standpoint theory is based on the originally Marxist idea that knowledge is socially situated and that one's position in society shapes and constrains what one knows, or even what one can know (Harding, 1991). Furthermore, standpoint theorists argue that knowledge from a marginalised point of view could be more valuable than

knowledge from a dominant position: "one can expect that the vision of each will represent an inversion of the other, and in systems of domination the vision available to the rulers will be both partial and perverse" (Rose Hartsock, cited in: Harding, 1991, p 120). The argument is that the oppressed have a more complete idea of society, because very often they not only know how things work in their own groups, but also in the group that is dominating them. For example, because of their work as domestic helpers, many black women are familiar with family traditions of both white and black families. Moreover, feminist standpoint theorists argue that women, because of their marginalised position, can function as 'critical strangers' to the social order: they have the right combination of nearness and remoteness to criticise and notice things that are hard for those immersed in the culture to detect (Harding, 1991, p 124). Secondly, as members of the oppressed groups, women have fewer interests in ignoring the social order. This too should make them more critical (Harding, 1991, p 125).

But does this mean that women, or other oppressed groups, are always right? No: according to Sandra Harding, standpoint theory gives us important reasons to listen to the arguments of women, but that does not mean that they are always right (Harding, 1991, p 123). There is a difference between an individual claim and a standpoint, she argues. A standpoint is a location from where feminist research should begin:

> "it is not the experiences or speech that provides the grounds for feminist claims; it is rather the subsequently articulated observations of and theory about the rest of nature and social relations - (…) that look at the world from the perspective of women's lives" (Harding, 1991, p 124).

This also means that a standpoint is not something you have, but something to achieve. Thus not all men have 'male standpoints', and not all women have 'feminist standpoints': a man can also take a feminist standpoint, e.g. by joining women to work for the improvement of women's conditions.

Thinking from women's lives does not mean that we have to let go of the concept of objectivity. Instead, Harding argues, standpoint theory requires and generates stronger standards of objectivity (Harding, 2004). The concept of 'strong objectivity' challenges the classic notion that objectivity is connected to neutrality, and argues that the objectivity of claims becomes stronger when they are linked to partial or

particular positions (Prins, 1997, p 68). All research, Harding argues, is socially situated; only when we stop claiming it to be value-free can we can develop a stronger objectivity:

> "The requirements for achieving strong objectivity permit one to abandon notions of perfect, mirror like representations of the world, the self as a defended fortress, and the 'truly scientific' as disinterested with regard to morals and politics, yet still apply rational standards to sorting less from more partial and distorted belief" (Harding, 1991, p 159).

Giving up the classic notion of objectivity does not automatically mean that one turns to relativism. People fear, Harding argues, that if we let go of the idea that there is not one universally and eternally valid standard of judgement, then we have to regard each person's judgment as equally valid. However, the concept of strong objectivity shows that there are alternatives outside of the narrow dichotomous relation between objectivity and relativism. This requires us to "investigate the relationship between subject and object rather than deny the existence of, or seek unilateral control over, this relation" (Harding, 1991, p 152). Thus, standpoint theory is not doomed to relativism; instead it claims that some standpoints or situations are better starting points for knowledge projects than others (Harding, 2004, 131).

In order to be able to maximise objectivity, subjects of knowledge should be reflexive. Or as Harding puts it: "strong objectivity requires strong reflexivity" (Harding, 2004, p 136). Instead of eliminating all external factors from scientific research, we should include those factors that influence the process of knowledge production, such as gender, race or class. Researchers have to be aware of the fact that they always look at certain issues through the eyes of their communities and begin thought with its assumptions (Prins, 1997, p 70). To summarise: strong objectivity and reflexivity do not help us to find one true account of a certain issue, but to locate less false or distorted accounts (Prins, 1997, p 69).

Standpoint Theory and Others

Standpoint theory presents interesting arguments and tools to prevent us from producing knowledge from a supposedly universal standpoint, which is in fact hegemonic and partial. The concept of 'thinking from women's lives' is therefore an important approach for feminist research. However, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, black and 'third world' women particularly have argued that the category of women is heterogeneous. Therefore, not only gender, but also other classifications such as race, culture, class, sexuality, should be taken into account. What does this mean for standpoint theory?

In order to answer this question, Sandra Harding examines the relationship between experience and knowledge in the context of standpoint theory. According to her, we can learn more about a society in general when we start from marginal perspectives. Not experience itself, but the view from a certain standpoint is central to this approach. These standpoints are always multiple and contradictory: women are not just women, but also rich or poor, black or white, heterosexual or lesbian etc (Harding, 1991, p 284). Therefore, each feminist knower is 'multiple', in the sense that thinking from a contradictory standpoint generates feminist knowledge. Harding argues:

> "The logic of standpoint theory requires that the subject of liberatory feminist knowledge must also be the subject of every other liberatory knowledge project. Since lesbian, poor, and black women are all women, feminism will have to grasp how gender, race, class, and sexuality are used to construct one another." (Harding, 1991, p 285).

Thus, in order for liberatory movements to be successful, they have to take into account these different categories and their intersections.

If white women want to take into account the experiences of, for example, black women, they can use the approach of 'reading against the grain' (Harding, 1991, 288). This method comes from the experience of lesbian women and suggests that people whose identity is not marginal, have to 'become marginal'. This does not mean that they should give up or change their identity (e.g. being heterosexual), but that they give up the "spontaneous consciousness created by their heterosexual experience in a

heterosexist world" (Harding, 1991, p 289). Consequently, they can think as heterosexual persons who have learned from lesbian lives. The same approach can also work for whites, who can learn from the experiences of blacks etc. Sandra Harding also refers to this as 'traitorous identities'. Such thinking does not start from direct experience, but from critical reflexivity. Among other things, this means that we cannot literally repeat the arguments of 'the oppressed'. Instead we have to develop a new critical view from our standpoint, including evaluating our own dominant position.

An interesting aspect of the 'traitorous identities' of Sandra Harding is that they make it possible for men to be feminists or whites to be anti-racist. But there is another, maybe even more important consequence of this approach: it brings back responsibility to people with a dominant identity, e.g. whites, to rethink their own position and learn from the perspectives of others about their own privileged locations (Prins, 1997, p 74). Thus, attention is moved away from marginalised positions to the dominant positions. This means that the concept of 'traitorous identities' is first of all an alternative to Okin's view on protecting minority women, but it also provides an answer to the question, 'are white women not allowed to say anything about minority women?' Of course women can share struggles with other women and make statements about oppressions, but it is important to note the power differences and to be accountable for one's position.

Situated Knowledges

Standpoint theory has had enormous influence on feminist research and is still important in many research projects. However, feminists have also criticised its main premise that the oppressed know better. Do they really know better, and is this not an essentialist thought? The work of Donna Haraway is an important example of such criticism. In 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the privilege of Partial Perspective' (1991), she builds on Sandra Harding's criticism of the social constructionist view on objectivity, but also takes it a step further. Haraway describes alternatives to the narrow interpretation of the concept of objectivity that feminists have developed, such as standpoint theory, and how these have influenced our image of 'good science'. However, she also argues that feminists seem to be

trapped in discussions about science and objectivity, and she proposes another way of thinking about these issues: 'situated knowledges'.

Like Harding's 'strong objectivity', 'situated knowledges' aim to achieve a more objective perspective by letting go of the concept of neutrality. Haraway argues that objectivity should be connected to 'situatedness':

"This is an objective vision that initiates, rather than closes off, the problem of responsibility for the generativity of all visual practices. Partial perspective can be held accountable for both its promising, and its destructive monsters" (Haraway, 1991, p 190).

Haraway uses the metaphor of 'vision' to illustrate her interpretation of objectivity: all vision comes from a certain perspective and uses a particular instrument; the combination of these factors creates different ways of seeing. According to Haraway we have to develop an objectivity, which is just as embodied as vision is. This embodied objectivity should prevent the so-called "god-trick" (Haraway, 1991, p 189) of neutral objectivity; to see without being seen or seeing everything from nowhere.

Vision is always about the power to see. Furthermore, seeing is always active and mediated:

"All eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific *ways* of seeing (…). There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds" (Haraway, 1991, p 190).

According to Haraway, in order to achieve embodied objectivity we have to understand how visual systems work (socially, physically and technically) (Haraway, 1991, p 190). Thus, we have to be accountable for the way we see: where we see from and with which instruments. In feminist research this means that we have to position ourselves. Seeing is about translating and if we want to be able to recognise tensions, contradictions, transformations or resistances, we have to be aware of the fact that we only have a partial view, from a certain location (Haraway, 1991, p 195).

An important aspect in the act of positioning oneself is the awareness of difference:

> "Feminism is about the sciences of the multiple subject with (at least) double vision. Feminism is about critical vision consequent upon a critical positioning in inhomogeneous gendered social space" (Haraway, 1991, p 195).

Hence, there is no single feminist standpoint according to Haraway. We have to respect difference and avoid fixation. Here is where Haraway clearly distinguishes her theory of 'situated knowledges' from Harding's standpoint theory. Haraway agrees with Harding (and other standpoint theorists) that there are good reasons to believe that 'vision is better from below', but she also warns against romanticizing the position of the subjugated:

> "to see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic, even if 'we' 'naturally' inhabit the great underground terrain of the subjugated knowledges. The positionings of the subjugated are not exempt from critical re-examination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation; that is, from both semiological and hermeneutic modes of critical enquiry. The standpoints of the subjugated are not 'innocent' positions." (Haraway, 1991, p 191).

Thus, according to Haraway, standpoint alone is not enough for embodied and objective knowledge production. We need instruments to actually see something from a certain standpoint. And the most important instrument for a researcher, according to Haraway, is 'critical positioning' (Haraway, 1991, p 193). Hence, not identity, but critical positioning produces partial, locatable and critical knowledges (Haraway, 1991, p 193). Positioning implies responsibility and should therefore be at the base of an accountable science.

Besides positioning oneself, Haraway mentions another crucial aspect for feminist epistemology: 'splitting'. Maybe even more than positioning, the concept of splitting is a very important criticism of standpoint theory. Subjects, Haraway argues, are always multidimensional, and therefore their vision too. This makes our vision always partial. Therefore, we should not define our standpoint on the basis of

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identity, but on partiality; we have to acknowledge our partiality and position ourselves accordingly.

Because location and critical positioning are not self-evident (knowing subjects are always split and contradictory); a located position has to be *made* in order to make particular objects of knowledge possible (Prins, 1997). Haraway proposes to use the concept of the 'modest witness' as the knowing subject: a knower whose modesty renders her invisible (Haraway, 1997). So, even though Haraway lets go of the foundation of 'objective knowledge' as used by standpoint theorists, she does not resort to relativism:

> "Relativism is a way of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. (…). Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well (Haraway, 1991, p 191).

Instead, Haraway suggests that we need other critical tools than the unmasking of prevailing accounts as lies (Prins, 1997). Critical theory, in this view, should no longer be about revealing 'how things really are', but about making a difference in the world. Hence, feminists should not try to find the best representatives of a story, but develop alternative stories that can change our perspective. The concept of the modest witness could be a starting point for the production of such stories.

Experience in Feminist Research

Both standpoint theory and situated knowledges have been and are important contributions to feminist theory. Both theories have taught us that location can influence our views on certain issues. The main difference is that standpoint theory starts from the normative notion that certain positions provide better grounds for knowledge production, while the theory of 'situated knowledges' demonstrates that all standpoints provide partial views and that we have to be accountable for that.

If we apply standpoint theory and situated knowledges, we will see that both will help us in the rethinking of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

Standpoint theory tells us why we need a view from below, and should for example take the experiences of women from minority cultures into account. But standpoint theory is not merely about women's experiences; these are just a point of departure, a ground for 'knowledge-claims' (Bracke, 2004). In order to develop a standpoint, one needs to combine social location with political analysis: "an initial link is not enough to make a standpoint; it takes a theoretical and political project to contextualise experiences and perspectives of oppression" (Bracke, 2004, p 7). When we approach standpoint theory in such a manner, it becomes obvious why it is important that the voices from Islamic feminists, as described above, are taken into account in feminist research and theory. These women have transformed their experiences (from below) into standpoints, through their political projects and 'multiple critiques'. But the question of which standpoints are 'proper' standpoints, is not always easy to answer and leads to much discussion between feminists.

Sarah Bracke argues that if we want to 'think from women's lives', we have to ask ourselves *whose* women' lives we want to think from (Bracke, 2004, p 8). We have to take into account the differences between women and prevent 'false universality'. Bracke does not aim to answer the question whether the women in her research could engender proper (feminist) standpoints. Instead, she wants to:

> "take the lives of women that stand in an 'awkward relationship' to feminism as a starting point to explore *what kind of knowledges* such vantage points engender and *how these knowledges make feminist thinking more complex*" (Bracke, 2004, p 10).

In this context Bracke cites Willy Jansen, who also argues that in order for Women's Studies to be able to do justice to the differences between women, we need to understand why women make certain choices, what interests influence these choices and how women are divided among themselves (Jansen, cited in: Bracke 2004, p 9).

Where Bracke starts from a political interpretation of standpoint theory to make feminist thinking more complex, one could also turn to the concept of situated knowledges. According to Baukje Prins, situated knowledges are so appealing because of their multi-layeredness. In her view, there are at least three important dimensions to distinguish within the concept. The first level is descriptive and claims that all knowledge is partial and situated. The second level is more normative and

refers to the fact that a view from below could be a better vantage point for seeing the world. Obviously, this is where standpoint theory and situated knowledges meet each other. However, Haraway is much more careful with this normative account and also warns us not to romanticise oppressed standpoints. The third level is the visionary dimension of meaning: situated knowledges aim to actively construct new perspectives to 'knowing' (Prins, 1997, p 104). Prins argues that the idea of situated knowledges emphasizes the construction of identities much more explicitly than Harding does. Social positions are not fixed and do not automatically lead to resistance to the system (Prins, 1997, p 104-5). Haraway plays with identities and boundaries, where for Harding these are much more static. For instance, Harding writes about feminist men as men who occupy a 'contradictory position'; Haraway on the other hand describes them as "a little bit different, a little bit fraught" (Haraway, cited in Prins, 1997, p 105). For Prins these are examples of the many possibilities Haraway's work provides. To summarise:

> "The feminist subject position of the 'outsider within' has been radicalized by the figuration of the cyborg, whose vision is not simply double, but whose artifactual eyes diffract the world into a mosaic pattern. Furthermore, Haraway's relativization of the distinction between subject and object as two types of 'material-semiotic actors' seriously weakens the traditional hegemonic relationships constituted by practices of knowledge. Finally, her work shows a persistent awareness of the existence of power/knowledge configurations: by suggesting the non-innocence of its constructions, by its focus on the empowerment of 'inappropiate/d others', and by emphasizing the inevitable responsibility that goes with any knowledge claim." (Prins, 1997, p 106)

Prins argues that the Dutch discourse on ethnic minorities and multiculturalism is a good case for exploring the concept of situated knowledges, because it is a discourse in which many 'non-innocent' positions are put forward, and because the relations between marginal and dominant groups in society are at stake.

Briefly summarized, we can say that standpoint theory provides feminists with an essential tool, and explains why it is important to include the view from 'outsiders within' in feminist research. Haraway's 'situated knowledges' de-essentialised

standpoint theory and shows us that the view from below should not be romanticised. In that sense, situated knowledges open the way to a more dynamic and less static interpretation of standpoint theory. However, both the more political interpretation of standpoint theory and the dynamic theory of situated knowledges leave us with the question of how to decide which views are relevant for feminist research or activism.

Even though Bracke does not (want to) answer the question (how to differentiate a good standpoint from a problematic one), she does give good reasons to start thinking from the lives and experiences of women who might make feminist thinking more complex, such as women who are actively involved in 'fundamentalist' movements. This seems to contradict her point about the necessity to combine location with political struggle in standpoint theory. Hence, in her second statement she argues that it is more important to understand the lives of religious women than to focus on the question whether their experiences could engender feminist standpoints. I would like to argue that both issues are important in feminist research, such as this project, but they relate to different angles of the debate about multiculturalism and feminism. Hence, if we want to rethink statements such as those from Susan Moller Okin, one could argue that minority women also fight for equality, albeit it in another way and, for example, from within their community. Another argument, however, would be that some women might not want the equality of freedom that Okin stands for. These different lines of reasoning are connected to different theoretical frameworks. I would like to argue that standpoint theory would be an important instrument in the first and that situated knowledges provides us with an entry to the latter. A redefinition of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism needs to take into account both aspects and hence develop theoretical frameworks that help to understand both.

Moving from Standpoints to Subjectivities

Saba Mahmood states that if feminists really want to understand the lives, experiences and strategies of all women, we have to be open to the possibility that we can learn from other women and maybe even change our political views accordingly. Therefore, according to Mahmood, feminists have to separate their analytical and prescriptive work (Mahmood, 2005). This means we should openly engage with other

worldviews in our analytical work and then decide whether these might change our political standpoints. Hence, we should not try to define beforehand whether a certain experience is a good standpoint or not, but first try to understand it and discuss the political consequences afterwards. In order to be able to do this, Mahmood argues, feminists have to rethink their conceptualisation of agency.

In general, the participation of Muslim women in Islamist organisations is considered a paradox: they are active in movements that do not support their interests and agendas (Mahmood, 2005, p 2). Mahmood does not believe in this paradox, her goal is to rethink the:

> "normative liberal assumptions about human nature (…), such as the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily exists of acts that challenge our social norms and not those that uphold them" (Mahmood, 2005, p 5).

This way she not only aims to challenge classical liberal thought, but also feminist theory, which for in large part rests on liberal assumptions about human nature and agency. Resistance is an important theme in the work of Mahmood. As I mentioned above, feminists have often defined agency in terms of resistance. According to Mahmood this is problematic and causes us to be blind to many ways of being that are not embedded in the framework of subversion.

Most feminist thinking is primarily liberatory and agency is in this context is described as a model of subordination and subversion. Mahmood argues that this attachment of agency to progressive politics is problematic. If, she says, there are different ways to change the world depending on social, political and historical contexts; then the meaning of agency should not be fixed in advance. Thus, if we really want to understand the lives, experiences and strategies of all women's lives, we should not try to place their activities and ways of being in the simply dichotomous relation of subversion and subordination. This might mean that we have to re-conceptualise individual freedom, and adjust it to a situation where the distinction between:

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> "the subject's own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be easily presumed and where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for achieving the subject's potentiality" (Mahmood, 2005, p 31).

The point Mahmood makes here is radically different from most other feminist work.

Many feminists (and others) might wonder whether Mahmood's approach can still be defined as 'feminist'. She herself is conscious of this fact and keeps reflecting on this issue. Mahmood does not want to let go of feminist criticism of patriarchy, but she does believe that feminists should expand their definition of criticism. This means that, in her view, criticism is most powerful when we leave open the possibility of learning something new. We should openly engage with other worldviews and occasionally turn the critical gaze upon ourselves (Mahmood, 2005, p 37). Finally, she argues for a separation of prescriptive and analytical work. We do not have to abandon our critical stance towards practices we consider unjust. Rather:

> "we should leave open the possibility that our political and analytical certainties might be transformed in the process of exploring non-liberal movements (…), that the lives of the women with whom I worked might have something to teach us" (Mahmood, 2005, 39).

Thus, if we open up our analytical practices, we might learn something new about our own political standpoints.

Negotiating Subjectivities Further

Mahmood's rethinking of agency has been a major intervention in feminist thinking. Her more open, conception does give feminists an instrument to better understand women whose lives and choices (at first sight) seem contradictory to the feminist project. But her work led to much criticism and it is often argued that Mahmood's interpretation of agency is a threat to the feminist project. This debate cannot be analysed in detail here, but I do want to point out some issues that emerged from this debate, which might influence our thinking about multiculturalism and feminism.

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The question of subjectivity has regained its prominence in feminist theory. Especially in relation to religion, the terms 'subjectivity', 'agency' and 'false consciousness' have become central in theoretical debates. Some criticise the turn to agency and its consequences. Bracke for example argues that:

> "it is important to investigate the theoretical work that 'agency' performs. A problematic division of labour emerges in those studies on pious women that take a women's studies approach to focus on agency in contrast to mainstream scholarship attending to structural power relations, including women's oppression. Such a division of labour effectively produces an impoverished understanding of agency (…) through evacuating structural constraints and conditions from the very notion of agency (Bracke, 2008, p 62).

Bracke also mentions the work of Asad, who argues that religious agencies are often considered to be 'defective, not the least because they insist on circumstances and reasonings 'outside of their own will' (Bracke, 2008). The work of Mahmood would be another form of such criticism, though her aim is to rethink *the meaning* of the concept of agency.

I believe that such 'rethinking' of the meaning of subjectivity is highly important for my project on multiculturalism and feminism. I agree with Mahmood that feminists need more open analytical tools in order to research these topics. However, I also think that, besides opening up the concept, the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism would benefit from a conception of subjectivity that combines a certain form of openness with a road to change. I believe that the work of Rosi Braidotti provides us with such a combination (Braidotti, 2008). While arguing that normative secularism is too closely connected to islamophobia, she calls for a more nuanced analysis of the relations between feminism and religion/spirituality. She emphasises the long history of feminism and spirituality (think of the work of Audre Lorde or Luce Irigaray) and the importance of recognising this. The interesting aspect of Braidotti's definition of subjectivity is that she aims to keep subjectivity 'political' without letting it become negative or fixed. This means that her interpretation of subjectivity is not about producing radical counter subjectivities, but rather about daily practices and negotiations within dominant norms:

> "Political subjectivity or agency therefore consists of multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions in and on the world we inhabit for ourselves and our future generations" (Braidotti, 2008, p 16).

By applying these different interpretations of subjectivity, it becomes possible to analyse the lives and experiences of religious women or women from minority cultures differently. Rather than evaluating their activities and choices within the limited framework of subordination versus liberation, more nuanced perspectives can be developed, with attention to daily negotiations or alternative perspectives on equality and liberty.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I discussed the use of experience in feminist research and the recent developments in the discussions about subjectivity in connection to this. In the introduction I quoted Susan Moller Okin, who argued that multicultural policies might harm the interests of minority women and that their opinion in this is often irrelevant and even to be ignored if they were raised in a patriarchal society. I argued that there are two important counterarguments in this context. First of all, there are many women from minority groups who are also fighting for equality (albeit in their own way and from within their communities) who deserve the support of (other) feminists and their experiences and strategies should be included in the debate about multiculturalism and feminism. The other argument against Okin's statements would be that not all women want the freedom and equality that she fights for.

Standpoint theory starts from the idea that one's location determines what one knows, or even what one can know (Harding, 1991). Furthermore, standpoint theorists argue that knowledge from a marginalised point of view could be more valuable than knowledge from a dominant position. In that context, the experience of women can be an important source in generating knowledge. But not all experiences are standpoints. These experiences need to be connected to articulated observations, theory or political ideas. However, this does make it difficult to judge which experiences are proper standpoints and which are 'mere experiences'. Through the concept of situated knowledges, Donna Haraway takes up the main ideas of standpoint theory, but

without the normative statement that the oppressed know better. All knowledge is partial, Haraway argues, and we have to become accountable for this, for example by recognising the lens through which we see. In this view, social positions are not fixed or automatically related to resistance. Haraway plays with identities and makes the concept of situated knowledges more dynamic and less fixed than (most interpretations of) standpoint theory. This leads her to propose 'the modest witness' as knowing subject, who can tell the stories that would otherwise remain invisible.

I argue that both standpoint theory and situated knowledges are important instruments in the debates about multiculturalism and feminism. Where the first provides us with proper arguments to support and incorporate the struggles of minority women, the latter can provide an entry for the narration of alternative stories, such as those from women who do not necessarily want freedom or equality. This is not to say that situated knowledges are to be connected to relativist politics. Rather, it means that they can open our minds to other possibilities and relations to feminism.

This connects to the debates about subjectivity and agency that followed when Saba Mahmood published her *Politics of Piety*, in which she argues that feminists should separate their analytical work from their political ideas and that the concept of agency ought to be redefined. She proposes to take agency out of the subversion versus submission framework and to leave it more open in order to better understand the lives and choices of women who do not fit this structure. In an attempt to rethink the concept of subjectivity, without letting go of the idea of oppositional consciousness, Rosi Braidotti emphasises the importance of daily activism and interventions. These new interpretations of subjectivity, agency and knowledge claims provide us with essential tools to rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, and include the arguments, experiences and strategies of women who fight alternative struggles for equality as well as those of women who do not desire freedom or autonomy. However, this leaves unanswered questions, such as, how open can our definition of agency and subjectivity be without endangering feminist struggle? In the following chapters, this question will be taken up through an analysis of the feminist magazine *Opzij* and an analysis of group interviews with women. These empirically based chapters will provide for a more thorough evaluation of the discourses about multiculturalism and feminism in the popular media (as captured in *Opzij*) and among women involved in grass-roots organisations.

Chapter 5   **The Debate on Multiculturalism and Feminism in the Dutch Media: An Analysis of the Feminist Magazine *Opzij***

Introduction

In the previous chapters the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism has been discussed from various perspectives. In chapters 2 and 3, I showed that both multiculturalists and feminists struggle for equality, but that we find various ways of thinking about difference and sameness and their relation to equality both within and between these groups. Interpretations of the boundaries of sameness and difference in relation to equality are essential when we think about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. Does equality mean that we all have the same rights, or should we all have the right to be different? And, if we have the right to be different, how do we transform differences between groups into a 'politics of difference'?

Another important aspect of the debate about multiculturalism and feminism is subjectivity and its relation to power and discourse. In chapter 4, I described how these concepts are related to the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism and in what way they can help us understand the issues at stake. In the popular media, it is often argued that Muslim women are oppressed and need to be liberated. Ayaan Hirsi Ali for example, wrote that Muslim women do not know what is best for them because oppression has become part of their lives and they have accepted it as such. Such remarks raise many questions about possible conceptualisations of agency, subjectivity, liberal freedom and discourse.

In this chapter I will scrutinize three years of coverage in the magazine *Opzij*. The above-mentioned concepts of difference, sameness, equality, subjectivity and discourse will be of much importance throughout this chapter. Moreover, I will undertake an in depth analysis of how the notions of multiculturalism and feminism are interpreted and discussed in *Opz*ij. As will become clear in the following section, *Opzij* is the most longstanding and influential feminist monthly in the Netherlands and it represents the dominant approach to feminism. Furthermore, through its many

interviews with politicians and opinion leaders, it also makes a bridge between feminist views and the broader public debate. Therefore, an analysis of *Opzij* will give important insights into its specific interpretations of feminism and the relation to multiculturalism. This knowledge can subsequently play an important role in the redefinition of the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism. By bringing together the approaches, arguments and statements in *Opzij* with those of the women from the women's organizations (chapter 6), an overview can be taken of the different arguments, perspectives and starting points of these two discourses about the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism. When this information is combined with the theories and experiences of other feminists (described in the previous chapters), we can map out the differences and similarities and work on a redefinition of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, in a positive and constructive manner.

Opzij: a Short Introduction

Opzij is a monthly magazine in the Netherlands in which various issues related to women, emancipation and feminism (such as work, family life and politics) are discussed. The first issue came out in 1972, and was an initiative of two, 'second wave' feminists: Wim Hora Adema and Hedy D'Ancona.[10] It started as a rather radical and activist magazine, but changed over time into a more mainstream feminist magazine. *Opzij* not only produces the monthly magazine, but also organises a yearly emancipation event on the 8th of March, awards a yearly emancipation prize and supports an '*Opzij*-chair' at the Gender Studies Department of the University in Maastricht. The total circulation of the magazine is 85.000 and the readers are mostly well-educated, well-off women, between the ages of 25 - 49. Remarkably, the website does not say anything about the ethnicity of the readers. I would expect the majority of *Opzij* readers to be white and secular, but this goes unstated.

Since September 2008, Margiet van der Linden has been the chief editor of *Opzij*. She is the successor of Cisca Dresselhuys, who held this position from 1981 to 2008.

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[10] The information in this section about the history and readers of *Opzij* comes from the website of the magazine: http://www.opzij.nl

Van der Linden has changed *Opzij* considerably. She states that the most important transformation is that the magazine has become more open to diversity. One of the examples she mentions is the Moroccan-Dutch columnist, Nora Kasrioui, who will write about emancipation of 'allochtonous' girls. This chapter does not cover these changes in *Opzij*; the sample for my analysis came from the years 2004 - 2007 when Cisca Dresselhuys was still the chief editor. It is important to gain more knowledge about the different discourses on multiculturalism and feminism in the years that these issues were at the top of the political agenda*,* and these 'earlier years' cover an important strand in the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism that needs to be investigated further, and taken into account in a redefinition of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism in a more nuanced, dynamic and positive manner.

In the years that Cisca Dresselhuys was chief editor of *Opzij*, she was an important, well-known figure who represented the magazine in many public discussions. She also reached headlines regularly with her often explicit and controversial statements. One of the most famous of these is the previously mentioned remark she made in the daily newspaper *de Volkskrant*[11]

> "In a coffee house I don't endure sexism; circumcision is a taboo for me and editors with a headscarf are not welcome at *Opzij*" (Dresselhuys, 2001, cited in: Van Gelder and Schottelndreier, 2001)[12].

On its website, *Opzij* defines feminism as a diverse political and social movement and philosophy that criticises the unequal power relations between men and women and aims to break through traditional relations between - and positions of - men and women. The editors also argue that feminism has already achieved a lot; women get more opportunities and motherhood is not considered their only destiny anymore. Nevertheless, they say, this does not mean that the emancipation of women is 'finished'. They especially mention the group of 'allochtonous' women, who are still being discriminated against, from within their culture or religion. The editors argue

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[11] See chapter 1 for a discussion of this quote.
[12] Original text: "In het koffiehuis verdraag ik geen seksisme, vrouwenbesnijdenis is bij mij taboe en redactrices met een hoofddoek komen er bij *Opzij* niet in."

that because of the growing number of (mostly) Muslim women who now struggle for equality, a Third Wave[13] of feminism is rising. Finally, the website of *Opzij* emphasises that only 'allochtonous'[14] women need emancipation, also 'autochtonous' women still experience discrimination on the basis of their gender.

Sample

The material I used to analyse *Opzij,* covers a period of time in which the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism was a much discussed subject: July 2004 - July 2007. It includes very important moments related to the topic of this research, such as: the first broadcast (on Dutch national television) of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's film *Submission* (August 2004); the murder of the director of this film, Theo van Gogh (November 2004), and the case around the passport of Ali and her departure to the USA (May 2006). As I explained in chapter 1, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is generally seen as the dominant factor in the Dutch debates about multiculturalism and feminism (or gender equality), so her input and these events are also of great importance for this project.

In order to find all articles in *Opzij* (from July 2004 - July 2007)[15] that deal with multiculturalism, I chose a combination of search terms that refer both to the issue in general (multiculturalism, religion, integration, 'allochtonous' and traditions) and to specific events or themes that have been important in the Dutch debates about multiculturalism (Islam, burqa, Muslim women and Ayaan Hirsi Ali).[16] This resulted in a total of 164 articles, of which 56 were actually relevant to this research project. Articles were regarded as irrelevant if they only mentioned one of the search terms in

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[13] The history of feminism is often described in waves. The First Wave took place at the end of the 19th century and dealt mostly with basic legal issues, such as suffrage. The Second Wave was in the 1960s and focussed, among other things, on sexuality and other issues related to the body. Some argue that at this time a third wave is developing. One of the main themes in this wave is supposed to be Islam, but also economic emancipation and sexuality are mentioned in this context. For more information, see for instance: Henry A. 2004. *Not my Mother's Sister: Generational Conflict and Third Wave Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press and Tuin, van der I. 'Jumping Generations: On Second- and Third-Wave Feminist Epistemology'. *Australian Feminist Studies*. Vol. 24. Nr. 59. Pp. 17-31
[14] See footnote 3 for short explanation of this term.
[15] The search was conducted electronically, through the search engine of Lexis Nexis
[16] The exact words I used are (in Dutch): multiculturalisme, religie, integratie, allochtonen, tradities, Islam, Moslima, boerka (and Burqa) and Ayaan (and Hirsi).

passing, and did not actually discuss the subject. In some cases for instance, one of the search terms was only mentioned once in passing in an example. The relevant articles can be divided into four main categories: Meetlat Interviews (interviews by Cisca Dresselhuys with well known men), Columns (by Jolande Withuis and Cisca Dresselhuys), (group) interviews and main articles (written by the editors, mostly about current affairs). Finally, there were a number (20) of short articles and news items, which were relevant but were excluded from the analysis because of their short length and lack of argumentation. This brings the total of articles for the analysis to 36.

Method of Analysis

The main aim of this research is to analyse different discourses on multiculturalism and feminism and to develop a nuanced, dynamic and positive interpretation of the relationship between these concepts. For this chapter the main approach will be critical discourse analysis (CDA). However, in order to get a broader insight into the debates about these issues, I will combine this approach with an argumentation analysis. This latter method provides us with tools to better understand the reasoning behind certain standpoints in discussions. Questions that can be asked with the use of argumentation analysis are for example: what argument does an author use to defend his/her statement, what assumptions lie beneath these arguments and is the general argument coherent? In other words, this approach is very useful for getting a better understanding of the content of the disagreements in the debates. However, it does not tell us much about the context of the texts or the relations between texts. In other words, a study of the argumentation in certain articles does not help us to answer questions like: who is participating in the debate and who is being excluded, and are there any rules that prescribe a certain way of speaking? For such a broader analysis of the debates, I will make use of critical discourse analysis (CDA), following especially the work of Norman Fairclough.

Generally, we can call a combination of texts and images 'a discourse'. But the term discourse is a highly disputed one and can be used in many different ways. In the introduction of *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*, Wetherell, Taylor and Yates mention two other possible definitions of discourse: 'the use of language' or

'meaning-making' (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001, p 3). In this research, I will apply the definition that Norman Fairclough uses in *Language and Power*: "language as social practice determined by social structures" (Fairclough, 2001, p 14). An important point to note here is that discourse has effects upon social structures, as well as being determined by them (Fairclough, 2001, p 14). I have chosen to focus on the work of Norman Fairclough regarding CDA because his work largely corresponded to my aims for this part of the analysis. The main reason for this is that power and power relations are central in his work. Fairclough has a background in linguistics but developed an approach to discourse, which is also useful for social scientists and philosophers. His main aim is to:

> "help correct a widespread underestimation of the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power" (Fairclough, 2001, p 1).

Social relations, he argues, are for a large part determined by linguistics, and language is not just a tool we use to express social processes, but part of these processes themselves.

Fairclough distinguishes two different forms of power related to discourse: power *in* discourse and power *behind* discourse (Fairclough, 2001, p 38-9). The first refers to the fact that powerful participants of discourse can control and constrain less powerful participants. This can be done on three different levels: content (what is or can be said), relations (the social relations people enter into in discourse) and subjects (the subject positions people can occupy). Very often, especially in the mass media, this power is hidden. Power behind discourse, on the other hand, refers to the social order of discourse; this includes things such as access. Fairclough refers in this context to the power of the myth of free speech. Cultural goods, such as free speech, are not equally distributed. In principle, he argues, everyone is free to obtain them, but in practice they are mostly in the hands of people from the 'dominant bloc' (Fairclough, 2001, p 53). The power in and behind discourse is not just dominating or oppressive power; there is also struggle over this power and resistance to the dominant forces.

Another aspect of power and language that Fairclough discusses is the relationship between common sense, ideology and discourse. This part of critical discourse analysis is an important link to argumentation analysis, where hidden arguments or

statements without arguments are also central for the evaluation of a text. Fairclough uses a definition of common sense, which is closely related to Gramsci's description of ideology. (Ideological) common sense according to Fairclough is thus: "an implicit philosophy in the practical activities of social life, back grounded and taken for granted" (Fairclough, 2001, p 70). Usually, he argues, common sense is used to sustain unequal power relations in an invisible way. For example the myth of free speech disguises and helps to maintain the actual barriers to free speech (Fairclough, 2001, p 70). Ideologies or ideas usually become 'common sense' by a process of naturalization (Fairclough, 2001, p 76). Through such a process, an ideology loses its ideological image and becomes standard, or common sense. This is important for the analysis of this project's discourses: are there any standpoints or arguments that seem common sense, but are in fact ideological?

An important dimension of ideological common sense is 'meaning giving' (Fairclough, 2001, p 76). Most words have different meanings, and these meanings often correspond to different ideological positions. When one of these meanings becomes the standard definition, this can be a mere coincidence, but it can also be a result of ideological struggle. Another point that Fairclough mentions about common sense is its relation to subjects and subject positions in discourses (Fairclough, 2001, p 85). Subject positions in discourses can also be naturalised. In medical discourse for instance, people who receive medical care are often called patients (Fairclough, 2001, p 85). But this term is usually interpreted as a sick person, often in pain, who needs help. A woman giving birth is called a patient, but does not really fit this term. In those cases more neutral terms would be more appropriate.

Where CDA focuses very much on the structures and power relations in and behind discourse, argumentation analysis deals with the content of discussions, and centres on disagreements and the arguments people use to solve these. In general, argumentation analysis aims to first scrutinise the manner in which statements are structured within a discursive text and secondly to assess their soundness (Liakopoulos, 2000, p 153). Arguments are generally considered to be verbal (either written or oral), social (arguments are directed towards others) and rational (they aim to convince a reasonable critic) (van Eemeren, Grootendortst and Snoeck Henkemans, 2002, p xi). Furthermore, the concept of argumentation refers to arguments both as a product and as a process (van Eemeren, Grootendortst and Snoeck Henkemans, 2002, p xii). This last point means that an argumentation analyst not only looks at

arguments as written down in a certain text (product), but is also interested in the argument as part of a communication and interaction process.

Originally, the study of argumentation focussed on the formal aspects of argumentation. Aristotle for example, approached argumentation from a purely logical perspective (Liakopoulos, 2000, p 153). Such a formal evaluation of arguments does not seem to be appropriate for the analysis of current discourses. Mass media have changed the rules and possibilities of public discourses completely and require new tools of analysis. This does not mean that analyses of arguments have become irrelevant; with some adjustments to the approach argumentation analysis is still an important tool.

In the pragma-dialectical approach of van Eemeren and Grootendorst, argumentation is defined as a way of resolving differences of opinion by verbal means (van Eemeren, Grootendortst and Snoeck Henkemans, 2002, p ix). This means that they analyse argumentation as:

> "an explicit or (in case of a monologue) implicit discussion between two parties that have different positions with respect to the same proposition" (van Eemeren, Grootendortst and Snoeck Henkemans, 2002, p ix).

Their analysis is not (only) focussed on the formal or logical structure of arguments, but also on situational and verbal aspects of the argumentation. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst evaluate arguments on two aspects: logical and pragmatic consistency. If two statements contradict each other, the argument is logically inconsistent. But, as I mentioned earlier, the authors also find it important to give attention to the more practical elements of argumentation. In this context they also evaluate arguments on the basis of pragmatic consistency. In some cases an argument might be logically sound, but practically impossible. For example, they argue, you cannot promise that you will pick someone up by car, and also say you don't have a driver's license.

In the following paragraphs I will present my approach towards the *Opzij* sample and make clear how I have combined insights from both CDA and argumentation analysis for my analysis of *Opzij*. The investigation started with two main questions inspired by CDA, and the sample is further analysed by taking into account the content and assumptions behind the argumentation.

Discourse Structures in Opzij

After a preliminary analysis of the sample, it turned out that the articles in *Opzij* could not simply be divided on the basis of their arguments (positive or negative) regarding the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. In fact, only a small part of the sample explicitly discussed this relationship and presented an either pessimistic or optimistic argument about it. In the other articles, only a specific facet of this relationship was focussed upon. This focus was often a dilemma, a problem to be resolved or something that needed to be changed, according to the author or interviewee. Definitions of multiculturalism, feminism and their relationship were taken for granted and hence not further investigated. In one article for instance, the author asks herself the question: why do (Muslim) women decide to wear a headscarf? (Bochhah, 2006). So even though the author does not write about the actual relation between multiculturalism and feminism, she does refer to the connections between religion and gender. Since viewpoints on the latter are strongly connected to the former, the author is implicitly engaging in the debate about multiculturalism and feminism. Explicitly however, the focus of the article (and hence the argument) is the decision of young Muslim women to wear or not wear a headscarf.

The fact that most articles did not have an explicit argument on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism (but rather make a statement about a related topic, based on a certain, often not explained, interpretation of this relationship) was not only an important first conclusion of the preliminary investigation of *Opzij*, but also a complicating factor for further analysis of the sample. Hence, not only explicit arguments about multiculturalism and feminism turned out to be relevant for the research, but also much more implicit ones. In that context, argumentation analysis theory and its methods to investigate assumptions were very important for my approach towards the sample. But, as I explain in the previous section, I also wanted to include power relations in my analysis. In order to get a better understanding of the *Opzij* discourse on multiculturalism and feminism, I decided to focus on 2 basic questions from discourse analysis. First of all, who or what is the object of the article/statement? Or, to make it more concrete: who or what needs change according to the author or interviewee? This question was followed with two sub-questions: who

or what is considered as the problem and who or what as the solution? The answers to these questions result in a rich overview of the arguments in *Opzij* articles when it comes to multiculturalism and feminism. These results are much more detailed than would have been the case if I had only looked at the basic evaluation of this relation as either positive or negative. Instead we get to know who or what is focussed upon in the articles and what are considered to be the problems and/or solutions. This way, the different interpretations and assumptions related to the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism can be analysed and eventually, with the use of this knowledge, a more constructive reading of the connections between these concepts can be theorized and discussed.

After analysing the sample with the first question, 6 categories or answers could be distinguished: feminism (or feminists), Muslim women, Islam (or Muslim traditions), Dutch society (or government), the style of debating and finally the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. As I mentioned above, all 6 categories refer to an aspect of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, which was focussed upon in a particular article (or part of an article). Of course one could think of possible other facets of this relationship but they could not be found as such in *Opzij*. The last two categories (style of debate and relationship between multiculturalism and feminism) were discussed in more articles than the other ones, but most of the categories were discussed in approximately equal amounts. Remarkable is that all comments on the category 'Dutch society' come from the male interviewees from the Meetlat series. None of the other *Opzij* articles contained any statements about how Dutch society should deal with multiculturalism. Another issue that could be noted at this point is that most remarks about the 'style of debating' were related to (the work of) particular people; especially Ayaan Hirsi Ali was mentioned often.

In the first category feminism is the main theme. The main question addressed within this group of articles is: *how* should feminism deal with difference related issue? The second category focuses upon Muslim women. Articles in this section do not try to answer a similar question to those in the first, but rather discuss the issue: *why* do Muslim women make certain decisions with regard to religion/culture? The clear difference in focus between these two categories will be analysed later in this chapter. The third category is Islam/Muslim traditions. Articles in this section contain a statement about this religion or its religious traditions and use gender equality or

feminism as an argument to back this. Articles in the fourth group centre on the question: how should Dutch society deal with the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism? In these articles, very often a particular interpretation of this relation is already assumed and used for another argument. Articles on the 'style of debating' fall into the fifth category. These usually contain remarks about either the harshness or the weakness of certain debates, strategies or statements. Finally, in the last group the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism itself is focused upon. This category is divided between positive and negative arguments about the connection between these concepts.

At first glance it might be difficult to recognise the different categories mentioned above, for instance the distinction between an argument on 'Islam' and one on 'the relationship between multiculturalism and gender equality'. Theoretically however, there is a clear difference. The first statement only refers to Islam (as for instance traditional, backwards, radical, et cetera), and uses women or gender equality as a basis for this:

1. Islam is …… because of the gender relations

The second type of statement refers to the relationship between multiculturalism and gender equality as good or bad and then uses certain traditions, for instance, as arguments:

2. Multiculturalism is good/bad for gender equality because …….

Hence, the second category tries to argue in favour of, or against, the so called tension between gender equality and multiculturalism, while the first already assumes certain gender patterns and makes another statement on the basis of that.

The analysis of the 6 categories of *Opzij* articles/statements resulted in a broad range of conclusions on how the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism is discussed in this magazine. Most arguments and disagreements were related to the authors' interpretations of the main concepts of this research: feminism and multiculturalism. Furthermore, there was a considerable amount of statements found on discourse itself. In order to make it possible to both critically analyse these conclusions and keep the chapter readable, I have chosen to divide the chapter into

three main sections: the terms of the debate, feminism and emancipation and finally multicultural issues. This structure also makes the results more comparable with those in the next chapter. It does mean however, that the descriptions of the first results (problems and solutions that were put forward in the 6 categories of articles) can only be found in the chapter in a summarized form.

Use of Main Terms in the Public Debate

In chapter 2, I described what is generally understood by multiculturalism: an ideology that values the existence of different cultures in a certain society and aims to protect these by, for instance, proposing laws to safeguard their languages or traditions. I also explained that there are many possible interpretations of multiculturalism; for instance liberal or critical multiculturalism (see chapter 2 for a discussion of several different forms of multiculturalism). Furthermore, the different terms multicultural*ism* and multicultur*al* are often confused. While the latter is only descriptive, as it refers to societies with various cultures, the former is the normative response to that fact and aims to respect and protect these different cultures.

If multiculturalism is about protecting (minority) cultural groups, how then could the sample mostly refer to only one particular group and one which is not only defined as a cultural collective, but also as religious? The public debates in the Netherlands at this moment about minorities and the recognition of difference are mostly about Muslims. In that sense, this sample follows the broader development.[17] I have already discussed this in the previous chapters; here I would like to repeat two main issues connected to equating multicultural issues with Islam-related issues. Note that this means not only culture and religion being very often confused, but also that the whole debate about cultural recognition has been reduced to just one particular group. Moreover, the majority is almost completely excluded from most debates, as if they do not play a role. Two important issues that are connected to this are: (1) a transformation in the discourse about migrants: from guest workers to Muslims, and

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[17] Note that in this chapter the analysis reflects the interpretation of multiculturalism in *Opzij* and thus focuses very much on Muslims. In the following chapters, I will look at this restricted definition more critically and explore other interpretations of multiculturalism.

(2) a (re)new(ed) definition of the Dutch identity, very much related to secularism.[18] (See chapter 2 for a more detailed description of these developments.)

For the *Opzij* sample I used general terms such as 'multiculturalism', 'culture' and 'religion', but also specific ones like 'Muslim women', 'Ayaan Hirsi Ali' and 'the headscarf'. I did this to capture both the articles that are actually about multiculturalism and cultural recognition, and also the more particular articles. This way, I tried to balance the different interpretations of and discussions about multiculturalism, cultural recognition and integration. As a researcher one does not want to confuse multiculturalism, foreign cultures, and religion etc, but at the same time one aims to capture the debate as it is, with all its problematic assumptions. This means that in the rest of the chapter, I will sometimes refer to multiculturalism, culture and/or religion simultaneously. This is not because I think these concepts have the same or a similar meaning, but because the authors and interviewees in *Opzij* use the terms together, or because they can be placed in the context of the broader public debates on these issues where the terms are also mixed up. In the next chapter (with focus groups interviews) I will focus on these different terms more accurately and describe and analyse how the women from women's organisations define and experience them.

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[18] See chapter 2 for a more elaborate discussion of these issues. Also the following articles contain interesting analyses of the changing discourse in the Netherlands: R. Peters. 2006. ''A dangerous book': Dutch Public Intellectuals and the Koran'. RSCAS Working Paper No 2006/39. European University Institute. Also online available: http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/r.peters/bestanden/Dangerous%20book.pdf and M. Bruinessen. 2006. 'After van Gogh: Roots of Anti-Muslim Rage'. Paper Presented at the seventh Mediterranean Social and Political Research Meeting, Florence, Italy. Also online available: http://www.let.uu.nl/~martin.vanbruinessen/personal/publications/ws10-2006MM-van-Bruinessen.pdf

Terms of the Debate: Discourse on Discourse

At the beginning of this chapter, I explained how important it is to look at the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism from a discursive perspective. We have to investigate the *way* people discuss the relationship between multiculturalism and gender equality and emancipation: which issues are discussed and which are not, and who is talking and whom are they talking about? Take for instance the Dutch words 'allochtoon' and 'autochtoon'. These apparently neutral terms officially refer to the 'country of origin' of a person. Implicitly however, they are closely connected to race or skin colour (Wekker, 2005, p. 4). It is still difficult to imagine a black person as an 'autochtoon', even though there are more and more people of colour born in the Netherlands for whom this is their 'country of origin'. For that reason, I also analyse and compare different discourses on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism in this thesis. For this chapter this means that I scrutinize who is talking about whom in *Opzij*. The chapter is mainly structured by two main questions: who/what is presented as a problem and what solutions are presented?

Various difficulties arise when one aims to conduct a discursive analysis, most importantly the position of the researcher. I do not consider myself to be outside of discourse and am not claiming to make an objective or outsider's analysis of the articles in *Opzij*. However, by committing to asking these two basic questions, I do aim to produce a more structural understanding of the debates on multiculturalism and feminism in our society. And by asking these questions, I came to an interesting (first) conclusion: the authors and interviewees in *Opzij* were themselves also making discursive analyses. There were many statements to be found in the articles about the style of debating. People mostly argued that this mode was either too soft or too harsh. Interestingly, this discursive perspective on the debates about multiculturalism has now also become part of the debate itself. With this I mean that participants of a certain discourse mention the way people discuss culture-related issues as an argument for their statement.

This conclusion closely relates to the work of Baukje Prins on the Dutch debates on multiculturalism. Prins argues that the harsh discussions of multiculturalism

demonstrate that a new type of public discourse has arisen in the Netherlands since the 1990s (Prins, 2004). According to her, this 'neo-realist' genre can be recognised by four main characteristics (Prins, 2002). First of all, authors or speakers in this discourse present themselves as persons 'who dare to face the facts'; secondly, neo-realists believe to be representing 'normal people'. A third characteristic of the genre is the belief that having 'a sense of reality' is an important part of Dutch national identity and finally, neo-realists can be recognised by their aversion to the political left. In general, gender equality and women's issues are important elements in neo-realist discourses.

I find these characteristics very typical of the recent debates in the Netherlands on multiculturalism and Islam and have found similar arguments in *Opzij*. However, the opposite arguments were also there; some people stated for example that more respect is needed in these debates. In the following section I will present both types of arguments and finally discuss a specific subject of discursive arguments: Ayaan Hirsi Ali. In many cases, authors or interviewees did not mention any general aspects of the discourse, but explicitly evaluated the approache of Ali. Note that Ayaan Hirsi Ali is the only individual who is the subject of such enquiry, regarding the approach she takes.

'Dare to Face the Facts'

The clearest example of 'neo-realism' in *Opzij* can be found in the conversation of Cisca Dresselhuys with politician Geert Wilders. When the chief editor confronts Wilders with his remark on women who wear headscarves ("I could eat them raw"[19]), he replies:

> "That is of course metaphorical language. Just as when I said that the Netherlands are hit by a tsunami of Islamisation. But I do mean it and I would say the same thing again tomorrow. (…) I wouldn't physically attack these women. But in the indolent political The Hague you have to say things

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[19] Original text: "Die lust ik rauw"

sharply, otherwise you will not get a discussion. In that case nobody would have listened and I couldn't have made my point, believe me. It would have disappeared in the big grey mincing machine."[20] (Wilders, 2007, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2007)

Hence, according to Wilders you have to be very clear and provocative if you want to be heard. This fits perfectly with Prins' remarks about neo-realists and their drive to 'say what is really happening' and to 'face the facts'. Furthermore, because of his particular use of language he clearly provokes people. Not only does his statement about women with headscarves not show much respect for these women, or open up any dialogue about this issue, he explicitly works on people's emotions. By comparing Islam to the tsunami of 2004, he evokes fear among people. We can all remember the horrible images of the tsunami, and can easily imagine how destructive another 'tsunami' could be.

Fiction writer and columnist Nahed Selim also believes that we should be more direct in the debates about multiculturalism, but she argues from a different perspective than Geert Wilders. Selim is a Muslim woman, originally from Egypt, who is known for her critical views on Islam and certain Muslim traditions. She refers to the title of her new book (*staying silent is the same as betrayal*) when she says:

"I feel abandoned by both the majority of the Dutch Muslims, who do not speak about intolerable customs in their culture, and by left wing people such as Geert Mak. That he mentioned Ayaan in one breath with Goebbels is inadmissible. Left wing people have criticised everything themselves in the sixties and seventies, also their own faith, but if Ayaan and I criticise Islam, they stop us by saying: it used to be the same with us. As if that means that we can't criticise it anymore."[21] (Selim, 2006)

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[20] Orignal text: "Dat is natuurlijk beeldspraak. Net zoals toen ik zei dat er een tsunami van islamisering over Nederland komt. Maar ik meen het wel, en zou het morgen weer precies hetzelfde zeggen. Ik zal die vrouwen heus niet te lijf gaan. In het gezapige politieke Den Haag moet je de dingen scherp zeggen, anders krijg je geen discussie. Dan had niemand ernaar geluisterd en was het punt nooit gemaakt, geloof mij. Dan was het verdwenen in de grote, grijze gehaktmolen."
[21] Orignal text: "Ik voel me niet alleen in de steek gelaten door de meerderheid van de Nederlandse moslimbevolking, die zwijgt over ontoelaatbare praktijken binnen hun cultuur, maar ook door linkse mensen als Geert Mak. Dat hij Ayaan in een adem met Goebbels heeft genoemd, is ontoelaatbaar.

This rich quote refers to many of the subjects of this chapter, such as solidarity with Muslim women (see the next section). But above all, it makes a statement about what can be said and what cannot be said in the view of Selim. Contrary to Geert Wilders however, she does not literally say that we should be more direct in our discussions and she also seems less provocative than Wilders. But what the two writers share is an explicit (neo-realist) purpose to 'face the facts'. They both believe that certain things are obscured in the Netherlands and should be revealed. Furthermore, Selim adds Prins' fourth characteristic of neo-realism to the discussion: critique of 'the Left'. She disapproves of certain left-wing standpoints related to cultural and religious issues and regrets left-wing politicians' attitudes when it comes to these themes. She makes her argument more explicit in the following quote, in which she criticises socialist feminist Anja Meulenbelt, who wrote on her web log that Selim "polarizes and splits". According to Selim:

> "You polarize when you don't fight customs in Muslim culture that are unfriendly to women. (…). I do not polarize, the Qu'ran does. Look at what it says about Jews, Christians and non-believers. It is about time to distance ourselves from that. Just as from the sexist texts in it. Feminist Muslim women such as Amina Wadud and Rifat Hassan have tried to explain these in a women friendly way, but in reality that is like fiddling with language."[22] (Selim, 2006)

In the first quote Selim focussed upon the left-wing people who try to stop her from criticising Islam, in this one she pleads for taking a more active stand against women-unfriendly customs and texts in Islam/Qur'an. Again, Selim's words resemble the

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Linkse mensen hebben in de jaren zestig en zeventig zelf alles aan de kaak gesteld, ook hun eigen geloof, maar als Ayaan en ik kritiek op de islam hebben, snoeren ze ons de mond met: bij ons was het vroeger ook zo. Alsof wij daarom geen kritiek meer mogen hebben."

[22] Original text: "Je polariseert juist als je vrouwvijandige praktijken in de moslimcultuur niet bestrijdt. Niet ik polariseer, de Koran polariseert. Kijk maar wat daar allemaal voor nare dingen over joden, christenen en ongelovigen in staan. Het wordt hoog tijd daar afstand van te nemen. Net zoals van de vrouwvijandige teksten erin. Feministische moslima's als Amina Wadud en Rifat Hassan hebben geprobeerd die toch vrouwvriendelijk uit te leggen, maar eigenlijk is dat een beetje sjoemelen met taal."

'dare to face the facts' style of (other) neo-realists. Moreover, her remark about Muslim feminists who try to develop alternative interpretations of the Qur'an is rather provocative. She excludes possible opponents to her argument by dismissing them without any (proper) arguments. This also shows that Selim herself starts from a rather fixed interpretation of what religion is and what the message of the Qur'an is. Hence, those who are imagining other interpretations of what religion means to them, or what the message of the Qur'an could be, are only "fiddling with language".

One might expect neo-realists to be white, middle-aged and conservative men. But here and later, we can also recognise aspects of this discourse in the words of Nahed Selim and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Not only are these actors in the debates women, but they were also born into Muslim families. This raises important questions in relation to finding more nuanced ways of thinking about Islam and women specifically, or feminism and multiculturalism in general. In the article *Feminism, Democracy and empire*, Saba Mahmood discusses the autobiographical genre that has become very popular and deals with the so-called problematic relation between Islam and women's rights. Not only does Mahmood expose the symbiotic relationship between the authors in this genre and conservative political parties, she also shows how these books legitimise Islamophobia in Europe and the US by making use of an Orientalist discourse. Orientalism, according to Mahmood, "reproduces and confirms the impressions of its Western audience, offering no surprises or challenges to what they think they already know" (Mahmood, 2008, p 93). In my view, Mahmood explains with this article how important it is to make nuanced analyses of these issues and to take into account various power relations. Among other things this means that we need to engage with and respect certain forms of religiosity and not reject these as false consciousness (Mahmood, 2008). At the same time, we need to let go of essentialist interpretations of 'The Muslim woman's voice', and think from the concept of situated knowledge's as I described in chapter 4. This way we can better understand remarks such as those from Nahed Selim. Even though at first sight her argument seems to be a marginalised one, a more thorough analysis of the power relations at stake combined with an evaluation of her standpoint in the debate (rather than thinking from her identity), shows that Selim's statements do not deviate from the dominant discourse.

I would like to conclude that the neo-realist discourse, as described by Baukje Prins, is apparent in the articles of *Opzij*. Especially, the argument of 'daring to face

the facts' returns several times. Note that this is not just a statement about the mode of discourse, but is also used to dismiss opponents. The disagreement is framed as a situation in which one side 'dares to face the facts' while the other is 'blinded', for example by faith in multiculturalism or respect for other cultures/religions. This frame makes it almost impossible to actually discuss the content of the disagreements at stake.

An Alliance of Gentle Powers

Only one person in *Opzij* (besides the comments on Ayaan Hirsi Ali's style) explicitly pleads for more respect and understanding in the discussions about integration and multiculturalism:

> "I am in favour of an alliance of gentle powers, a vote against the politics of fear and polarisation. My field, feminist ethics, can contribute to this. In this field, it is argued that dialogue and communication will get us further than the current polarisation of positions. I don't care that this sounds old fashioned, also in the field of emancipation you achieve more by keep talking to each other and really listening to others."[23] (Sevenhuijsen, 2005, cited in: Dresselhuys 2005b)

This quote shows that Sevenhuijsen opposes the harsh style of debating in the Netherlands when it comes to the subject of emancipation and integration. Contrary to the previous authors, she believes that 'saying out loud what is really happening', or as Ayaan Hirsi Ali once called it, 'the right to offend'[24] is not an efficient approach when it comes to issues related to culture and religion.

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23 Orignal text: "Ik ben juist in deze tijd voor een verbond van de zachte krachten, tegenstem tegen de politiek van angst en polarisering. Mijn vakgebied, de feministische ethiek, kan daaraan een bijdrage leveren. Die stelt dat je met dialoog en communicatie veel verder komt dan met de huidige verharding van standpunten. Het kan me geen bal schelen dat dat ouderwets klinkt, ook op emancipatiegebied bereik je het meest door in gesprek te blijven en echt naar elkaar te luisteren."

[24] Ali A. Hirsi. 2006. *The Right to Offend*. Unpublished speech, Berlin, 9 February, see for full text e.g.: http://www.nrc.nl/opinie/article215732.ece

Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Criticism and Support

Among the many remarks in *Opzij* that especially refer to Ayaan Hirsi Ali and her approach we can find various examples of people who find her too harsh and of those who appreciate her because of her approach. Moreover, there are also numerous remarks in *Opzij* on her strategy in general.

Two examples of people who support Ayaan Hirsi Ali and agree with her approaches are Hafid Bouazza and Jolande Withuis. In the following quotes we can find several arguments that correspond to those mentioned above about the style of the debates. Hafid Bouazza argues for instance:

> "I support Ayaan and her approach a hundred percent, because I believe that the injustice she wants to fight is many times more important and bigger than the hurt feelings of a segment of the population or the honour of a religion. That the style she chooses would not be good, is in my view an empty discussion that ignores the true issues we are talking about: the liberation of Muslim women."[25] (Bouazza, 2004, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2004b)

Even though he does not say it literally, Bouazza's argument is connected to the 'daring to face the facts' category: we should stop taking into account the feelings of migrant groups and start focussing on what is 'actually happening' in our society. But his remarks are also related to another issue: the relationship between language and pain, or the ability of language to hurt people. In *Excitable speech*, Judith Butler argues not only that language can indeed create wounds, but also links this to current debates on freedom of expression. In the foreword of the Dutch translation of her book, she argues that we should not make Theo van Gogh or his murder a symbol of a senseless cultural war between people who defend 'freedom' and those who defend 'religion' (Butler, 2007). According to Butler, such a cultural war much too easily

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[25] Original text: "Ik sta voor honderd procent achter Ayaan en haar aanpak, omdat ik vind dat het onrecht dat zij wil bestrijden vele malen belangrijker en groter is dan de gekwetstheid van een bevolkingsgroep of de eer van een religie. Dat de vorm die zij kiest soms niet goed zou zijn, vind ik een loze discussie die voorbijgaat aan waar het werkelijk om gaat: de bevrijding van de moslimvrouw."

results in a war between those people who want others to adjust to certain values and those who desire a diverse Europe. If we take the first route, and interpret 'freedom' in such a limited way, 'freedom' runs the risk of becoming an instrument for the oppression of minorities. Through Butler's remarks, we can connect Bouazza's quote to two issues: the ability of language to hurt and the relationship between freedom (of expression) and the rights of certain (religious) minority groups. Both play an important role in the discussions about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. I will go into these themes in more detail in my concluding chapter. Finally, it is too often assumed that only religious people 'get hurt' by certain language. This has become a very important argument in the discussions about Islam, and needs further investigation. Among other things for example, we need more research on the sensibilities of secular people and how they influence social norms in society.

Jolande Withuis also talks about sensibilities, but she does not mention the pain of religious people. Instead her focus is more on those who defend certain cultural groups:

> "Hirsi Ali [has] accomplished more than them [her colleagues, EM], with their long years of trying to hold things together. Because, let's be honest: a few years ago it was simply a taboo to even whisper that Muslim women were maybe a tiny bit oppressed. After all, they were very happy in 'their culture'."[26] (Withuis, 2004)

These rather cynical words support Ayaan Hirsi Ali and criticise those who, for example, argue that Islam and feminism are compatible. Just as in the quotes above, Withuis' dismisses her opponents completely. Judging from this quote, there does not seem much space for dialogue. I will return to the issue (supporting Muslim women) in the next section (on feminism).

According to these authors, Ali's approach might be provocative, but it is certainly also efficient and legitimate. There were also articles in *Opzij* in which the opposite

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[26] Original text: "Hirsi Ali [heeft] in korte tijd meer bereikt dan zij [haar collega's, EM] met hun jarenlang pappen en nat houden. Want laten we wel wezen: een paar jaar geleden was het simpelweg taboe ook maar te fluisteren dat wellicht moslimvrouwen heel misschien een heel klein beetje werden onderdrukt. Die waren immers dolgelukkig in 'hun cultuur'."

was argued. One of the most explicit quotes came from writer and historian Geert Mak. He wrote a booklet about the days after the death of Theo van Gogh in 2005 (Dresselhuys, 2005c)[27]. This small book also contained serious criticism of Ayaan Hirsi Ali's position in these debates in general and the film *Submission* specifically. In an interview with this historian, Cisca Dresselhuys asks him to reflect on this:

> "I was very angry with her, indeed because of Submission. I find that film a dangerous provocation. Of course I don't compare her with Goebbels. I compare certain techniques of propaganda in film with each other. Whether I would keep that comparison in the reprint of my leaflet? The politician in me says: no. The stubborn historian says: yes. A man can compare different techniques, can't he? I would try to find other examples too now."[28] (Mak, 2005, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2005c)

Interestingly, Mak criticises Ali's approach for being too provocative by criticising her work in a rather provocative way: comparing her film techniques with those of an important WWII Nazi propagandist. When Dresselhuys asks him what he thinks of Ayaan personally he is more careful and says that she is a "forerunner who runs too fast"; if she really wants to achieve something she should start building bridges with her target groups, according to this historian (Mak, 2005, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2005c).[29] Mak believes that Ali should get more involved with her target group and thus listen more to what they want and need.

The final remarks on Ayaan Hirsi Ali that I would like to put forward here come from a group interview with some of her 'European colleagues'. All these women fight oppressive customs in Islam, but their styles and approaches differ tremendously. One of them explicitly mentions Ali's style:

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[27] See chapter 1 for more information on his argument.
[28] Original text: "Ik was woedend op haar, inderdaad vanwege Submission. Die film vond ik een linke provocatie. Natuurlijk vergelijk ik haar niet met Goebbels, ga weg, zeg. Maar ik vergelijk bepaalde technieken van propaganda bedrijven via film met elkaar. Of ik die vergelijking zou handhaven in een herdruk van mijn pamphlet? De politicus in mij zegt: nee. Het koppige historische mannetje zegt: ja. Een mens mag bepaalde technieken toch we met elkaar vergelijken? Ik zou nu wel naar meer andere voorbeelden zoeken."
29 Orignal text: "Als ze daar nog iets wil betekenen, moet ze als de sodemieter bruggen slaan naar haar echte achterban: de moslimvrouwen. Ze is een voorloper, maar ze holt te ver vooruit."

"The way the Dutch parliamentarian directs the integration discussions, is too provocative (…) 'She only evokes resistance; Muslim women do not feel addressed by her. Hirsi Ali makes the right diagnoses, but would accomplish more by talking about reformation'."[30] (Kelek, cited in: Kraaijo, van Vliet, and Wiemand, 2005)

Note, that like Geert Mak, Kelek connects the provocative style to the lack of contact with Muslim women and non-efficiency. This specific aspect of the relationship between multiculturalism will be focussed upon in the next section. At this point I want to point out that Ayaan Hirsi Ali is constantly evaluated on the basis of her approach and style. Again, it shows the importance of investigating discourse and the way people discuss certain issues. Ayaan Hirsi Ali is not only an actor in the debates about Islam and emancipation, but also an object. People very explicitly talked about her and her approach, often with extreme words. I will come back to this in the next chapter; in the focus groups Ayaan Hirsi Ali also formed an important part of the conversations.

To conclude, I would like to point out that this combination of quotes shows that the *way* we discuss multiculturalism and feminism is a very important aspect of the debate itself. In other words, the style of the actors in the debate is often used as an argument and hence becomes more and more mingled with the content, or with what can and cannot be said. In many articles and interviews it is mentioned that people either are too provocative or not direct enough. Very often too, these statements are used to back up or criticise certain arguments or strategies. It is important to note that such framings of the debate exclude certain speakers, not because of their arguments, but because of their style.

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[30] Original text: "De manier waarop de Nederlandse parlementarier het integratiedebat voert, vindt Kelek te provocerend. 'Ze roept alleen maar weerstand op, moslimvrouwen voelen zich door haar niet aangesproken. Hirsi Ali stelt een juiste diagnose, maar zou meer bereiken door over hervormingen te spreken."

Feminism, Female Agency and Experience

This section will focus on the interpretations and conceptualisations of feminism and emancipation in *Opzij* articles. How does this magazine define feminism and what standpoints are considered to be feminist and which not? In the following, I will present an analysis of articles about feminism and Muslim women. These two sets of articles are discussed here because they both argue for or against a certain interpretation of what feminism is or when women are emancipated. One could argue that the main question in this section is: who is included in the feminist 'us' and who is excluded from this?

It appeared that the first group of articles on 'feminism' particularly addressed the question: how should feminism deal with difference in general, or multiculturalism and religion specifically? Notice that the question that *Opzij* authors/interviewees discuss here is rather ideological: they are theorizing feminist approaches and strategies. In the second group of articles on Muslim women, however, I did not encounter a similar focus. Instead, when *Opzij* articles discussed 'Muslim women', the main question was: why do these women make certain choices? This means that the articles on feminism share a common goal: theorizing feminism. The articles on Muslim women on the other hand seem to have another aim: understanding Muslim women. This suggests a discrepancy between feminists and Muslim women. Apparently these are two separated groups. The assumption behind this seems to be that feminism is white and secular and that Muslim women are not feminists. This division plays an important role throughout the following analysis.

Another point that needs to be addressed before moving to the further analysis of these articles is the use and abuse of standpoint theories. In my view, one of the main disagreements revolves around the question: who can decide what a feminist standpoint is, or is not? On many occasions, remarks are found that refer either to a lack or to a surplus of contact with certain groups of women. Can feminists develop general ideas about what feminism is, or should they be more open to the experiences and opinions of women? The discussions in this group of articles are directly related to the debates about standpoint theory as described in chapter 4. The essential question in this section is, when we talk about experience, whose experience do we

mean? Those who want to take experiences into account seem to refer to a specific, rather political, interpretation of standpoint theory. They do not propose to ask 'average' women what they think of certain issues, but, for instance, propose to work more closely with Muslim feminists. The opponents of this approach on the other hand, often mention a much more individual interpretation of 'taking women's experiences into account'. Below, I will present the different views of experience and feminist standpoints, followed by an analysis of the statements about solidarity.

Feminist Standpoints

In her two columns around the issue of how feminism should deal with multiculturalism, Jolande Withuis puts forward two main problems related to the 'experience issue'. The first is 'historical' and the second is about current feminists in the field of gender studies.

In 'Strijdbaar en Superieur' ('warrior like and superior') Withuis writes about the struggle of a 'first wave' feminist and shows why feminists should defend their own struggles, instead of asking average women what they want: in 1917, 43.000 Christian women signed the petition 'do not give us the right to vote (Withuis, 2006). Nevertheless, Withuis argues, nobody would now dare to say that feminists at that time should have changed their views on voting. According to Withuis:

> "This historical fact teaches us (…) that religions can change (…); it teaches us that Christianity is not less hostile to women than Islam is. Furthermore, it reminds us that also the pioneers of the first wave sometimes did not get support from the women whose interests they defended."[31] (Withuis, 2006)

Hence, according to Withuis, feminists do not need the approval of all women for their struggles; in some cases they should just fight for what they think is right. The

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[31] Original text: "Dit historisch gegeven leert ons (…) dat religies kunnen veranderen (…); het leert ons tevens dat het christendom niet minder vrouwvijandig was dan de islam. Bovendien herinnert het ons eraan dat ook de pioniersters van de eerste golf soms geen steun kregen van vrouwen wier belangen zij verdedigden."

question that comes to mind here is: when is a female argument a feminist one? Or, which standpoints count as feminist? Withuis argues that feminists do not need the approval of all women, but who says that feminists do? In the debates about, for example, the approach of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, we find the argument that she is not working with any other Muslim women, but nobody talked about approval. It seems that, just as in the previous section, Withuis tries to exclude her opponents from the discussions by referring to extreme arguments. Unfortunately this rules out the option of a possible fruitful debate about standpoint theory.

In 'Meninkjes' ('little opinions') Withuis expands on the issue of 'approval'. The problem, in her view, is that researchers constantly refer to the fact that we should listen to the opinions of Muslim women, instead of criticising certain categories, such as Muslims and non-Muslims. The argument she gives for this statement is that oppressed people are not always open to liberation:

> "If someone argues that 'Muslim women want to wear a headscarf', I not only see the veiled 10 year olds, but also Aafke Komter's *De macht van de vanzelfsprekendheid (The Power of the self evident)*. After this analysis of invisible power differences in marriages, the phrase 'what they want themselves' is an empty slogan. Komter shows that something as simple as 'to want something yourself' does not exist: the least powerful people give shape to their desires through those of the powerful and experience those as their own."[32] (Withuis, 2005a).

According to Withuis, it is meaningless to think about 'what women themselves want', because there is no such thing as 'wanting yourself'. I must agree with her that people are indeed shaped by the society they live in. The question is however, whether Withuis is criticising the concept of autonomy and starting a (legitimate) discussion from there, or whether she is using the argument to claim that *certain* people cannot critically judge their own decisions? It is difficult to answer this

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[32] Original text: "Als wordt betoogd dat 'moslima's zelf een hoofddoek willen', zie ik behalve bedekte tienjarigen ook Aafke Komters De macht van de vanzelfsprekendheid voor me. Na die ontleding van de onzichtbare machtsongelijkheid in huwelijken is 'wat ze zelf willen' een frase. Komter liet zien dat zoiets eenduidigs als 'zelf willen' niet bestaat: de minst machtige vormt langs velerlei mentale sluipwegen haar wensen naar die van de machtige en ervaart die vervolgens als eigen."

question based on these two quotes only, but it does appear that Withuis is not referring to her own ability to make decisions here.

To summarise, Withuis argues that discussions about religion and culture too often end up with statements from certain (multiculturalist) feminists about the experiences and opinions of the women who live in these communities. She believes that this is not the right approach for feminists. First of all, she says, we have historical examples that show that sometimes some women just do not know what is best for them and secondly, gender theorists have shown that women can think they want something, without realizing they might have been influenced by more powerful others. For these reasons, Withuis argues, it is problematic that feminists refer to categories such as 'Muslim women', without deconstructing these.

The issues of experience and feminist standpoints are also discussed in a group interview with 14 experts. Contrary to Withuis, many of these experts say that we should *talk to Muslim women, instead of about them*[33]. The various answers given in the interviews also show that the question of feminist standpoint is not just about listening or not listening to Muslim women (as Withuis seems to argue), but rather about *whose* experiences should count as feminist. Finally, before moving to the next quote, I would like to point out that the division between 'feminists' and 'Muslim women' continues to play an important role in most *Opzij* articles/statements.

Local politician Fatima Elatik believes that feminists should respect the fact that there are different ways to be emancipated. She further argues that the strength of Muslim women is not acknowledged enough:

> "Muslim women want to emancipate in their own way, with respect for their background and religious traditions and by keeping the dialogue with their family. We have to facilitate that."[34] (Elatik, 2005, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2005b).

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[33] 'Talk to Muslim women, not about them' is the title of the article that is referred to in this paragraph.
[34] Original text: Moslima's willen emanciperen op hun manier, met respect voor hun achtergrond en religieuze tradities en door in dialoog te blijven met hun familie. Daarbij moeten we ze faciliteren.

Elatik explicitly argues that there are different ways of emancipating women, implicitly however, she also points out that Muslim women's experiences and standpoints should be taken into account in feminist analyses or struggles. Elatik therefore goes beyond the framework that feminists either need or do not need approval, as presented by Jolande Withuis. The issue according to Elatik is not about approval, but about defining emancipation. However, judging from the quote above, the question related to the division between 'Muslim women' and 'feminists' remains. Who is the 'we' she is referring to in the last sentence of the quote? It seems that Elatik criticises feminists who judge Muslim women for having a different perspective on emancipation, but she does not deconstruct the framework and power relations behind this.

Philosophy professor Marli Huijer argues that Dutch feminists should not act like 'big sisters'. She does not make a division between Muslim women and feminists, but explicitly talks about different forms of feminism. Dutch feminists, she argues: "can contribute by not regarding these women as more oppressed, but as women whose own feminism needs support" (Huijer, cited in Dresselhuys 2005b). Also Media and Popular Culture professor van Zoonen emphasises the importance of supporting the struggles of these women:

> "I get so sick of all these little opinions and do not understand where Dutch people get their so called expertise about Islam and Muslim women from. I do not have this expertise and would rather have the women who are trying to combine emancipation and Islam to speak up, instead of myself"[35] (van Zoonen, 2005, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2005b).

In the above quotes, the interviewees argue for an alternative approach towards feminism. They plead for cooperation between various women, but frame the issue rather differently than Withuis. They propose that Dutch or secular *feminists* support Muslim *feminists* and recognise their struggles and choices. Hence, they aim to acknowledge different interpretations of emancipation and feminism, but do not claim

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[35] Original text: "Ik word doodziek van al die meninkjes en snap niet waar Nederlanders hun zogenaamde deskundigheid over de islam en moslima's vandaan halen. Ik heb die deskundigheid in elk geval niet en zou ook liever vrouwen die emancipatie en islam proberen te combineren aan het woord laten dan mezelf."

that feminists have to 'ask for approval' for certain struggles. In other words, they want to work together with women who share similar goals, not with those who do not share these.

Van Zoonen and Huijer start from multiple interpretations of feminism and aim to achieve cooperation between women, while acknowledging differences. Withuis on the other hand, frames the discussion rather differently; she starts from the problem: how should feminists respond to women who do not want to be emancipated? Feminists, according to Withuis, should not ask these women what they want, but fight the oppression and deconstruct certain categories. In my view, Huijer and van Zoonen do not necessarily dispute this when they say that feminists should support the *struggles* of Muslim women. Withuis talks about who we *should not* listen to and Huijer and van Zoonen talk about who we *should* listen to. This connects to the many discussions among feminists about standpoint theory (see also chapter 4). Withuis seems to fight a rather essentialist and fixed interpretation of standpoint theory. According to her, not all women can produce better knowledge because they are in a marginalised position. On the contrary, she believes that oppression can blind people to a critical view. Huijer and van Zoonen, however, defend a rather different, much more dynamic and collective perspective on standpoint theory. They not only take into account the power differences (and oppression) between men and women, but also between women. Furthermore, they do not start from any marginalised woman's position, but from those who have developed oppositional consciousness. In that context, I would like to argue that if we want to theorise this issue further in a productive way, we should not allow ourselves to get stuck in arguments such as 'should we or should we not listen to Muslim women', but instead think about how we can use experience as a basis for feminist standpoints. Moving the focus of the discussion to different interpretations of standpoint theory might help to change certain problematic aspects of the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism, but that doesn't mean it will solve all disagreements.

Sociology Professor Sawitri Saharso puts forward a different perspective. Contrary to the previous authors, she starts her analyses from individual women's choices:

"I am not against operations that recover the hymen; when we have many of these operations, virginity will become a farce. The wish of individual girls is decisive for me " (Saharso, 2005, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2005b).[36]

In this context, she is the clearest opponent of Withuis. Where Withuis argues that we should not listen to 'average' Muslim women and accept their opinions as such, Saharso wants to do exactly that: the choice of the individual woman is decisive for her (at least when it comes to this issue). In that context, Saharso adds the factor of practicality into the discussion. First of all, she moves beyond principles about virginity and argues that if we go along with certain developments, the problem will disappear automatically. I would like to add the issue of individual women's safety here. A principled perspective on, for example, the issue of virginity might not be in the interests of individual women who are trying to navigate between different spheres in their lives here and now. I will return to this in more detail in the next chapter.

Feminist Solidarity

Many of the statements deal with different aspects of the problems related to feminists' responses to multiculturalism (or actually Islam), without really engaging in a single and well-defined debate. I would now like to move the focus of attention from feminist standpoints to feminist solidarity. Many statements in *Opzij* were in one way or the other related to the issue of solidarity. It seems again though that there is no clear definition of the disagreement. In most quotes the discussion is framed as if there is a difference of opinion between those who aim for solidarity between women and those who do not. Yet when we take a closer look at the statements it appears that most (if not all) authors aim for more solidarity. Hence, the actual debate is about the right interpretations of solidarity.

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[36] Original text: "Ik ben niet tegen maagdenvlieshersteloperaties, omdat maagdelijkheid een farce wordt als deze operaties op grote schaal plaatsvinden. De wens van de meisjes zelf is voor mij doorslaggevend."

Jolande Withuis talks about solidarity through the case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. In her view, feminists need to show their solidarity with this politician:

"Where are the educated feminists who support Ayaan (or if necessary refute) with fundamental analyses and usable research results? When do besides the 'friends of Ayaan' finally also the 'girlfriends of Ayaan' turn up? (…) Why are professors and students from women's studies not protesting at the parliament buildings since November 2: we are not leaving until she is returning? (…) A black refugee is threatened with death because of her feminist political opinion. That they could not even put their little theories and interest struggles aside for this obvious 'women's interest', made all their talks about 'women themselves' empty gabble."[37] (Withuis, 2005a)

Judging from this quote, Withuis strongly believes there is a lack of solidarity between feminists, which is especially shown in the lack of support for Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Because Ali is threatened as a black feminist, feminists should support her, Withuis argues. This view clearly differs from most remarks that were made in the group interview. Marli Huijer for instance, argues that:

"Solidarity with Muslim women starts with informing ourselves of the long tradition of (pan-) Arabic feminism, with interest in the lives and stories of Muslim women and with allowing and facilitating these women's own ideas in public space. (…) The symbolic capital of Dutch Muslim women – or the value society attaches to them – can grow a lot when they get more access to public positions. Dutch feminists can contribute to that by not seeing Muslim

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[37] Original text: "Waar zijn de geleerde feministen die Ayaan steunen (of desnoods tegenspreken) met fundamentele analyses en bruikbare onderzoeksresultaten? Wanneer dringen zich naast de 'vrienden van Ayaan' eindelijk eens 'vriendinnen' aan haar op? (…) Waarom staan hoogleraren en studentes in de vrouwenstudies niet sedert 2 november met spandoeken met teksten van Hirsi Ali op het Binnenhof om te demonstreren: wij gaan niet weg voor zij er weer is? (…) Er wordt hier een zwarte vluchtelinge om haar feministische politieke overtuiging met de dood bedreigd. Dat ze zelfs ten behoeve van zo'n overduidelijk 'vrouwenbelang' (en veel meer dan dat) hun theorietjes en belangenstrijdjes niet even opzij wisten te zetten, maakt alle gepraat over 'vrouwen zelf' tot loos gebabbel."

women beforehand as more oppressed, but as women whose feminism deserves support."[38] (Huijer, cited in Dresselhuys 2005b)

This shows how close the connection is between the discussions on feminist standpoints and on feminist solidarity. Those who are considered to have proper feminist standpoints are also regarded to deserve feminist solidarity. Related to this are the different views on equality and difference. There is a connection between which views are considered to be feminist standpoints and the different views on equality and difference. Withuis supports Ayaan Hirsi Ali and her struggle for equality as sameness, Huijer connects to Muslim feminists, who fight for equality through difference. Both authors detect a lack of solidarity among feminists, but aim for solidarity with different struggles.

In the interview with politician Ahmed Aboutaleb, yet another interpretation of solidarity is put forward. His view is not based on feminist standpoints, but on class. He argues that women like Dresselhuys should not try to discuss issues such as freedom with the most marginalized in our society; these women have to learn to write and read first. (Dresselhuys, 2006a). According to Aboutaleb, feminists should:

> "Start with the young ones, the privileged, and the ones who found their ways to an education. They can mean something for their mothers. For instance, in Amsterdam we have a group called Daughters for Mothers, young girls who organise activities for their own mothers. They try to get their mothers outside, to institutes, for example to learn the language"[39] (Aboutaleb, 2006, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2006a)

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[38] Original text: "Solidariteit met moslimvrouwen begint met het kennisnemen van de lange traditie van (pan-)Arabisch feminisme, met interesse voor het leven en de verhalen van islamitische vrouwen en met het toelaten en faciliteren van hun eigen geluiden in de publieke ruimte. Het symbolisch kapitaal van Nederlandse moslimvrouwen - de waarde die de samenleving aan hen hecht - kan flink toenemen als zij meer toegang krijgen tot openbare posities. Nederlandse feministen kunnen daaraan bijdragen door moslim- vrouwen niet bij voorbaat als meer onderdrukt te beschouwen, maar als vrouwen wier eigen feminisme ondersteuning verdient."

[39] Original text: "Begin bij de jongeren, de kansrijken, die de weg naar het onderwijs gevonden hebben. Die kunnen dan op hun beurt iets voor hun moeders betekenen. Zo hebben we in Amsterdam de groep Dochters voor Moeders, jonge meiden die activiteiten organiseren voor hun eigen moeders. Zij proberen die moeders naar buiten te krijgen, naar een instituut, waar ze bijvoorbeeld de taal leren."

Hence, Aboutaleb makes a rather different analysis of the issues at stake. He moves beyond the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, by focussing on more classical social democratic themes, such as education. This means that his interpretation of solidarity does not really engage in the debates about multiculturalism. Instead he puts forward the idea that different generations of women can show solidarity by organising activities for each other.

Who counts as feminist? Mechanisms of in/exclusion

When does a female standpoint count as a feminist one and when should feminist show their solidarity with other women? These questions are connected to the division I detected in the statements between 'feminists' and 'Muslim women'. Here, I will elaborate on this division and its consequences for the interpretations of feminism in *Opzij*. Among other things this means that the focus will move from statements about feminists and feminism to Muslim women. By scrutinizing the remarks about Muslim women in *Opzij*, it becomes clear how they are separated from 'feminists' and 'feminism'.

The first thing to be noted about the articles on Muslim women is that they are written from a rather different perspective than those on feminism and feminists. In most of the articles in the latter category there was often an explicit statement to be found on the problems and solutions related to the connection between multiculturalism and feminism. In the articles on Muslim women on the other hand, these statements are much more implicit. I believe that this is connected to the different aims of these pieces. The articles on 'feminism' share a commitment to theorise feminism. As mentioned above, the discussions were mostly about feminist standpoints. The articles that focus on Muslim women do not correspond to that goal; they do not theorise how Muslim women see feminism or how to be a Muslim feminist in a Western country. Instead, they are centred on one particular question: why? Why do women choose to wear a veil? Why do Dutch women decide to convert to Islam?

The number of articles on feminism and Muslim women is not large enough to make strong conclusions, but it is worth noting that *Opzij* has no articles that theorise how for instance feminism and Islam can/cannot be combined. I would like to argue that this is connected to the conceptualisation of feminism in *Opzij*. Instead of

discussing different interpretations of feminism, such as Muslim feminism and secular feminism; *Opzij*'s articles either talk about how *feminists* should deal with difference or about the decisions of *Muslim women*. This way, it seems they position (secular/white) feminists on one side and Muslim women on the other. In other words: there are feminists and there are Muslim women.

The headscarf is an important theme in *Opzij* and in many articles and interviews there is some sort of reference to it. In this section I would like to present the instances in which the decisions of women to wear the headscarf are central.

When Aboutaleb is asked by Dresselhuys why women wear a headscarf, he argues that women first of all wear it as a response to the heavy criticism on Islam in Dutch society:

> "It seems to me like the logical response to the denunciation of this piece of clothing. When you say to young people that we do not want them to wear bomber jackets or headscarves, they will precisely do that. I see it as a statement of these girls: if the headscarf is criticised more, more of them will wear it."[40] (Aboutaleb, 2006, cited in: Dresselhuys, 2006a)

He adds to this that there is a religious component too, but the political statement is more important in his view.

In the interview with Muslim women we also find this reason given, but among many others. The 6 women who are interviewed for the article (Bochhah, 2006) mention a broad range of arguments, but most of these can be divided into 4 categories: (1) rebellion/resistance, (2) religion, (3) Identity/definition of the self and (4) family/community. Most of the women mention reasons which are related to their self-image or identity: I feel prettier when I wear one; I feel more secure; it reminds me of my Muslim identity, or it makes me feel more conscious of my behaviour. Then there are the religious reasons for wearing a headscarf: I do it out of love for the

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[40] Original text: "Het lijkt me een logische reactie op de verkettering van dit kledingstuk. Als je tegen jonge mensen zegt dat het dragen van bomberjacks of hoofddoeken ongewenst is, gaan ze dat juist doen. Ik zie het als een statement van die meiden: naarmate de hoofddoek meer verketterd wordt, zullen ze hem meer dragen."

Prophet; it makes my faith complete, or it is a command and I like living according to the rules of the Qu'ran. Finally, there are the arguments related to the (expectations of) family or community: I get more respect from Moroccan boys; my family appreciates it that I wear a headscarf, or I want to show people that I am a good Muslim.

Some of the arguments are focused on what other people think or want these women to do; others are more about the desires and aims of these women themselves. When we talk about the first category of arguments (those focussed on what others think of them),, it is not only the Muslim community, but also the Dutch society in general that influences these women in their choices. See for instance, "I want to show that you can reach a lot as a Muslim woman, without losing your identity" (Bochhah, 2006). This can be directed both towards other Muslim women and towards Dutch people who think that wearing a headscarf prevents you from integrating or developing yourself. Note that most women in the interview also mention the disadvantages of wearing the headscarf. The problems they mention are related to acceptance and respect from society: it is more difficult to find an internship or job; you get negative responses from people; they think you are not educated or cannot speak Dutch, and one woman was even called a terrorist and told to go back to her own country.

The statements about the headscarf are very descriptive: *Opzij* does not explicitly write about what Muslim women should or should not do, as it does regarding feminists. Instead the magazine is exploring *why* Muslim women do certain things. This could mean that the editors find these women's choices problematic, but not necessarily. They could also try to make their choices more acceptable. In any case, *Opzij* is trying to understand these women and their choices, which suggests a distance between the Opzij editors (or their audience) and Muslim women. I believe that this shows again that the editors of *Opzij* focus on a white or non-Muslim audience: one would not try to increase understanding of Muslim women among Muslim women.

In the article 'De lokroep van de Islam' (The call of Islam), psychiatrist Carla Rus investigates why young women (especially 'autochtonous' Dutch women who decide to convert) are attracted to Islam. The question she wants to answer is:

> "Which young women voluntarily give up the rights and freedoms that my generation of women have obtained during the second wave with so much pain? "[41] (Rus, 2006)

Two aspects of this question stand out for me. First of all, Rus assumes that these women are giving up rights when they convert to Islam. One might wonder whether this is necessarily the case, but furthermore, they might not mind giving up certain liberal rights.[42] Implicitly, Rus approaches this issue as a matter of false consciousness: why do people do things that are not in their best interests? This means that she is not really asking an open 'why' question. Or to put it more bluntly, she seems to already judge these women's choices in her question, instead of being open to understanding them better.

  Secondly, there is a generational aspect in the question. The women who become Muslim are not just giving up any rights, but the rights that women from Rus' generation have fought for. There seems to be pain in this part of the question. I believe that this could be an important aspect of the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism that needs further investigation. At first sight, the differences between feminist generations might not be connected to multiculturalism, but we need to ask why many of the feminists from the second wave generation are now so fiercely criticising Islam. The answer could be found in the following quote:

> "For me as an ex-Reformed person, who has wrested from an external authority and had learned to trust her own authority, this is shocking to read. These women are actually saying that they do not know what to do in life without a religious leader and that they do not trust themselves enough when it comes to morals."[43] (Rus, 2006)

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[41] Original text: "Welke jonge vrouw doet vrijwillig afstand van de rechten en vrijheden die mijn generatie vrouwen tijdens de tweede golf met zo veel moeite heeft verworven?"

[42] See the work of Saba Mahmood for more information on this issue: Mahmood S. 2005. *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

[43] Oringal text: "Voor mij als ex-gereformeerde, die zich heeft ontworsteld aan een externe autoriteit en op haar eigen autoriteit heeft leren vertrouwen, is dat schokkend om te lezen. Eigenlijk zeggen deze vrouwen dat ze zonder religieuze leider geen raad met het leven weten en dat zij zichzelf onvoldoende vertrouwen op het gebied van de moraal"

Rus herself has struggled against external authorities and cannot imagine why other women would actually choose this. From her perspective every woman would choose to be free (from authorities) if she could. Authors such as Saba Mahmood however have shown us that not all women want liberal freedom; some women actually choose to submit to God and/or (possibly) patriarchal religious traditions. I will return to the generational issue in more detail in the next chapter.

In the first instance, this article on conversion seems comparable to those on the headscarf, but the final argument of this piece is considerably different. The authors in the previous section only tried to understand Muslim women who decide to wear the headscarf. In other words, there was no clear normative statement to be found. Rus on the other hand, is providing the reader explicitly with her opinion on this issue. A statement follows most arguments for conversion from the author in which she explains why such arguments are problematic. Hence, in this case, the author is trying to understand these women's choices but at the same time thinking about how to change them. This is confirmed by her conclusion, in which she says:

> "There is no use in fighting these new Islamic Dutch girls; the history of Christianity teaches us that faith grows when it is oppressed. They should be tempted back via good examples: women with self esteem who help others out of an inner civilisation, without wanting anything back for it – not even afterwards in paradise."[44] (Rus, 2006)

A long history lies behind the words Rus is using here. For example during the First Wave of feminism, white, bourgeois feminists tried to emphasise their importance for the nation (and hence the need for civil rights) by arguing that they needed to help Others. They created a task for themselves by defining social issues as other people's problems. This way they managed to transfer the boundaries of the nation; they included themselves, by creating new second range citizens, such as women from the

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44 Original text: "Ten strijde trekken tegen de islamitisch geworden Hollandse meiden heeft geen zin; de geschiedenis van het christendom leert ons dat geloof juist tegen de verdrukking in groeit. Ze zullen teruggelokt moeten worden via goede voorbeelden: vrouwen met eigenwaarde die vanuit innerlijke beschaving anderen helpen zonder er een beloning voor terug te verwachten - ook niet achteraf in het paradijs."

colonies.[45] Of course we cannot easily apply the strategies of certain first wave feminists to the remarks of Carla Rus, but it is remarkable that the concept of 'helping others' remains recurrent in feminism. The similarities (and differences) between these approaches to feminism need further investigation.

Comparing the articles in the above sections on 'Muslim women' with those on 'feminists', I would like to argue that even though Muslim women's *issues* are discussed in *Opzij*, these women are not really involved in the discussions about feminism. In the articles about Muslim women, choices are evaluated from a rather universal view of feminism. Feminism, in these cases, is approached as something quite fixed. For instance, there were no articles in which authors discussed whether and how feminism and Islam could be combined. Furthermore, in the pieces on feminism there was no discussion about *why* (white) feminists do certain things. Thus, Muslim women's choices are interrogated, while those of (white) feminists are not. Note though that white (allochtonous) women who decide to convert to Islam are investigated. They seem to fall between the applied categories. Secondly, feminists discuss what feminism is or should be, but not how it could be combined with religion. In other words, only the boundaries of feminism are debated, not the basics.

Multicultural Issues: Moving between Multiculturalism and Islam

As I have discussed above, it is mostly Islam that is discussed in *Opzij's* discourse, the statements or arguments are hardly ever explicitly about multiculturalism. Not only are culture and religion often conflated, it is also one group that is at the centre of attention: Muslims. Nevertheless, many important arguments were made in connection to multicultural politics and gender relations and most of them can be connected to the debate about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, as initiated by Susan Moller Okin.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I discussed how Susan Moller Okin's essay *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* led to a heated debate amongst feminists and

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[45] See for more information for example: B. Waaldijk, 1999. 'Colonial Constructions of a Dutch Women's Movement: 1898', in: K. Rotther en H. Paul (ed.), *Differenzen in der Geslechtsdifferenz: Aktuele Perspektiven der Geslechtsforschung*. Berlin, 1999, pp. 285-299

others. Okin argues that progressive people who are against all forms of oppression assume too easily that multiculturalism is compatible with gender equality. She believes that cultures are suffused with practices and ideologies concerning gender and that most cultures facilitate the control over women in various ways (Okin, 1999a). Many replied to this essay with counterarguments; the Dutch sociologist Sawitri Saharso for instance published a paper called *Feminisme versus Multiculturalisme?* (Feminism versus Multiculturalism?). This essay was also discussed in detail in the first chapter, where Saharso's main argument was that while multiculturalism and feminism might not always be easily compatible, they are certainly not incompatible either (Saharso, 2000). They can be 'friends', according to Saharso, even though it is a friendship that needs to be worked on. In her view, most discussions about multiculturalism and gender equality are not about conflicts between traditional and liberal values; indeed, very often they deal with tensions *within* the liberal ideology (e.g. between autonomy and non-discrimination or equality). Opinion leaders might say that 'our liberal values are non- negotiable', but in reality they do not give us a clear-cut answer. Saharso therefore believes that dialogue is the only option we have in solving the problems that arise in a multicultural society. This means reinterpretation of both majority and minority cultures and discussion about how to deal with conflicting values.

In the *Opzij* sample we can find similar arguments. However, the concept of multiculturalism, defined as an ideology that aims to protect and recognise minority groups by acknowledging special group rights, is hard to find in *Opzij*. Interviewees and authors sometimes refer to the positive aspects of culture and religion, but do not always connect this to multicultural politics. Furthermore, most statements in *Opzij* about culture and religion are about the problems related to these concepts. Hence, *Opzij* does not really discuss multiculturalism as such, but reports on the themes and subjects closely related to multiculturalism, such as the meaning of culture and religion in people's lives, migration politics and specific current issues such as the headscarf.

Redefining Religion and Culture

The statements in *Opzij* about culture and religion can be divided into positive and negative ones. In four articles, the positive relationship between multiculturalism and feminism is discussed. In two of these, women talk from their own (religious) experiences and argue that their religion makes them stronger. The other two interviewees also use their experiences, but reason more from a general political perspective.

In 'Minder dan een minderheid' (Less than a Minority), the relation between multiculturalism and feminism is discussed in relation to homosexuality. The article is a report about the struggles of Muslim lesbian women and their feelings of alienation from both Muslim communities and (white) lesbian communities. We read about the experiences of three Muslim women regarding their sexuality. They all seem to agree that most Muslim lesbian women have (or had) difficulties within their family's communities, but also feel that their religion (Islam) strengthens them. Dunya for instance says:

> "I have used faith to be able to feel love again. I believe that that is the basis of all faiths: love and respect for yourself and others around you."[46] (Dunya, cited in: Vleerlaag, 2004)

Dunya believes that God gave her sexuality in order to experience him through that aspect of life as well (Vleerlaag, 2004). Hence, for her there is no tension between her faith and her sexuality. However, the people around her do find it difficult to accept her as she is. Also for Warda faith is a vital aspect of her life. She argues that it is not the Qu'ran that condemns homosexuality, but the people. Allah is very important for her:

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[46] Original text: "Ik heb het geloof gebruikt om weer liefde te kunnen voelen. Volgens mij is dat de basis van alle vormen van geloof: liefde en respect voor jezelf en je medemens."

"Allah is constantly with me. (…). The only one I have to be accountable to is Allah. I try to live my life as good as I can and be a good person. Should I feel guilty about being in love with a woman? I can not believe that something that beautiful is forbidden"[47] (Warda, cited in: Vleerlaag, 2004)

Religion is thus an important instrument for these women, in their struggle for acceptance and a happy life. This also makes two of them argue that it is important for them to find a Muslim partner; if they can't share their faith they would miss something. Obviously these women have to fight several struggles at the same time, because many people in their lives do not understand or accept them. Muslims often do not accept them because of their sexuality, and 'autochtonous' Dutch girls do not understand that they do not break with their (Muslim) families and friends. It seems that almost everybody in their surroundings wants them to choose between their sexuality and their religion. These women themselves however want to combine these two aspects of their lives; their faith is not an aspect of their struggles, but a source of inspiration.

Theologian Manuala Kalsky also argues that her religion helps her in her struggle for emancipation. According to her, we have to acknowledge that religion is an important source of inspiration to many people (Kalsky, 2006). Furthermore, she argues that because our societies are multi-religious, progressive theologians and feminists should support liberal interpretations of religions. For many women, faith plays an important role in answering important questions such as 'why am I here' and 'what do I want with my life'. According to Kalsky, feminism should also engage with these kinds of spiritual issues. For her personally, religion is an important instrument in keeping her feminist ideals and her life in balance (Kalsky, 2006). Many women, she says, are tired when it comes to their feminist struggles; things are more difficult to change than we thought. The value of religion lies in the fact that it shows us that not everything is immediately changeable:

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[47] Original text: "Allah is constant bij me (…). De enige aan wie ik verantwoording moet afleggen is Allah. Ik probeer een zo goed mogelijk leven te leiden, een goed persoon te zijn. Moet ik me dan schuldig voelen omdat ik verliefd ben op een vrouw? Dat zo iets moois niet mag, kan ik niet geloven."

"That is how it works for me personally as well. Feminism is my attitude to life that makes me look critical towards power inequalities in society and religion. My faith is the basis of my existence, it tones down my feminist impatience now and then and comforts me at the moments my world is not changeable. That is not a refuge from the hard reality. For me, the red thread through the biblical stories is the vision of liberation, of a more just world. That is not necessarily a happy end, but it is a promise. That touches upon the reality of our everyday lives. Also within feminism."[48] (Kalsky, 2006)

When we compare these articles, we can see that all of the women interviewed use their faith as a source of inspiration, also for their struggle for emancipation. Hence their faith does not stop them from being a feminist or oppresses them as women; instead it is an instrument that helps them to go further. This is probably related to the fact that they interpret religion in a personal way and start from their own experiences, rather than from certain dominant views on religion. The women in the first article talk about their personal relationship to Allah, and Manuela Kalsky shows how feminist theologians can (and have) change(d) dominant views on religious texts and traditions. In that sense these women uphold a different view on religion than feminists such as Susan Moller Okin, who focus more on the dominant and patriarchal aspects and interpretations of religion.

I believe that when we think about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, we can learn from these women who try to think *how* we can combine feminism and religion. They recognise the oppressive elements of religion, but try to find ways to transform ideas about God, human beings and society in such a way that religion and feminism are not contradictory.

Two further interviewees redefine dominant perspectives on religion from a different perspective. Former minister Karla Peijs for instance says that she used to believe that headscarves were a sign of oppression, but now she knows that for many

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[48] Original text: "Zo werkt het ook voor mij persoonlijk. Het feminisme is mijn levenshouding die me kritisch laat kijken naar de machtsongelijkheid in samenleving en religie. Mijn geloof is de grond van mijn bestaan, relativeert zo af en toe mijn feministische ongeduld en troost me op de momenten dat mijn wereld niet maakbaar is. En dat is geen vlucht uit de harde werkelijkheid. Voor mij is de rode draad in bijbelse verhalen het visioen van bevrijding, van een rechtvaardiger wereld. Er is niet per se een happy end, maar wel een belofte. Dat raakt aan de realiteit van alledag. Ook binnen het feminisme."

women wearing the headscarf is a personal choice (Vuijsje, 2006). Her meetings with veiled women in Abu Dhabi convinced her of this. This is how she recalls one of the women she met there:

> "The first time I saw her, I ran into her accidentally. She was with a whole bunch of male colleagues and openly made jokes about them. It appeared very natural. She had a very technical education and has done a lot with ICT. As minister she has several big departments under her. She is a fantastic woman. One day she was there in an haute couture suit, the other day covered in a chador. (…) Apparently they have a lot of freedom there."[49] (Peijs, 2006, cited in: Vuijsje, 2006)

Contrary to the previous authors/interviewees, Peijs does not aim to redefine religion, instead she proposes a more practical approach that goes beyond any possible meanings of religious traditions and dogmas:

> "Look, I am a practical person. I believe that if women can be active in the public sphere because of their scarves, then that's the way it goes. If the same counts for Muslim women here, then we have to give them the chance to develop themselves. That is why I meant it when I said that I would be in favour of a Minister with a headscarf."[50] (Peijs, 2006, cited in: Vuijsje, 2006)

Contrary to the previous interviewees, Peijs does not reason from her own religious experience (although she does mention her education at a monastery) but from a more practical and at the same time political perspective. Instead of giving her own opinion

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[49] Original text: "De eerste keer dat ik haar zag, liep ik haar toevallig tegen het lijf. Ze was met een hele batterij mannelijke collega's en stond openlijk grapjes over hen te maken. Dat zag er erg natuurlijk uit. Zij heeft een heel technische opleiding genoten en veel gedaan in de ICT. Als minister heeft ze een aantal grote departementen onder zich. Een fantastische vrouw is het. De ene dag zat ze daar in een haute-couturepak, de andere dag was ze gehuld in chador. (…) Kennelijk hebben ze heel veel vrijheid daar."

[50] Original text: "Kijk, ik ben een praktisch ingesteld mens. Ik vind: als die vrouwen daar dankzij hun sluiers de maatschappij in kunnen, dan moet het maar op die manier. Als hetzelfde geldt voor vrouwen met een moslim achtergrond hier, dan moet je ze juist de kans geven zichzelf te ontplooien. Daarom meende ik het ook toen ik zei dat ik ook in Nederland voorstander zou zijn van een minister met een hoofddoek"

on the meaning of the headscarf, she argues that we should not condemn it, because it enables women to fully participate in the public sphere.

If we compare the arguments of, for example, Kalsky and Peijs regarding the headscarf then we can clearly recognise the many layers of this subject (such as the symbolic, the social and the individual). By dividing the social and the symbolic layers, Peijs allows for a more practical view of the headscarf: even though the headscarf might stand for unequal gender relations, in practice it makes it possible for women to participate in the public sphere. In order to have a good discussion on issues such as the headscarf, it is important to note on which level certain arguments focus.

When Haleh Ghorashi is asked about her opinion on the burqa, she plays with all three levels in her answer:

> "How many women in the Netherlands wear a burqa? Very, very few, thus the prohibition of the burqa is a non-issue. But in the mean time you do give a signal: we do not accept you. About the headscarves: I have a few students with headscarves, but they aren't any quieter with it. They do not consider the headscarf as a sign of oppression. When I first came to the Netherlands, I also thought it was strange that women voluntarily wear a headscarf. I didn't understand it, because in Iran you were obliged to wear one. I am not religious at all; I see myself as a secular feminist. But by now, I realise that in a democracy you have to give space to others."[51] (Ghorashi, 2007, cited in: Lambalgen, 2007)

She mentions certain symbolic aspects of the discussion (prohibition gives a sign), the social aspects (in a democracy you give space to others) and finally the individual side (they aren't any quieter with it). In the rest of the interview she returns to several

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[51] Original text: "Hoeveel vrouwen in Nederland dragen een boerka Heel, heel weinig, dus het boerkaverbod is een non-issue. Maar intussen geef je wel het signaal af: wij accepteren jullie niet. Wat de hoofddoekjes betreft: ik heb zelf studentes met een hoofddoek, maar die hebben daarom echt geen minder grote mond. Zij zien de hoofddoek niet als een symbool van onderdrukking. Toen ik net in Nederland was, vond ik het ook raar dat vrouwen vrijwillig een hoofddoek dragen. Ik begreep dat niet, want in Iran was de hoofddoek juist verplicht. Ik ben helemaal niet religieus, beschouw mezelf als een seculier feministe. Maar inmiddels besef ik dat je in een democratie juist ruimte moet bieden aan de ander."

of these issues and connects them to having respect for other women's choices and acknowledging different feminist strategies for emancipation. Regarding the first point, she argues that we should not automatically turn our back on Muslim customs. The interviewer is worried about the fact that separate swimming hours for (Muslim) women will lead to separatism, Ghorashi replies:

> "Why are we making this so difficult? There are also women's days in saunas. I believe it is one of the achievements of feminism that women can be among each other. Some women like to swim without men. That should be possible, feminists should not be so afraid of Islamic customs. Why would Muslim feminism not be possible? Many women in Islamic countries have feminist thoughts. They try to reinterpret the Qu'ran, in order to give space to feminism. We should respect these women, not look down upon them."[52] (Ghorashi, 2007, cited in: Lambalgen, 2007)

In this quote we can see that according to Ghorashi we can interpret religion in different ways. It is not necessarily a bad thing that needs to be contained. Instead, it can be an important aspect of women's lives that feminists should not deny. Furthermore, Ghorashi argues that it would be arrogant if secular women force Muslim women to become emancipated just as they did and to step out of their faith: "there just are women who want to become emancipated within their religion" [53] (Ghorashi, 2007, cited in: Lambalgen 2007).

When it comes to strategies, Ghorashi believes that we should start from the needs of all women (Lambalgen, 2007). When the interviewer asks her how we can help Muslim women, she says:

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[52] Original text: "Waarom doen we daar zo moeilijk over Je hebt toch ook vrouwendagen in de sauna. Ik vind het juist een van de verworvenheden van het feminisme dat je als vrouwen onder elkaar mag zijn. Sommige vrouwen vinden het fijn om zonder mannen te zwemmen. Dat moet toch mogelijk zijn? Feministes moeten niet zo bang zijn voor islamitische gebruiken. Waarom zou er geen moslimfeminisme mogelijk zijn? Heel veel vrouwen in islamitische landen denken feministisch. Zij proberen teksten in de Koran te herinterpreteren zodat er ruimte is voor feminisme. Die vrouwen moet je respecteren, niet minachten."
[53] Original text: "Maar er zijn nu eenmaal vrouwen die vanuit hun religie willen emanciperen."

"Why do they need help? Such a superior attitude will not help. Ask first, what they want. Then you can always help them later, for instance with internships of jobs. I believe that we in the Netherlands argue too much from a white, elitist middle class perspective. Women should choose themselves how they live their lives. (…) I thought that women were allies. Emancipation should come from within. Only when you have respect for the opinions of others, you can talk and make alliances."[54] (Ghorashi, 2007, cited in: Lambalgen 2007)

These words of Ghorashi are closely connected to the earlier discussions on feminism, on standpoint theory and on experience as a source of feminist ideas. Clearly, according to Ghorashi, we should ask Muslim women what they want, and not try to decide beforehand what is feminist and what not.

Religion as a Problem

Where the above-mentioned authors and interviewees argued for a redefinition of religion and a more comprehensive perspective on religious traditions, most statements in *Opzij* approach these issues rather differently. In one of the Meetlat interviews, lawyer and columnist Paul Cliteur argues for example:

"It worries me that a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, which is bad for gender relations, gays and non-believers, could have success here. Even though I am a conservative on certain issues; I am progressive on these areas: the emancipation of women, gays and non-believers. On these issues we

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[54] Original text: "Waarom moeten ze "geholpen" worden Zo'n superieure houding helpt niet. Vraag nou eerst eens waar ze zelf behoefte aan hebben. Dan kun je ze daarna altijd nog helpen, bijvoorbeeld met stages en banen. Ik vind dat we in Nederland te veel denken vanuit de witte, elitaire middenklasse. Vrouwen moeten zelf kunnen kiezen hoe ze hun leven inrichten. Ik dacht dat vrouwen elkaars bondgenoten waren. Emancipatie moet van binnenuit komen. Pas als je respect hebt voor andermans meningen, kun je met elkaar in gesprek komen en verbindingen maken."

cannot learn from the ancient texts of Islam, Judaism and Christianity."[55]
(Cliteur, 2004, cited in: Dresselhuys 2004a)

So, contrary to the interpretations of religion by the previous authors and interviewees, Paul Cliteur regards the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam as inherently problematic and as a danger for gender equality. However, the connection that this author makes between Islam, fundamentalism and gender inequality has a long history and is not unproblematic.

First of all, the label fundamentalism is not only attached to Islam in *Opzij* articles; the concept is very important in many public debates about Islam (and its relation to 'the West'). Originally, fundamentalism referred to the protestant tradition that wishes to maintain traditional Protestant beliefs (Bracke and Fadil, 2006, p 12). But, at this moment fundamentalism is used to define various religious movements, mostly Muslim. Hence the concept has not only changed in meaning (when is a religious group fundamentalist?), but also in target group (from Protestants to Muslims). Furthermore, the connection that Cliteur makes between fundamentalism, unequal gender relations and holy texts is rather contested. Fundamentalism is often connected to patriarchy in general or 'disciplining the female body' specifically (Bracke, 2006). However, there are not only enormous differences among the various 'fundamentalist' movements when it comes to disciplining the female body; there is neither a clear factor that distinguishes these groups from other religious or non-religious movements when we compare patriarchal systems. Furthermore, the other connection that Cliteur makes, regarding the literal interpretation of holy texts, is also problematic. This apparent characteristic of fundamentalism does not recognise the complexity of reading holy texts (Bracke, 2006). The meaning of a text is always constructed: it is impossible to read a text without interpreting.

Another point of criticism that Cliteur puts forward is that he believes that Islam is not "secularizable":

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[55] Original text: "Het baart mij zorgen dat een fundamentalistische vorm van de Islam, die slecht is voor de man-vrouwverhouding, homo's en ongelovigen hier voet aan de grond zou krijgen. Hoewel ik op een aantal punten conservatief ben, ben ik progressief op deze gebieden: de emancipatie van vrouwen, homo's en ongelovigen. Op die punten kunnen we uberhaupt niet in de leer bij eeuwenoude geschriften van islam, jodendom en christendom."

"Bernard Lewis says: Mohammed was not just a spiritual leader but also a political leader. The spiritual and political leadership in Islam is in the same hands and it is questionable whether this will change. Often it is being said that you have to look at things in their context. But Imam El Moumni, who once said horrible things about gays[56], was very clear when he said: 'I just can not rewrite the Qu'ran'."[57] (Cliteur, 2004, cited in: Dresselhuijs 2004a)

This interpretation of fundamentalism seems to suggest that the combination of religion and politics is a unique feature of fundamentalist movements. But, as Bracke argues, religion is always connected to politics. Even in so-called secular Western nation-states, religion and politics are much more intertwined than we might expect. Furthermore, there are various movements (e.g. the civil rights movement in the US) that combine religion and politics and are still defined as progressive movements (Bracke, 2006). Cliteur uses a quote here from one of the most conservative and disputed imams in the Netherlands to make a wider statement about Islam; namely that Islam is not secularizable. In my view it is important to note that in this case a very partial image of 'the other' is presented. Indeed, El Moumni might not want to "rewrite" the Qu'ran, but other people are interpreting the Qu'ran in different ways. This way, Cliteur, like El Moumni, only leaves space for one 'true' interpretation of the Qu'ran.

Cliteur's comments also connect to a more common pattern regarding the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim countries: 'the West' is connected to secularism and 'the East' with fundamentalism. The development in the definition of fundamentalism has an important role in this; the traditional meaning of this concept has almost entirely been replaced by a new one. Fundamentalism in this new definition refers to a political and violent stream of Islam. Bracke and Fadil argue that the debates about (a fundamentalist stream of) Islam and whether this religion can be defined as 'modern' or 'secular' are increasingly presented in terms of its

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[56] This imam reached headlines in the Netherlands when he said that gays were lower than pigs and he wouldn't mind if they were thrown of apartment buildings

[57] Original text: "Bernard Lewis zegt: Mohammed was niet alleen een geestelijk leider, maar ook een politiek leider. Het geestelijk en politiek leiderschap is in de islam in dezelfde handen en het is de vraag of dit zal veranderen. Vaak wordt gezegd: je moet de zaken in hun context zien. Maar imam El Moumni, die ooit vreselijke dingen over homo's zei, was heel duidelijk toen hij zei: "Ik kan de koran nu eenmaal niet herschrijven'."

compatibility with democracy. I would like to add that discussions about Islam and gender equality are strongly related to this. The position of women is used as one of the most important markers in the distinction between the so called secular societies on the one hand and fundamentalist ones on the other, as we can also see in the first quote from Cliteur.

Jolande Withuis also talks about violent movements in Islam, but makes a different argument. The article is not focussed on Islam as such, but on Muslim female terrorists. She describes the apparent contradiction between the intensity of these women's struggles on the one hand and their conservative ideas about gender on the other. The author does not use supposed ideas about gender relations as an argument to criticise Islam, but argues instead that these terrorists have 'inconsistent views' on gender and the role of women in society:

> "These women struggle with the constraints of the domains allowed for women. But the holy texts of the Qu'ran appear to be stretchable: currently grandmothers are also allowed to die as martyrs. At the same time, the engagement of these women does not go together with letting go of traditional gender patterns – on the contrary: they choose the most orthodox misogynist version and echo sexist standpoints, such as that men and women should be spatially divided, because otherwise women provoke rape"[58] (Withuis, 2007)

Withuis argues that these women (and the men who support them) have inconsistent gender patterns. When we look at these choices from a liberal perspective, they might indeed be, or at least sound, incompatible, but would that also be the case if we think from a different starting point?[59] In chapter 4, I pointed out that according to Saba Mahmood feminists should rethink their conceptualisation of agency. Most feminist thinking is primarily liberatory and agency is in this context described as a model of subordination versus subversion. Mahmood argues that this

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[58] Original text: "Deze vrouwen worstelen met de begrenzingen van het aan vrouwen toegestane domein. Maar de heilige letter van de Koran blijkt rekkelijk: het wordt tegenwoordig ook Palestijnse oma's toegestaan te sterven als martelares. Tegelijk echter gaat het engagement van deze vrouwen juist niet gepaard aan afscheid van de traditionele vrouwenrol - integendeel: zij kiezen voor de meest orthodoxe en vrouwvijandige variant daarvan en echoen seksistische opvattingen, zoals dat mannen en vrouwen ruimtelijk gescheiden moeten zijn, want anders lok je als vrouw verkrachting uit."
[59] Thanks to Sarah Bracke for pointing this out to me.

attachment of agency to progressive politics is problematic. For instance, not all human beings might desire freedom and autonomy. Thus, if we really want to understand the strategies of all women, we should not try to place their activities and ways of being in the simply dichotomous relation of subversion and subordination. Hence, the choices of these 'female terrorists' might not be about inconsistent gender views, but about something else. Maybe the paradox that Withuis detects is only a paradox because it doesn't fit her analytical framework. This demonstrates how important it is to develop proper analytical tools in order to develop a better understanding of the choices and strategies of women.

Religious Traditions as Inherently Patriarchal

The first group of arguments in *Opzij* about religion and culture considered religion or culture as a positive factor in their lives and struggles, the last group argued that religion, or actually Islam, is a negative factor in our society, and also a threat to gender equality. In the next section I will investigate the statements in *Opzij* that are more focussed on particular traditions or customs.

Writer Nahed Selim for instance says that she feels abandoned by feminists who "trivialize" problems with Islam. She argues we should not permit gender inequality out of respect for a religion (Selim, 2006). During the interview she mentions a great variety of examples that show why Islam is a danger for gender equality, for instance circumcision, segregation, headscarves and Sharia law. About the headscarf she says:

> "It is not just a piece of cloth. There is a concept behind it about the unequal position of women in society. The headscarf has become a banner for fundamentalists, just like the burqa. I am in favour of a burqa ban, definitely in schools and public spaces. But I would prefer to see that the burqa just disappears from the earth. I think women start wearing it if they do not get enough affection from the people around them."[60] (Selim, 2006)

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[60] Original text: "Het is niet slechts een kledingstuk. Er zit een concept achter over de ongelijkwaardige plaats van de vrouw in de maatschappij. De hoofddoek is het politieke spandoek van de fundamentalisten geworden, evenals de boerka. Ik ben voor een boerkaverbod, zeker op scholen en in

According to Selim the burqa is a sign of oppression and inequality, and women who wear one do so because they miss certain attention from others. These two arguments demonstrate on which level Selim evaluates the headscarf: the symbolic and the social. Her first argument relates to the symbolic meaning of the headscarf and the second to the social. She does not seem to agree with Peijs (above) that the headscarf can also have an important social function and she certainly disagrees with Ghorashi (above) on the symbolic meanings of the headscarf. For Selim, there is no discussion possible about possible alternative meanings of the headscarf: it is a political issue and stands for inequality.

Selim's disagreement with Ghorashi's position comes to the fore again, when she is asked about her statement on segregation:

> "The Netherlands should not give in to Muslims who want separate swimming hours for women and separate groups for boys and girls in community houses, separate hospital rooms et cetera. In the eight fundamentalist Muslim counties where they live in segregated societies, for instance Iran and Afghanistan, you can see that this has negative effects on women. Then the house becomes the women's domain and the world the place for men."[61] (Selim, 2006)

Again, Selim warns of the ideologies behind these practices and the possible negative consequences for women. Ghorashi says that many women would like separate swimming hours and that we should not be afraid of Muslim traditions but make space for them, also within feminism.

In an article on the kindred spirits of Ayaan Hirsi Ali we can also find this kind of argument against certain Muslim traditions or customs. A very extreme example comes from the Iranian-French writer Chahdortt Djavann, who compares women who

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openbare instellingen. Maar nog liever had ik dat de boerka van de aardbodem verdween. Volgens mij gaan vrouwen een boerka dragen als ze onvoldoende genegenheid krijgen van de mensen om hen heen."

[61] Original text: "Nederland moet niet toegeven als moslims aparte zwemuren voor vrouwen willen of aparte clubjes voor jongens en meisjes in buurthuizen, aparte ziekenzalen en ga zo maar door. In de acht fundamentalistische moslimlanden waar de segregatie ver is doorgevoerd, waaronder Iran en Afghanistan, kun je zien dat dit altijd nadelig uitpakt voor vrouwen. Dan wordt het huis het vrouwendomein en de rest van de wereld is er voor mannen."

wear the veil with the guards in Nazi concentration camps; they are collaborators according to her (Kraaijo, van Vliet and Wieman, 2005). The Opzij editors describe her view on the headscarf as follows:

> "She compares the veil or the headscarf – for her there is no difference – with the Star of David: a sign of inferiority. She calls the veil pornographic because it reduces women to sexual organs and impure beings. It is abuse if you have a young girl wear a veil, because you implicitly say that she is 'consumable'. Exactly the veil makes her into a sex object, she explains in almost every interview. Indirectly you tell her that she lives in a sinful body."[62] (Djavann, 2005, cited in: Kraaijo, van Vliet and Wieman, 2005)

Even though this quote shows a much more radical view on the headscarf than Selim's, both women describe its operation at a symbolic level and believe it to represent only one thing: unequal gender relations.

MP Geert Wilders also talks about the symbolic meaning of veiling, but he adds a social analysis as well (note however that he talks about the burqa and not the headscarf):

> "For me it is most important that it [the burqa, EM] is a medieval symbol that emphasises the unequal position of women. If you wear such a thing, you will know one thing for sure: you will never integrate, because this piece of clothing is a big 'no' to Dutch society. Furthermore, your chances to get a job are close to nothing, and we would like to see Muslim women to become independent as well. The chance to find friends is also lower when you wear the burqa. Through this piece of clothing you will find loneliness."[63] (Wilders, 2007, cited in: Dresselhuijs 2007)

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[62] Original text: "Zo vergelijkt ze de sluier of hoofddoek - voor haar is er geen verschil - met de jodenster: een teken van minderwaardigheid. Ze noemt de sluier pornografisch omdat deze de vrouw tot een geslachtsdeel en een onrein wezen reduceert. 'Het is kindermishandeling als je een jong meisje een sluier laat dragen, want je geeft dan aan dat ze al "te consumeren" is. Juist de sluier maakt van haar een lustobject,' legt ze uit in ongeveer elk interview. 'Je vertelt haar indirect dat ze in een zondig lichaam leeft. En waarom?"
[63] Original text: "Voor mij staat op de voorgrond dat het een middeleeuws symbool is dat de ongelijkheid van de vrouw benadrukt. Als je zo'n ding draagt, weet je een ding zeker: je zult nooit integreren, omdat dat kledingstuk een groot "nee" is tegen de Nederlandse samenleving. Verder zijn je

The interesting thing about this quote is that when we compare it with the previous ones, we can see that Wilders plays with (or maybe just confuses) the different levels of thinking about issues such as the headscarf or burqa. He starts by consciously referring to the symbolic meaning of the burqa, then he moves to a practical argument (you will never integrate), but then refers to a symbolic reason for this (it is a big 'no' to Dutch society) to back this up. Furthermore, he connects his arguments to integration in such a way that they could just as easily be used to criticise Dutch society instead of the burqa: if you wear a burqa in the Netherlands you cannot find a job, make friends or integrate

In the article 'Met een hoofddoek om krijg je respect' (When you wear a headscarf people give your respect) yet another approach to the headscarf issue turns up. The woman who is interviewed decided to wear a headscarf for a certain time, just to investigate how people respond to it. The results: many angry sights from 'autochtonous' people and more respect from Muslims (Manschot, 2006). Van Roode both describes the different behaviour of Muslim boys, but also how it feels to be discriminated against. Hence the problems described by her are twofold: the negative aspects of Muslim culture and the discrimination by 'autochtonous' Dutch people.

The interviewer however (Anke Manschot) is much more critical about the headscarf. She argues that the headscarf is a sign of oppression and she regrets the fact that women wear it. See for instance these questions, posed by her to van Roode during the interview:

> "But isn't it terrible that despite a Second Feminist Wave now also women in Dutch neighbourhoods have to wear a headscarf in order to be left alone?"[64] (Van Roode, 2006, cited in: Manschot, 2006)

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kansen op een baan ongeveer nihil, en we zouden toch graag zien dat ook moslimvrouwen onafhankelijk worden. De kans op het vinden van Nederlandse vrienden wordt ook ernstig belemmerd door de boerka. Via dit kledingstuk kies je dus voor het isolement."
[64] Orignal text: "Maar het is toch verschrikkelijk dat het ondanks een Tweede Feministische Golf nu ook al in sommige Nederlandse buurten zover gekomen is dat een vrouw een hoofddoek moet dragen om met rust gelaten te worden"

Interviewee van Roode however argues that we should acknowledge the different meanings of the headscarf:

> "We should not blame the headscarf. I am not against the headscarf. For a number of Muslim women it really is an expression of their faith. Others use it to emphasise their identity. And others indeed to be left alone, like women in Egypt told me. But when you fight against the headscarf, you only fight the symptoms. The continuous discussion about the headscarf is a sign of the lack of understanding of each other and the big differences between groups."[65] (Van Roode, 2006, cited in: Manschot, 2006)

An interesting aspect of this quote is that in the first part van Roode recognises different possible meanings of the headscarf, but in the second part she still considers it as part (a symptom) of a problem. In the next quote she explains what the 'real' problem is:

> "In our culture we have achieved that a woman is not considered to be a whore when she has sex before she is married. Muslims come from a culture in which the virginity of unmarried women is very important. Only a pure woman can count on respect."[66] (Van Roode, 2006, cited in: Manschot, 2006)

In other words, van Roode believes that individual women can wear the headscarf for different reasons, and thus also choose to wear it, but the background of the headscarf is still considered to be related to a rather conservative view of gender relations.

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[65] Original text: "We moeten niet de schuld aan de hoofddoek geven. Ik ben niet tegen de hoofddoek. Voor een aantal moslima's is het echt een uiting van hun geloof. Anderen gebruiken hem weer om hun identiteit te benadrukken. Weer anderen om inderdaad met rust gelaten te worden, zoals vrouwen in Egypte me vertelden. Maar wanneer je tegen de hoofddoek ageert, doe je aan symptoombestrijding. De aanhoudende discussie over de hoofddoek is een symptoom van het grote onbegrip en van de grote tegenstellingen die er tussen bevolkingsgroepen bestaan."
[66] Original text: "In onze cultuur hebben we bereikt dat een meisje geen hoer meer is als ze seks voor het huwelijk heet. Moslims komen uit een cultuur waarin de maagdelijkheid van een ongetrouwde vrouw nog reuzebelangrijk is. Alleen een kuise vrouw kan op respect rekenen. Wanneer je je in hun ogen etaleert als een keurige dame, en dat doe je blijkbaar met die hoofddoek, kom je zelfs in aanmerking voor positieve behandeling zoals ik in de tram ondervond."

After discussing the different meanings of the headscarf Manschot moves on to transformation. According to van Roode, we can only achieve change through the development of a liberal Islam and dialogue between different groups:

"If we want to live together in a positive manner, we will have to get to know each other. For too long, we have lived in separate worlds and now we have to pay for it. For that reason, the debates between Muslims and non-Muslims should go on. I also believe in personal conversations between Muslims and non-Muslims. The positive results of those will seep through, I believe, as a very optimistic person. Muslims will have to be prepared to discuss their own culture and interpretation of their religion."[67] (Van Roode, 2006, cited in: Manschot, 2006)

This quote shows that van Roode focuses on the *approach* to the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. Her answer to the question 'how should we deal with differences in our society?' is dialogue. Both groups should talk to each other with an open attitude. This also means that she does not say much about the expected results of these dialogues, or how she feels about certain (feminist) values. To put it in other words, she does not make a statement about what is negotiable and what is not, she just says we have to negotiate.

The interviewer has a rather different view on this issue and is much more focussed on certain values than on dialogue. When van Roode says that she will also try to talk to the boys on the streets, who whistle when she walks by, the interviewer responds:

"A much more effective strategy would be that all women take off their headscarf. Then we will be right away released of the difference between 'whores' and 'non-whores'."[68] (Van Roode, 2006, cited in: Manschot, 2006)

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67 Original text: "Willen we goed kunnen samenleven, dan zullen we ons in elkaar moeten verdiepen. We hebben te lang in gescheiden werelden geleefd en krijgen nu de rekening daarvan gepresenteerd. De debatten tussen moslims en niet-moslims die steeds meer gehouden worden, moeten daarom voortgaan. Ik geloof ook in een-op-eencontacten tussen moslims en niet-moslims. Positieve uitkomsten daarvan sijpelen dan weer door, denk ik als rasoptimist. Moslims zullen daarbij bereid moeten zijn hun eigen cultuur en interpretatie van het geloof ter discussie te stellen."
68 Original text: "Een veel effectievere strategie zal zijn als alle vrouwen hun hoofddoek afdoen. Dan zijn we in een klap af van het onderscheid tussen 'hoeren' en 'niet-hoeren'."

The interviewer is not concerned about approaches; instead she wants to make sure that women are not divided into "whores and non-whores" anymore. Van Roode replies to this that such a policy wouldn't be very strategic: women will not just stop wearing the headscarf overnight (Manschot, 2006).

Some might argue that the above-described differences of opinion are related to the divergence between universalism and relativism. I purposely have not used these terms however, because I believe that something else is at issue here. Interpreting this disagreement through the framework of universalism versus relativism will not help us to better understand the situation. Van Roode's arguments cannot be described as relativist. Even though she does not want to commit to certain values beforehand, she does not say that every group's values should be respected in all cases. Instead she proposes dialogue in order to get to know each other and debate different values and issues. Hence, van Roode focuses on the approach towards diversity, rather than the outcome she would prefer.

The discrepancy between thinking about processes/approaches and general values is probably an important cause of some of the disagreements between feminists in discussions about cultural and religious issues. There are not just different arguments in the debates, but different ways of thinking about the issue. I believe it is important to be conscious of these variations in thinking about multiculturalism and feminism and not to reduce them to classic frameworks such as relativism/universalism.

Governing Minorities: Multiculturalism, Integration or Assimilation?

Some authors/interviewees talk about the positive influence of religion/culture in women's lives, most however discuss the problematic aspects of these concepts. Yet in the academic debates about multiculturalism and feminism, many authors, such as Susan Moller Okin, move beyond this theme and argue in favour of or against group recognition and state protection. This is connected to one of the most recurrent interpretations of multiculturalism, which starts from the idea that it is important to recognise cultural groups and safeguard the traditions and customs of these groups by granting specific group rights. In the recent public debates in the Netherlands on culture and religion we hardly ever find someone defending this interpretation of multiculturalism. Instead, most statements are about integration (and sometimes

assimilation) of minority groups and hence the restriction of group rights and difference. Here, I will present the statements in *Opzij* regarding this aspect (minority policies) of multiculturalism. These remarks are either about, or aimed at, those who are involved in policy making (the government, members of parliament etc), or those who can be considered to be the objects of these policies (migrants, 'allochtonous' etc). In most cases authors or interviewees plead for the active involvement of the state in the integration or assimilation of migrants.

Writers Hafid Bouazza and politician Boris Dittrich both argue that the integration of migrants should be a 'mutual project', where gender equality is an important aspect of this reciprocal interpretation of integration. Dittrich makes the following statement about intervention:

> "First of all, we should not leave that to them alone, also it is very important that they discuss it among each other. That is why I am happy with Ayaan, because she functions as a booster. But we also have to intervene, as Dutch people and as politicians."[69] (Dittrich, 2005, cited in: Dresselhuys 2005a)

This quote from Dittrich is a very general remark about intervention and the responsibility of both the 'autochtonous' Dutch and the migrants. What stands out however is that even though he argues that both the majority and the minority have a responsibility when it comes to integration, he does not seem to mean that both have to give in when it comes to norms and values. This fits exactly the division that Tariq Modood makes between assimilation, integration and multiculturalism (Modood, 2007). Where assimilation is used to describe a one-way process, multiculturalism and integration are considered as two-way processes for which both minorities and the majority have to do something. Multiculturalism can be distinguished from integration because it combines the reciprocal process with respect for different groups. Hence, the concept of integration treats people as individuals; multiculturalism on the other hand also aims to give space to certain groups in society. Dittrich's remarks fit the category of integration; he does not believe that

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[69] Original text: "Vooropgesteld: dat moeten we niet aan hen alleen overlaten, ook al is het heel belangrijk dat zij erover met elkaar in discussie gaan. Daarom ben ik blij met Ayaans functie als aanjager. Maar wij moeten ons er ook terdege mee bemoeien, als Nederlanders en als politiek."

migrants alone can be blamed for a lack of integration. Society as a whole is responsible for that, which also means that, for example, governments and employers must take a lead in this process (Modood, 2007).

Hafid Bouazza also refers to the responsibility of the majority (when asked about integration, but not in the sense of the above-described two-way process:

> "Dutch people have to interfere in this intensively. Self-reflection and change in Islam have to come from Europe. Simply, because according to the Qu'ran, the basis for Islam, it is forbidden to ridicule the prophet. And everything that differs from the traditional dogma is regarded as ridiculing, and, again according to the Qu'ran, this will be heavily punished, sometimes even with the death penalty."[70] (Bouazza, 2004, cited in: Dresselhuijs 2004b)

Bouazza does not want the majority to get involved because he thinks both groups should work together, but because he believes that change will not come from within. He argues that Dutch people have to get involved in order to change Islam (into a more self-reflective religion). This statement includes many sub-arguments and assumptions about certain groups, but if we apply the 'assimilation-integration-multiculturalism division' to this quote, we also see that Bouazza's main message is one of Muslims having to adapt to Western values.

Paul Cliteur argues that we should not give in to the wishes of "multiculture-lovers" (Dresselhuijs, 2004b), who believe that our multicultural society should be made visible everywhere. Instead, he argues, we should aim for a 'neutral state':

> "Especially a pluriform society would benefit from a further neutralising of the state. Just as with a football game, where the referee should be upright neutral in order to be able to bring together parties with huge differences; a plausible state authority has to be neutral too. Hence: we can have headscarves, yarmulkes and crosses in parliament, because they are representatives of the people, but not in the government, nor in the

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[70] Original ext: "daar moeten Nederlanders zich intensief mee bemoeien. Want zelfreflectie en verandering in de islam moeten uit Europa komen. Heel simpel, omdat in de koran, de basis voor de islam, een verbod staat om te spotten met de profeet. En alles wat afwijkt van de traditionele leer wordt gezien als spotten en daar staat, alweer volgens de koran, een zware straf op, soms zelfs de doodstraf."

courtrooms, the army or the police. Balkenende, as prime minister, should not refer to Jesus or Mohammed anymore, nor should the Queen. The Dutch should focus on the French model of the neutral state."[71] (Cliteur, 2004, cited in: Dresselhuijs 2004a)

According to Cliteur, the influence of religion in the public sphere should be as little as possible: religion should be a private thing. This also includes a strict separation of church and state. Besides the question of whether one could call the French laïcité model neutral, one could argue that the model that Cliteur proposes here, is very different from the general Dutch interpretation of state neutrality, which is highly influenced by pillarization.

When we move attention to what these authors say about gender equality (in relation to integration) we see a similar pattern. Dittrich wants dialogue between different groups, but also points out that certain values are non-negotiable:

"Politicians should lead the discussions, in the sense that we say: certain things such as the equality between men and women and heterosexuals and homosexuals are achievements in our society, we do not compromise on that."[72] (Dittrich, cited in: Dresselhuys 2005a)

He mentions circumcision as an example; according to him all girls should be checked at school (also non-Muslim) and he wants heavy punishments for parents who circumcise their daughters, for instance withdrawal of the residence permit.

Hafid Bouazza is again more explicit in his statements here than Dittrich. When it comes to the integration of Muslims he sees two priorities to fight: illiteracy and the oppression of women. The emancipation of women is an important aspect of the

[71] Original text: "Juist een pluriforme samenleving is gebaat bij een verdere neutralisering van het staatsgezag. Zoals je bij een voetbalwedstrijd een scheidsrechter van onbesproken neutraliteit moet hebben om heftig verschillende partijen tot elkaar te brengen, zo moet ook de staat geloofwaardig zijn als neutrale arbiter. Dus: wel hoofddoeken, keppeltjes en kruizen in de Kamer, want dat zijn door het volk gekozen vertegenwoordigers, maar niet in het kabinet, noch bij de rechtbank, noch in het leger of bij de politie. Balkenende zal, als staatsman, niet meer moeten verwijzen naar Jezus Christus of Mohammed, net zomin als de koningin. De Nederlandse staat moet zich oriënteren op het Franse model van de neutrale staat."
[72] Original text: "De politiek moet zelfs leiding geven aan de discussie, in die zin dat men zegt: bepaalde zaken als de gelijkstelling van mannen en vrouwen en hetero's en homo's zijn verworvenheden in onze samenleving, daar leveren wij geen centimeter van in."

integration (or assimilation) of a whole group and should therefore have priority over other things, such as respect for cultural or religious groups (Dresselhuys, 2004b). For that reason he very much supports Ayaan Hirsi Ali and her approach to these issues:

> "We have to realise that we live in a free country, but that a large part of our citizens, Muslim women, do not have this freedom. If you regard Muslim women, whom she defends, as a part of the Dutch society, then you fight for them; if you do not and argue that they are part of Islamic culture then you exclude them twice. This struggle should not be gradual, but rebellious, with great steps in a revolutionary way."[73] (Bouazza, cited in: Dresselhuys 2004b)

In this quote, we can see all the aspects of the previously mentioned themes: his view on integration as a rather one-way process and his provocative, neo-realist style of argument. In the following section, I will move attention to a particular issue in the integration debates: the headscarf.

The Headscarf Case: More Discussion and Stricter Laws

Cisca Dresselhuys has an in-depth conversation on the headscarf in the Meetlat interview with Afshin Ellian. Like the previously mentioned authors, Ellian believes that the Dutch should intervene: people in the Netherlands should have had a (more engaged) discussion on the headscarf, just as they did in France. According to him:

> "It would have given an enormous support to 'allochtonous' women and girls. (…) What kind of support do you give these girls when you say: 'well, a headscarf, what does it matter, just a piece of cloth'. It matters a lot because in most cases it is not a free choice. Or do you call it a free choice when a girl

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[73] Original text: "We moeten beseffen dat we in een vrij land leven, maar dat een groot deel van onze eigen burgers, de moslimvrouwen, die vrijheid niet hebben. Beschouw je moslimvrouwen, voor wie zij opkomt, als onderdeel van de Nederlandse maatschappij, dan vecht je voor ze; doe je dat niet, zeg je dat ze tot een eigen islamitische cultuur behoren, dan sluit je ze tweemaal buiten. De strijd moet niet geleidelijk gaan, integendeel: het moet rebels gaan, met schokken, revolutionair."

decides to wear a headscarf not to be bothered by 'allochtonous' boys and men."[74] (Ellian, cited in: Dresselhuys 2006b)

Ellian does not believe that women choose freely to wear a headscarf and therefore wants the Dutch government to help them with a public debate and restrictive policies. In his view, people very often oversimplify things when they say that women should have the choice to wear a headscarf or not. According to Ellian the party leader of the green left party (Femke Halsema) for instance supports the oppression of women with her noncommittal standpoint on the headscarf:

"If a girl tells her family she does not want to wear the headscarf, the father will say: Femke Halsema thinks it is ok. You are a whore if you don't wear one"[75] (Ellian, 2006, cited in: Dresselhuys 2006b).

Ellian's ideas about 'helping Muslim women' are based on the idea that they are forced to wear a headscarf. He believes that these women are oppressed and that a liberal government that believes in the equality of its citizens should intervene in this kind of situation. He might have an important point, but only if these women are really oppressed (and/or hurt) and need the government's help. The intrusion of the state in the lives of individuals should not be taken lightly, especially when one thinks from a liberal perspective. The question is however: how do we know if these women are really oppressed? Ellian does not really answer this question (in this interview).

What he does say clearly is that he condemns the fact that Muslim women do not have a free choice when it comes to the headscarf. He believes that laws (or policies) can be an instrument for girls in the discussions with their fathers and give them more space to make their own decisions. One could question whether his proposal is consistent with this idea. When Dresselhuys for instance mentions the special

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[74] Original text: "daarmee hadden wij veel allochtone vrouwen en meisjes een enorme steun in de rug gegeven. Wat voor steun geef je zulke meisjes als wij zeggen: "Ach, zo'n hoofddoek, wat maakt het uit, zo'n stukje textiel" Het maakt heel veel uit, want in de meeste gevallen gaat het niet om een vrije keus. Of noem je het een vrije keus als meisjes de hoofddoek omdoen omdat ze dan met rust gelaten worden door allochtone jongens en mannen."

[75] Orginal text: "als een meisje thuis zegt dat ze geen hoofddoek om wil, zegt haar vader: 'Femke Halsema vindt dat wel goed. Jij bent een hoer als je het niet doet"

headscarves that girls wear at work in her local supermarket (with the company's logo and colour), Ellian argues we should boycott these stores:

> "That boss could have helped that girl by saying: no headscarves behind the pay desk. Then this girl could have told that to her father. And the choice would have been: headscarf or job."[76] (Ellian, 2006, cited in: Dresselhuys 2006b)

In my view, this suggestion does not give much extra space for these girls' decisions. In the above quote there are only two people who are making decisions: the girl's employer and the girl's father.

In the next quote, Ellian takes his argument a step further. Here he not only argues that Dutch society should 'help' these women with regulations against headscarves, but he also accepts the fact that this might mean that these women have to have serious fights about it with their families. When we forbid the headscarf in public spaces:

> "the father could say two things: 'you stay at home', or 'leave the headscarf'. In Muslim culture, children are the true pensions of their parents. Therefore it is very important that the children have good jobs, people will give up a lot for that. If the father chooses the headscarf, there will be a little civil war in that home. That is not so bad, as long as there are no weapons used. Civil wars often lead to democracy."[77] (Ellian, 2006, cited in: Dresselhuys 2006b)

In my view, Ellian is asking a lot from Muslim women in this quote. Even if they agree with Ellian's standpoint, many women might not want to risk family relations

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[76] Original text: "Ik zou er niet willen kopen. Die baas had dat meisje juist kunnen helpen door te zeggen: Geen hoofddoek achter de kassa. Dan had dat meisje dat thuis tegen haar vader kunnen zeggen. De keus was dan geweest: hoofddoek af of geen baan."
[77] Original text: "Dan zou vader twee dingen kunnen zeggen: 'Je blijft thuis' of 'Doe de hoofddoek dan maar af'. In de islamitische cultuur vormen kinderen het echte pensioen. Het is dus heel belangrijk dat kinderen een goede baan krijgen, daar heeft men veel voor over. Als vader voor de hoofddoek kiest, dan wordt het daar thuis een kleine burgeroorlog. Dat is helemaal niet erg, zolang er maar geen wapens aan te pas komen. Uit burgeroorlogen komt vaak de echte democratie voort."

on the basis of it. Furthermore, again the Muslim women themselves are not making any choices here, which was the original problem Ellian wanted to solve.

To summarise, we can say that all three of these authors want more intervention when it comes to issues related to multiculturalism. Discussions about integration and stricter laws are the most important suggestions. Even though these authors differ in their focus and style, they all propose to have more debates and develop more policies for culture-related issues. None of the authors however suggest laws to accommodate the cultures and/or religions of minorities in society.

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have analysed 3 years of *Opzij* articles on the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism. All articles were analysed through a combination of critical discourse analysis and argumentation analysis. This combined method made it possible to evaluate both the content and structure of arguments and the rules of the discourse (who is included and who is excluded, what categories are used etc). The central questions asked in each section were: what problems and what solutions are proposed? For most of the articles the answers to these questions covered the most important messages. Some articles however centred on other questions or statements. The group of articles on Muslim women for instance dealt mostly with the question: *why* do these women make certain choices? A majority of the articles on multiculturalism were in fact about Islam and Muslims, which is probably related to the fact that this religion plays a growing role in the current (Dutch) discussions about migrants.

The chapter was divided into three main themes: the style of the debates, interpretations of feminism and emancipation, and discussions about culture, religion and multiculturalism. The first section, on the style of debating, showed that many articles in *Opzij* contained neo-realist elements, such as the 'dare to face the facts' arguments and the strict aversion to the left-wing elite. The structures of the debate were also shown to have become an important aspect of the debate itself. In other words, arguments about style and approaches were often used to back certain statements. Ayaan Hirsi Ali was the most-discussed person in this context. Many of

the interviewees and authors reviewed her approach towards Islam and gender equality and either valued her for her courage or disapproved of her style.

In the second section, it became clear that Muslim women were included in *Opzij* articles (for instance through interviews), but in a rather limited way. In the sections on feminism, the issues of experience and feminist standpoints played a very important role. 'Should we or should we not listen (more) to the opinions of Muslim women?' was the question that many authors and interviewees asked. The theoretical issue connected to that question is: what counts as a feminist standpoint? Some women argued that white feminists should get more involved in the struggles of Muslim women, others disagreed and pleaded for more particular interpretations of feminist values such as equality. What all articles in this section shared though was the aim to theorise feminism. In the articles on Muslim women, feminism was not theorised. The biggest difference between these articles on feminism in *Opzij* and those on Muslim women is that the first explicitly discussed *how* feminism should deal with culture and religion, in the latter authors and interviewees mainly focussed on *why* Muslim women make certain religious or cultural choices. In other words, there was one category of articles in which feminism and feminist standpoints were *theorized* and a separate one in which Muslim women's choices were *investigated*. This means the articles that focus on Muslim women do not theorise how Muslim women see feminism. It seems that this is connected to the conceptualisation of feminism in *Opzij*. Instead of discussing different interpretations of feminism, such as Muslim feminism and secular feminism; *Opzij*'s articles either talk about how feminists should deal with difference or about the decisions of Muslim women. This way, it seems they position secular/white feminists on one side and Muslim women on the other.

The final part of this chapter focussed on religion, culture and multiculturalism. In some articles, authors and interviewees discussed the positive influence of culture or religion on their lives, for example because the Qur'an was a source of inspiration. Others talked about the negative aspects and for example the possible dangers of a fundamentalist Islam. The first group had a much more personalised and flexible view of religion and culture, while the latter focussed more on certain dominant perspectives. The headscarf and burqa were much-discussed themes. Differences of opinion arose because some authors focussed on the individual choices of women, while others were more interested in symbolic meanings. These different layers of the

discussion were hardly ever made explicit in the *Opzij* articles, which made it difficult to have a proper discussion of the actual arguments. Just as with the standpoint and experience issue, it would improve the discussion to make these different layers more overt.

Another point we see in this chapter is the discrepancy between those who focus on certain interpretations of feminist values and those who consider feminism to be a process or guide with whose help we can think about progress. In the first case, authors or interviewees argued that we should not allow certain cultural practices without critical evaluation of their content and consequences. Feminists in the Netherlands fought against patriarchal customs in our culture and should not allow similar issues in other cultures. The second group state that white/secular feminists should inform themselves on how, for instance, Muslim feminists fight for gender equality, often within their religious communities. This means that white/secular feminists should try to understand Muslim feminists' choices, have respect for them and start a dialogue about feminism. In some cases these two standpoints collide because they approach feminism in a different way. But, in my view they can also come together and learn from each other: we can think about productive and respectful feminist dialogues without giving up on certain feminist values.

This in-depth analysis of the arguments and discourse structure of *Opzij* teaches us that the many different views on the relationship between feminism and multiculturalism are partly related to a lack of clarity in the discussions. Often the many layers of these discussions were not recognised or made explicit. Furthermore, this analysis demonstrates how feminism is interpreted in *Opzij*, who is included in the theorization of it and who is excluded. In order to enhance our understanding of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, I would argue that we need to uncover the many different layers of the arguments and to make explicit the power relations and in/exclusion in the interpretation of the main concepts. In the next chapter, I will analyse the focus groups I held with women from women's organisations to investigate these central issues further.

Chapter 6   Exploring the Public Debate Further: Grassroots Organisations and Minority Group Voices

Introduction

In the previous chapter I investigated the way multiculturalism and feminism have been discussed in the feminist magazine *Opzij* in the years 2004 -2007. Various patterns and arguments could be recognised in the articles on these themes. Feminist standpoints for instance played an important role in many of the articles. 'Should we or should we not take into account the experiences of Muslim women?' was a central question for many authors and interviewees of *Opzij*. It was noteworthy that such epistemological questions around feminist standpoints were mostly discussed from a white and secular perspective. Muslim women were generally not involved in the theorization of these issues, and often only came into the picture through the discussions about their choices. Questions such as 'why do Muslim women wear the veil?' are an example of this. In other words, it was not the case that Muslim women could not speak in Opzij or that they weren't listened to. On the contrary, there were many interviews with Muslim women. But most of the time they were objects of certain 'why' questions, instead of active agents of feminism. Their choices were investigated, but never became part of an (alternative) analysis of what feminism is about.

   In this chapter I will build on the conclusions from the previous chapter and move to the analysis of the focus groups that I conducted with women from various women's organisations. The interviews were only semi-structured and generally covered three main aspects of the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism: the debates in the media about this subject, the women's personal experiences, and their collective or political activities and strategies. The goal was to find out these women's ideas about the concepts of multiculturalism and feminism and to theorise the relationship between these concepts with them. The overall aim was then to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, and to attempt to reach a consensual conclusion to the issue of the presumed tensions between these concepts. The in depth argumentation

for talking with these women and to theorise these issues with them, can be found in the previous chapters (3 and 4), but can be summarised by arguing that there are many differences between women and that feminism should work with these differences by developing situated knowledges, in which various standpoints are taken into account. Women in general and feminists in particular are struggling to find ways to position themselves in debates about religion and culture. We need to give voice to these different opinions and try to find openings for dialogue in order to prevent feminism to becoming an exclusionary concept that only appeals to a limited group of women. I do not mean to say that feminism should therefore take a relativist perspective, but I would like to argue that feminism should be open to different interpretations and dialogue. Or, as Tariq Modood puts it when he talks about multiculturalism: 'We are not being asked to approve or disapprove in an ultimate way but to allow co-presence, public support, interaction and societal redefinition' (Modood, 2007, p 67).

The interaction and multivocal narratives that occur in focus groups make them a highly suitable method for accessing certain marginalised or 'subjugated' voices (Leavy, 2007 in: Nagy, Biber, and Leavy (ed). 2007). First of all, focus groups are generally considered to create the most equal relationship possible between researcher and interviewees (Wilkinson, 2004). Contrary to a one-to-one interview, in a focus group the researcher is outnumbered by the interviewees. This can make it easier for them to take control of the conversation and shift the balance of power. The effect is strengthened by the fact that focus groups are often only partly structured by the researcher. In other words, there are plenty of possibilities for the interviewees to influence the development of the discussion and to steer it in a different direction from the one the researcher might have planned. For some researchers this might be a disadvantage, but feminist researchers have argued that the possibility for "participants to contribute to setting the research agenda, results in better access to their opinions and conceptual worlds" (Wilkinson, 2004). In this research project these characteristics of focus group analyses are considered to be highly valuable. The main aim of doing the interviews was to investigate the opinions of various women who are active in women's organizations; about multiculturalism and feminism, and to scrutinize which arguments, strategies and experiences are excluded from the public debate. If the researcher had total control over the conversation, it would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to get to the heart of these (marginalised) arguments and strategies.

Another advantage of doing focus groups in a research project like this one is that focus groups produce socially situated knowledges. The dynamics in the group can make it possible for participants to make connections between certain opinions, which they had not been able to make before. If one woman for example mentions a certain experience, another might remember she has been through something similar and can possibly explain the way she has dealt with it. This is important because it might help participants to mention things they had forgotten about or would otherwise consider as unimportant, but it also shows how individual experiences can be turned into 'collective sense making' (Wilkinson, 2004). Even though the women in my focus groups were already active in women's organisations and rather conscious about issues such as emancipation and religion/culture, there were several instances where they also learned from the experiences of other group members and used the opportunity to theorise these issues together during the conversation. This shows that focus groups in general, but the ones conducted for this research project particularly, are also a good instrument for developing alternative arguments and strategies. This was the main aim of the focus groups from the beginning; they should not be considered as a representation of women's opinions on multiculturalism and feminism, but are instead more comparable to 'think tanks' that try to put forward and develop alternative views on these issues (compared to the ones we generally encounter in public debates).

Before moving to the description of the content of the focus groups, I will first describe the sample and approach. The analysis of the group interviews that follows will be divided into three main parts (in accordance with the prescriptions of the first part of the empirical study that explored the debate through a feminist media outlet): media and representation, multiculturalism and the implications of religion/culture, and finally different interpretations of and approaches to feminism and emancipation

Sample

The main purpose of this fieldwork is to describe and compare different discourses on multiculturalism and feminism that are not found in the popular media. This chapter will therefore aim to broaden the perspectives on these issues by referring to the arguments and experiences of women from many different backgrounds. Do they

think about these issues differently from the way they are covered in the mainstream media? Do they experience tensions between their culture or religion and feminist thinking? What other related problems are they faced with and what coping strategies do they employ to solve these? In order to get an adequate range of answers to these questions, it was necessary to get a broad sample that would be representative of the diversity in women's organisations in the Netherlands. A total of nine different organisations were chosen to cover the major groups that have a say in the debate: BIZ, ZAMI, FNV Vrouwenbond, Daral Arqam, Yasmin, Al Nisa, E-quality and SCALA en Interreligieuze Dialoog. The organisations differed in terms of their main target group (country of origin, religious affiliation, civil status), their action process (discussion, self-help, or information centres) and their focus of intervention (emancipation, empowerment, or experience sharing). The aim was to bring together as many different organisations as possible, in order to produce as many different arguments as possible, on the basis of a fair representation of women's organisations in the Netherlands. The organisations in the sample were selected because they were not only interested in feminism- or emancipation-related issues but also in cultural and religious issues (or diversity).

All organisations were approached via either email or telephone and informed about the aims and approaches of the research. Most organisations responded positively to the project, only few declined the invitation to participate, mainly for time-management reasons. Prior to the interview, the groups were sent an information sheet (see appendix I) about the content of the research project and their participation in it. Before the interviews all participants signed the consent form (see appendix II). Different numbers of women attended the various focus groups; there was a variation from 4 to 20 participants. In all cases, my initial contact person at the organisation arranged the time and place of the meeting and also invited the women of her group. Depending on the group, the women involved were either doing paid work for the organisation or worked there as volunteers. Because most of the focus groups were held in the organisations' own spaces, the women usually felt comfortable and had rather informal discussions about the issues involved. For more information on the prepared questions, see appendix III.

The first group to be interviewed was the network BIZ. This nation wide Turkish women's group aims to give a voice to Turkish women in the Netherlands who have experienced higher education[78] They do this by bringing women together through their own network and by uniting other different networks. BIZ aspires to develop a common vision from where the group can respond to current issues in society and be a soundboard for politicians, media and policy makers. BIZ also helps women to gain information and knowledge about various subjects for Turkish women. Through this, the network also aims to improve the position of migrant, especially Turkish, women in the Netherlands. The (4) women in the interview were all volunteers of the organisation. They meet regularly to share experiences, to support each other and to set up meetings for all members of the organisation. The women were all of Turkish background, though some were born in the Netherlands and were between 20-40 years old. They all called themselves Muslim, but only some were practicing Muslims.

The second group in the sample is ZAMI.[79] This is a self-organisation of black, migrant and refugee women.[80] The main objectives of ZAMI are: to promote the consciousness and identity of black, migrant and refugee women, to provide insights into the position of migrant women in Dutch society, and to contribute to knowledge about these women. ZAMI provides a political and cultural podium for all black, migrant and refugee women in and outside of Amsterdam. The main activities are a multicultural café with entertainment, discussion and a restaurant (ZAMI CASA), a magazine that focuses on the activities and experiences of black, migrant and refugee women (ZAMI MAGAZINE), and an annual prize for black, migrant and refugee women whose motivation, example and work provide inspiration for improving the position of black, migrant and refugee women in the Netherlands (ZAMI AWARD). The (5) women in the interview were volunteers and board members of the organisation. They were from different national and religious backgrounds. Some were born in the Netherlands; others had migrated to this country later in their lives (one as refugee). Their ages varied between 26-60.

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[78] This information comes from: http://www.netwerk-biz.nl
[79] This information comes from: http://www.zami.nl
[80] This term (in Dutch: zwarte/migranten/vluchtelingen vrouwen, or ZMV-vrouwen) is used in the Netherlands to describe various non-white women.

The third group is rather different, but also very engaged with issues related to women and diversity: FNV Vrouwenbond, the trade union's women's group.[81] The organisation aims to improve the position of all women, with a special focus on 'forgotten groups' such as women who combine work with taking care of children, women on welfare, widows, volunteers etc. Another important aspect of the FNV Vrouwenbond strategy is to try to reach women from all backgrounds such as young/old, doing paid/unpaid jobs, black, migrant and refugee women and white women. This is reflected in their activities, which are not just related to paid work, but also to care-related issues or other work-related issues, such as pensions. Finally, FNV Vrouwenbond has its own magazine and is politically active, for instance by advising political parties how to improve the position of women. The interview was held on one of the discussion evenings (that day's theme was diversity) and was attended by (7) board members who were volunteers for the group. The majority of the women came from the Netherlands and were raised in Christian families. Most of them were not religious (anymore). Two women were originally from Turkey, one of them called herself an atheist now; the other was a practicing Muslim. The women's ages ranged between 28-61.

The fourth group interviewed is Daral Arqam. Like the first two groups this is a self-organisation, but Daral Arqam is based on religion instead of national or other ethnic categories.[82] Several Dutch women who chose to live according to Islam started the group. Today the group brings together women of different ages from many different countries. Daral Arqam organises lectures and meetings to discuss issues related to Islam. The group's main aim is to contribute to the emancipation process of Muslim women without letting go of their identity. They study Islamic texts themselves and bring forward ways to combine Islam and emancipation. Other activities of the group are children's education (on the Qu'ran) and a buddy project, in which Muslim women support other women who need help. The (6) women in the interview were very diverse in both national background and age, which is consistent with the organisation's goals. They all shared their Islamic faith, but some were born in a Muslim family while others had converted to this religion later in life. Some of the women were volunteers for the organisation; others were active members who

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[81] This information comes from: http://www.fnvvrouwenbond.nl/index
[82] This information comes from: http://www.moslimainrotterdam.nl/

attended the meetings. The youngest participant of the interview was 16 and still in high school; the oldest was 49.

The fifth group in the sample is Yasmin. This is an educative and cultural centre for migrant women, mainly from Turkey, Morocco and Arabic speaking countries. The main aims of Yasmin are: to fight the isolation of many migrant women, to promote the emancipation, participation and integration of migrant women and girls, to promote social cohesion between different (ethnic) groups in the Netherlands, and to protect the interests of these women and empower them. Yasmin organises social meetings, informative meetings, conferences, debates and cultural activities. Most of the (7) women in the interview were members of the cultural centre, who meet once a week to eat, drink and discuss their experiences. One participant was a paid staff member of the organisation. The women were all from either Turkish or Moroccan background and had migrated to the Netherlands. They all called themselves Muslims but only some of them were practicing their faith. The women's ages ranged from 35-55.

After Yasmin, the organisation SCALA was interviewed. Unlike the other groups, SCALA is an expertise centre with the main goal to emancipate women in Rotterdam.[83] The organisation is dedicated to realising structural improvements to the position of women in general, as well as women from minority groups. SCALA aims to achieve this by providing policy advice and through the development of projects. The information centre also helps individual women with questions and problems. Women can simply come round for a talk. There is a care worker present who will listen, give advice and help find appropriate addresses or referrals. The (4) women in the interview were all paid staff members of the organisation. One woman was born in the United States and had been very active in the black feminist movement there; the others were born in the Netherlands (one in a Surinamese family). None of them called themselves religious. The women were between 26-48 years old.

The seventh group in the sample is Al Nisa. This is a self-organisation for and by Muslim women.[84] The group originally started for converted women, but is now open to all Muslim women in the Netherlands. Their main goals are to provide information about Islam which is as independent as possible from specific cultural backgrounds,

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[83] This information comes from: http://www.scalarotterdam.nl
[84] This information comes from: http://www.alnisa.nl/index.html

and to stimulate (Muslim) women to become better informed on issues related to Islam, the position of women in Islam and the position of Muslim women in Dutch society. Al Nisa's main activities include: organizing social meetings for women, a monthly magazine, a quarterly youth magazine for children between 8 -15 years old, discussion meetings in which different groups (for instance from different religions) meet, and seminars about specific themes. In this interview, more women than usual participated (20) because the interview was integrated in a national volunteer's day of the organisation. This also means that the participants were a mix of (unpaid) board members and active volunteers. The women were from different national backgrounds (mainly Turkish, Moroccan and Dutch), but were all practicing Muslims. Some of them were not only personally but also professionally interested in the position of Muslims in Dutch society. The women were between 28-48 years old.

The eighth group is another self-organization, which is based like Al Nisa on religion, but this one brings together women from different religious backgrounds. The Amsterdamse Vrouwengroep (Vrouwengroep van de Raad voor Levensbeschouweingen en Religies te Amsterdam) is a network organization of women from various religious backgrounds with various viewpoints or philosophies of life. Since May 1998, the Women's Group has been actively involved in organizing bi-annual meetings for women who wish to be involved in inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. The group also publishes a digital newsletter once a month with articles, reports and a calendar of activities on the subject of inter-religious dialogue. Their main aim is to equip women with knowledge about the many different religions and cultures in the Netherlands, to create a bridge in the present multicultural society and to search for similarities in life's goals and points of view. The (4) women in this interview were unpaid, active members of the network who meet regularly to organise inter-religious meetings. They were from different national (American, Turkish and Dutch) and religious (Jewish, Muslim and Christian) backgrounds. The youngest participant was 30; the others were between 48-59).

The ninth and final group in the sample is E-quality. Like SCALA, E-quality is an information and expertise centre.[85] The organization's main themes are emancipation, family and diversity. Unlike SCALA, E-quality does not work with individual

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[85] This information comes from: http://www.e-quality.nl

women. Instead, they gather and analyse facts, figures, research data and practical examples. With the knowledge gained, they inform and advise governments, politicians and public organisations. E-quality aims at stimulating equal treatment, individual growth and equal development of all people. The website plays a central role in the distribution of E-quality's publications and their news magazine *E-Quality Matters* provides people with information on emancipation and diversity. They also organise expert meetings, network events and training, and try to stimulate public debate by arranging speeches and lectures and publishing articles in magazines. The (5) women who participated in the interview were all paid staff members of the organisation. The majority were from a Dutch and Christian background, but did not identify themselves as religious (anymore). Most of them had been active in the feminist movement in the Netherlands; their ages varied between 35-48.

Approach: to the Interviews and Analysis

This thesis aims to scrutinize various discourses on multiculturalism and feminism and the concepts and ideas that lie beneath them. The analysis of the interviews in this chapter is the result of a search for lines of thinking that were not represented in the public media. Focus groups are an ideal instrument for producing this kind of knowledge. The conversations were informal and there was ample time for the women to propose certain themes to be discussed or not.

I conducted a total of 9 focus groups, each with the members/employees of one organisation. All focus groups were held in the period between April and June 2008. The average time of each discussion was 90 minutes; they were all taped with a digital recorder. The number of women in each focus group ranged from 4 - 20. In some cases the number of women was so high because the organisation arranged the focus group to coincide with one of their activities and invited volunteers to participate. A focus group with 20 participants is far from the norm, and such a large group is indeed difficult to lead. However the women in this group knew each other very well, and were used to discussing these themes with each other and in fact had a very fruitful discussion.

I led all the interviews myself; except for the women from the group nobody else was present. I always started the conversation by introducing myself. I explained my

background, current work, and the aims of the research project. I also mentioned to the women that I was born in the Netherlands and not religious, but added to this that I didn't consider myself to be a strict secular feminist. My purpose in doing this was to be open with them, in order to make the distance between them as interviewees and me as interviewer as small as I could. At the same time, I did not want to influence them, and so tried not to go into detail about my own ideas about multiculturalism and feminism. In some cases the women asked me afterwards how I felt about these issues, which often led to an interesting discussion in an opposite situation (they as interviewers, me as interviewee).

The interviews were semi-structured, which means that I prepared certain questions on important themes, such as culture, religion, emancipation, empowerment, participation and current political issues, while also allowing for free association on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. The main aim of these interviews was to explore different ways of thinking about multiculturalism and feminism, so it was important to discuss certain themes, but also to leave enough space for the interviewees to put forward other issues. My aim was to lead the discussion around the main themes of multiculturalism, feminism and the media. Depending on the particular discussion I would focus more on one or the other of these, and either go into certain detailed questions or not. In some focus groups I had to ask questions regularly in order to keep the conversation going, but in others there was more of a natural flow. I tried to use the input of the women as much as I could without losing sight of the structure of the conversations or the aims of the fieldwork.

In all focus groups the participants were very willing to discuss their experiences. Some women were more dominant than others; especially in the larger groups, but in the end all women shared their ideas and opinions. Sometimes the more vocal women corrected themselves and gave the word to others; in other cases I tried to involve the more silent women. Often, women showed initiative and brought up certain issues and posed extra questions to the group. These were generally interesting additions to the discussions and made the focus groups more democratic and less formal.

Like the media texts discussed in the previous chapter, the interviews will be analysed with a combined approach of argumentation and discourse analysis. This means that I will both focus on specific arguments made by the women, and also look at the context and inter-textual relations of the discourse. In my view, both parts are essential for a thorough analysis of a debate such as this one on multiculturalism and

feminism. As I want to rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, I cannot just focus on the second part, or I would run the risk of turning into a referee, who only checks whether the game is played by the rules, instead of looking at the issues at stake. On the other hand, an analysis of mere arguments would never be able to give a complete picture of the interests and power relations that influence the discussions.

The interview results were approached in a similar way to the *Opzij* articles. After conducting all the focus group interviews, I listened to all the recordings and made summaries of the discussions. In these abstracts, I briefly described the points that were made and issues that had come up. Just as in the previous chapter, two main questions were central for the data analysis: who or what is considered as the problem and who or what as the solution? I thus collected all the remarks that were made and grouped them according to the problem or solution they were referring to. Corresponding to the previous chapter, these were divided into 3 main categories: 'popular media and representation,' 'feminism and emancipation' and 'multiculturalism, culture and religion-related issues'.

For each of these categories, I described the points of discussion that had come out of the interviews. All the problems and solutions that were put forward are included in the chapter; I did not make a selection at this point. However, I did select the quotes to be used in the chapter. In order to describe the different views on each topic, I chose those examples that best represented the variety of opinions about the different subjects of the interviews. Hence, only statements that were very similar to others I had included were not used in the chapter. Note though that the 3 categories were discussed in all the interviews, but in some groups the participants talked more about one theme than another. This means that I do not refer to all groups for all themes.

The chapter is structured by the main themes of the focus groups. First an analysis will be presented of the women's arguments on media and representation; this will be followed by a section on multicultural issues and the implications of culture and religion. The final section, in which the focus group results are described, is dedicated to feminism and emancipation.

Media and Representation

All interviews began with various questions around the debates on multiculturalism and feminism in the popular media. Islam and Muslims have been much-discussed themes in the Netherlands (and elsewhere) and often women's issues were part of these debates. In particular, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders have become world famous with their comments on Islam-related issues. The short film *Fitna,* made by Geert Wilders, was released only a week before the first focus group was held and had already been endlessly discussed in the previous months (both in the Netherlands and abroad).[86] The film shows footage of several terrorists attacks (for instance Madrid and New York), and warns of Muslim extremism in the world and the influence of the Islam on the Netherlands. Through this film, Geert Wilders showed his fears and negative associations with Islam in general and the Qur'an specifically. Many politicians judged the film harshly for presenting a generalised and sometimes just wrong perspective on Islam and Muslims. Geert Wilders was even denied entry into the United Kingdom, where he wanted to show his film in the House of Lords.[87]

The interviewees were both asked about the discussions on Islam, Muslims and women's issues in general and about discussions on these issues from a more explicit feminist standpoint. The idea behind this was that even though most participants in discussions about multiculturalism refer somehow to women's issues, the arguments of women who explicitly mean to speak from a female or feminist perspective might be experienced differently. The women from the various organisations responded in very diverse ways to both questions. The first question was mostly dealt with by arguing whether we should take these people seriously or not and whether we should even take the time to discuss them (again). The second question was answered more in relation to good or problematic strategies, approaches and intentions.

When asked about the public debate in the Netherlands on multiculturalism and/or Islam, Geert Wilders came to mind quickly. Most women argued that they did not

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[86] See for instance: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7318363.stm (UK) or
http://www.rtl.nl/actueel/rtlnieuws/dossiers/dossier_paginas/film_geert_wilders.xm (NL)
[87] See for instance: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7885918.stm

take him seriously. They considered him to be a fool, who did not deserve this kind of attention. In one interview a woman said she felt that it was a waste of her time to talk about him:

> "He has a democratic right to think what he wants, arguing against him will only put you on the same level. We should leave him and think for ourselves how we want to think about Islam" (FNV, 16 min).

She compared the situation in the Netherlands with a family where one child has psychological problems: very often the only thing the family can talk about is the illness and the child's problems.

In other interviews similar ideas were put forward about not taking Wilders too seriously, for example because his standpoints are too radical or because he is not even prepared to debate with his opponents. However, there were also women who believed he is a threat to Dutch society. They feared his influence and wanted to think and talk about how to stop him. In the interview with Interreligieuze Dialoog a woman mentions:

> "as a Jew I know what racism can do and I find it a scary idea that racists are living so nearby" (Interreligieuze Dialoog, 9 min).

A comparable argument was put forward in the interview with ZAMI members. Wilders, one woman said, excludes certain groups of people who for that reason could feel less safe in our society:

> "The general vision of mister Wilders goes beyond Muslim women. The dangerous thing about him is that he has many followers among Dutch citizens and we cannot rule out the possibility that in 3 or 5 years he will be in government. And, how will his vision then be translated into policy? This idea is more frightening than the consequences of his remarks now. As an

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organisation we should get prepared for this and think about strategies." [88] (ZAMI, 4 min).

Another women in this group mentioned that we now see the enormous influence that Pim Fortuyn has had on the public debates in the Netherlands in general and on what can and cannot be said in particular. Finally, a woman in the same group points out that the kind of stereotyping of certain groups which Wilders uses can have negative consequences for the integration of these groups: "people do not want to integrate into a society they feel excluded from" she argued (ZAMI, 9 min.). In short, all women found the presence of a politician such as Geert Wilders problematic, but there were many different opinions about how to deal with such an issue. In general, none of the groups undertook any actions against Geert Wilders or his film.

When I asked the interviewees about their opinions on Ayaan Hirsi Ali, in comparison to for example Geert Wilders, women responded in a rather different manner. Where Geert Wilders was mostly discussed in a framework of 'should we take him seriously or not?', Ayaan Hirsi Ali was evaluated far more on her strategies. Interviewees talked about her in both positive and negative words, but almost always used her approach/tone/strategies as an argument for their statements about her. In a sense neither of these politicians were really accepted as 'equals' in the political arena. Wilders could or should be left aside because he is too extreme: people often seem to believe that extremists are foolish and do not have to be taken seriously. Ali on the other hand was evaluated more on the basis of her personal character, experience and approach: she is selfish, hurt, and her approach does not make sense. Her actual arguments were almost never scrutinized. In that context it is interesting and important for researchers to not only analyse her discourse on Islam and emancipation, but also to also evaluate how people talk about her and her politics.

Gloria Wekker shows us how the intersection between sexuality and race influence Dutch discourse and analyses the case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali (Wekker, 2009). Black women's representation is always connected to sex and sexuality, and when we look

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[88] Original text: "Die hele visie van meneer Wilders gaat veel verder dan alleen moslimas. Het gevaarlijke van hem is ook dat hij een grote aanhang heeft onder nederlandse bevolking en we mogen niet uitsluiten dat hij over 3 of 5 jaar ook echt in de regering zit. En hoe zal zijn gedachtegoed zich dan dan vertalen in beleid? En dat is beangstiger dan wat hij nu met zijn uitspraken al te weeg brengt. Als organisatie moeten we ons daarop instellen en er rekening mee houden en strategieen bedenken"

at how Ali is represented, we see a highly sexualised image. Wekker describes a collective feeling of being in love with her; she was the beautiful princess who said the things we wanted to hear: we don't have to change; Muslims have to change (Wekker, 2009). In my focus groups, I don't really recognise this sexualisation of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, but I would argue that it is remarkable how personalised the discourse on her is. Whether people are in favour of or against her; they use arguments related to her personality and personal experiences. In the magazine *Opzij,* most articles were also about Ayaan Hirsi Ali personally. Maybe the women I talked to did not 'sexualise' her as was done in the popular media, but they definitely talked about her in a different way from the way they talked about other politicians. Wekker's approach helps us to understand the discourses on Islam and Muslims in a more nuanced way, because we can analyse and compare the anti-Islam discourse *by* Ayaan Hirsi Ali, with the discourse *on* Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Among other things, it will prevent us stigmatising one person for being anti-Islam and focus more on the mechanisms at hand in both discourses.

The most common remark by the interviewees on Ayaan Hirsi Ali's contribution to the emancipation of women (in general and Muslim women specifically) was that they understood and supported (to a certain extent) what she was fighting for, but disapproved of her methods. Some women argued that Ali's methods were counterproductive, others mentioned that she was self-obsessed or doing nothing new. In most cases, the criticism was rather personal, much more than for example with Geert Wilders. One woman from Daral Arqam asked an interesting counter question:

"why do we feel more attacked by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, than by someone like Geert Wilders? Is it because she is an ex-Muslim or just because her arguments are more intellectual?" (Daral Arqam, 3 min.).

It was difficult to find an answer to this question, but the women did make some remarks about Ali that were echoed in most of the other interviews as well. Their primary argument was that she raised some interesting and important points, but the way she generalises her personal experiences to the rest of the Islamic world, is very problematic:

> "In Morocco for example, circumcision is no issue; she should have more attention for the differences within the Islamic world" (Daral Arqam, 4 min.).

One interviewee of Daral Arqam continues that because Ali never worked together with any women's organisation and her work was so explicitly anti-Islam, she didn't reach the women she talked about. A woman from E-quality adds to this that if we hold on to strict interpretations of emancipation, we never change anything;

> "instead it is better accept the situation as it is, and to be prepared to make small steps towards emancipation" (E-quality, 7 min.).

Finally, a woman from Interreligieuze Dialoog argued:

> "above all, we need positive examples for women, the negative debates as those initiated by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, bring us nowhere" (Interreligieuze Dialoog, 16 min.).

These examples show how women criticise Ali's political strategies and suggest what other strategies might be more productive.

In most interviews we also talked about how the many debates in Islam in general influence the women's lives. The responses ranged from being tired of it, to getting more faith. Before elaborating on the negative and/or positive experiences that women talked about in the interviews, I would like to mention the discussion about representation of Muslims that arose in the interview with women from Daral Arqam. After talking about Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirsi Ali, one woman in this group asked:

> "What do you think of the other side of the coin; we have people like Geert Wilders on the one hand, but what about the Muslims that we see on television? Do you recognise yourselves in what they say?" (Daral Arqam, 9 min.)

The discussion that followed, I believe, tells us much about Islam in debates in the popular media in the Netherlands: the women argued that only the extreme voices are heard.

"We either see extreme Muslims (certain radical imams for example) or very political correct types, never a mainstream Muslim" (Daral Arqam, 10 min.)

Another woman in this group mentioned that Muslims who reach headlines in a positive way, are often not called Muslim. They mention the Moroccan singer Hind as an example: "Is she Muslim? We don't know" (Daral Arqam, 10 min.) "No", added another woman, "because if Muslims reach the news positively, all of a sudden it doesn't matter that they are Muslim" (Daral Arqam, 11 min.). A discussion with Al Nisa connects to this. The former director of this group mentioned that in all the years she was chair of Al Nisa, the feminist magazine *Opzij* never gave any attention to her or Al Nisa. The moment she left and a new chair took over (a woman who didn't wear a headscarf) *Opzij* sent a request for an interview (Al Nisa, 24 min.). Just like the women from Daral Arqam, these interviewees from Al Nisa wondered why possible positive Muslim role-models hardly ever seem to be acknowledged.

Let us return now to the influence of the 'Islam debates' on the women in the interviews. When Islam is discussed in the popular media, it is mostly from a negative perspective. For example in *Opzij* it appeared that Muslim women were not included in the theorization of feminism. For many women in the interviews this is a difficult thing to deal with. First of all because they are so often asked to defend their way of life or beliefs: "as if the whole world lies on your shoulders", as one woman put it (Al Nisa, 3 min.). Many women had some experience with prejudices, attacks, or judgments and most of them found it difficult to constantly have to respond to a fixed perception of 'The Muslim woman'. One woman from Al Nisa found a way to play with this when she was verbally attacked on the street. A man came to her and said: "you dirty Muslim whore, I will get you". Her cunning answer was: "only if you convert to Islam you will be able to get me" (Al Nisa, 4 min). This way, she used the idea that Muslim women only marry Muslim men to respond to this man's aggression. This is one of many examples of how these women have found ways to deal with the stigmatisation and discrimination they are confronted with, by holding on to their religious beliefs. I will discuss this in more detail in the next section.

In other interviews the material consequences of prejudices were again put forward. A girl in the Daral Arqam group mentioned that she noticed that some of her friends (teenagers) were not applying for the jobs related to their education, because they didn't want to have to defend their headscarves:

> "it is easier to just work for a call-centre, where nobody asks questions about your appearance and many other Muslim girls work", (Daral Arqam, 32 min.).

One of the older group members told the girl that this is a very problematic development and that we should encourage girls to apply for jobs on the level of their education: "Women who wear a headscarf can do every job there is, except maybe call-girl" (Daral Arqam, 30 min.). She clearly tried to convince her younger colleague/friend that the headscarf does and should not influence your functioning in the public sphere, and that these kinds of strategies mean you accept the prejudices about the headscarf and the idea that it does prevent you from properly executing certain functions.

In most of the interviews, women mentioned above all the positive effects of the extreme debates on Islam in the Dutch popular media. Most women argued that the radical attacks on their religion strengthened their faith and the belief that Islam is predominantly about peace: "I actually feel sorry for those who feel they need to attack our religion" (Al Nisa, 4 min.). Another thing that several women put forward, was that all the commotion around Islam, lead to a growing amount of younger people who are more interested in the background and basics of their religion: "they are now doing their own research so that they can position themselves in the debates" (Yasmin, 16 min.). Hence, this woman argued, the growing (negative) attention for Islam results in more knowledgeable believers.

Multicultural Politics: Towards a Situated and Gendered Approach

Besides representation issues, other aspects of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism were discussed in the group interviews. In most interviews the women's conceptualisation of feminism and emancipation were talked about most elaborately, but also multiculturalism and culture and religion related

issues were important aspects of the conversation. I asked the interviewees about their thoughts on multiculturalism, but most of the time, the women didn't discuss multiculturalism in its strict interpretation (an ideology that aims to give space, both in the private and public sphere, to the different cultures living in a country). Instead most arguments were related to creating more understanding among Dutch people about, for example, certain Islamic traditions, the differences between religion and culture, and most of all about their own knowledge about their religion. The debates around the headscarf also returned in almost all interviews. In short, I would argue that these women were not so much thinking or talking around more or extra rights specifically aimed at their communities; instead they were trying to work with (and sometimes against) a variation of restrictions in their lives, connected to both their own community and others.

First of all, multiculturalism is generally connected to group rights. However, as I argued above, for many of the women in my focus groups, such group rights were not very much of an issue. In several interviews, the women argued that they did not want any extra rights; they just wanted to be treated equally, and as human beings (for instance Daral Arqam, 40 min.). Also in the interview with Interreligieuze Dialoog a woman argued that she just wanted to be a world citizen; we have to work together if we want to live a good life. For her this meant that she wanted to give space to cultural traditions, but not use the word multiculturalism: "multiculturalism is and should be self-evident; (…) it widens our view and brings us farther" (Interreligieuze Dialoog, 66 min.). A woman from another group said, that in her view, human rights correspond to Islam. Hence, specific group right are not an issue for them. Furthermore, they did not want to have stricter laws concerning cultural/religious customs either. Problematic customs such as circumcision are already prohibited, they argued. These statements led to an interesting discussion about maintaining these laws. One of the women's husbands comes from Sierra Leone, where circumcision is practiced broadly. She would be in favour of school doctors asking the parents about their views on this, but was against yearly check ups (as suggested by for instance Ayaan Hirsi Ali). This would be too stigmatising and traumatising to the children, she argued (Daral Arqam, 36 min.). After a short discussion, the women in the group concluded that these things should be dealt with, but very carefully, and by constantly taking into account all the consequences of certain decisions. Summarising, one could argue that these women were not struggling to change the law or their legal

possibilities; instead they were more aiming to be treated like human beings in daily life. This doesn't mean that they didn't believe in differences and recognising them, but they did not feel that the law needed to be adjusted for this.

The fact that these women were not asking for extra group rights, but thinking more about how to deal with difference-related issues in their lives, very much connects to perspectives on multiculturalism such as those suggested by scholars as Paul Gilroy and Tariq Modood. They argue that more attention should be given to on the one hand 'conviviality' (Gilroy, 2004) or how we work and live together in daily life, and on the other hand to 'difference' as perceived by 'outsiders' of a minority group (Modood, 2007). We can see that it is important to look at how these women (and other members of their groups) are perceived and treated by others outside the group (they want to be treated like humans). Moreover, just as Gilroy points, these women also argue that on a daily basis people are already living together and constantly making decisions about how to deal with certain differences. One can add to this that these women advise us to keep the discussions on multiculturalism localised instead of trying to develop general theories or opinions about multiculturalism related issues. The idea that perception of differences and daily experiences are important, and should not be dealt with through universal theories, is also confirmed by the many women who emphasised improving their own and other women's knowledge of for instance Islamic traditions and the Qur'an, in order to judge better how to combine religious beliefs with daily practice, and ideas about for instance emancipation. Note that this interpretation is far from relativist. These women are not arguing that every culture has its own values, but rather try to put forward a more nuanced and situated viewpoint on both minority and majority perspectives on our multicultural society. In this context they very much stressed the importance of knowledge and understanding.

In the Daral Arqam interview, the women emphasised the importance of making local analyses and to be very careful with general policy, based on so called universal ideas. This counts for circumcision, they argued, but also for things like language lessons. These can be a fruitful tool to integrate women more into society, one of the women argued, but obligatory courses can also turn out to be very patronizing (Daral Arqam, 37 min.). Hence, we should always take into account the context and specificities of certain cases. This connects to a remark made by a woman from Yasmin about being able to recognise the possible different meanings of certain issues: "virginity can be a woman's own choice; it can also lead to suicide because it

is an instrument of oppression" (Yasmin, 57 min.). We have to learn about the difference in order to prevent the latter from happening. Let me emphasise again that this is not about relativism, but an argument for more nuanced analyses. Or as a woman from ZAMI put it: "there is no general recipe for multicultural politics" (ZAMI, 41 min.).

Besides the above case for 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1991), other strategies or approaches to multicultural issues were mentioned in the focus groups. The three most recurrent ones were dialogue, consciousness raising and bans. To start with the latter, none of the women I talked to believed in the solution of banning customs or traditions. The law as it is now was the starting point for this discussion, meaning that it was assumed that for example circumcision was already illegal. Most women argued that bans do not solve anything (for example BIZ and ZAMI) and often result in new forms of oppression of women (BIZ, 35 min.). The women from SCALA argued for a more practical approach to multicultural issues. While they were very much in favour of dialogue and consciousness raising, they also emphasised the importance of helping individual women:

> "Big symbols are put against the interests of individuals. (…). Look for example at a country like Morocco, (…) doctors there also choose to use the pill[89], rather doing something against their principles than finding a dead girl the next morning" (SCALA, 64 min.)

The women of this group proposed a dual approach, in which there is both attention to the interests of individual women and to dialogue with a certain group in order to address problematic issues.

The last issue that I would like to raise in connection to strategies and approaches regarding multicultural politics is the combination of consciousness raising and the recognition of difference (or more inclusive models of feminism). In several group interviews these approaches were mentioned or discussed, but in the ZAMI focus group this led to a highly interesting and important discussion on the relation between these two concepts. The latter option assumes that there are different ways of looking

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[89] The pill this woman is talking about is the pill which is used to imitate so-called 'virginal bleeding' after intercourse.

at and dealing with feminist issues, while the first one starts from the idea that one group knows something and wants to make the other conscious of that. In other words, they have contradicting backgrounds and aims: change the other's view, or accept the other's view as legitimate. So, when is the first and when is the other appropriate? I will describe these women's interpretation of feminism in more detail below, here it is important to understand the argument about difference. How to realise change is central is this discussion. Apparently, some things need to be stopped or transformed through consciousness raising and dialogue and other issues need more understanding and respect. It is impossible and undesirable to develop a 'masterplan', but it appeared that more located approaches were also difficult to discuss. The main conclusion of the conversation was that we have to acknowledge that these issues should be approached as a process: there cannot be instant change. Starting from that, it was argued it should be made possible for people to grow (education) and to prevent one group dominating another (both when it comes to gender and ethnicity). Finally, one woman argued that these kinds of processes always entail tensions; we should not try to solve them, but go through the process (ZAMI, 55-78 min.). One woman concluded with the remark that friction creates shine[90]. Or, to use Rosi Braidotti's ideas on affirmative ethics: work through the pain, instead of trying to deny or go against it (Braidotti, 2008). Note that this view differs much from many of the arguments posed in *Opzij*, where instant change was often the main aim.

Religion and Culture: Knowledge is Power

In the beginning of this section, I already mentioned that knowledge about religious and cultural traditions and customs was very important for many of the women in the focus groups. They aimed both at developing their own knowledge and informing people outside of their communities about their values and customs, in order to create more understanding. When it came to more understanding we see on the one hand that women wanted to familiarise non-Muslims with certain traditions and customs, on the

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[90] She used the saying: "Wrijving geeft glans" (ZAMI, 73 min.)

other hand they also pointed out that they did not want exceptional treatments. One woman argued that she didn't like it that her employer asked her (well meant) questions about how the discussions on Islam influenced her and whether she still felt at home in the Netherlands. These kind of remarks exactly confirmed that she is an outsider: "I am one of you, so don't ask me whether I feel at home here, because I am at home here" (Al Nisa, 9 min.). So even though this employer aimed to support her in this, for her it felt like again someone was placing her outside of Dutch society. This does not mean that people shouldn't take certain differences into account, but instead that these differences should be more incorporated into the definition of 'being Dutch'. Another woman for example, mentioned that she regretted the fact she always had to ask for halal food:

> "I have to keep asking whether they have taken my (or certain customer's) wishes into account and why I live according to certain rules" (Al Nisa, 17 min.).

So where the women of Al Nisa were asking for more understanding and consideration from their direct environment, they were also involved in initiatives to make people more familiar with Islamic traditions and customs. One woman for instance did workshops where people could get to know more about headscarves. People are often very reluctant to familiarise themselves with the piece of clothing, she argued. However, the first response after trying it on is often, "Oh, that actually does not look ugly at all" (Al Nisa, 11 min.). "Of course not" the woman replies: "it was never meant to make you ugly" (Al Nisa, 11 min.). The thing is, she argues, is that people <u>make</u> it ugly, which makes it also very difficult to wear (Al Nisa, 12 min.). I will go into the headscarf debate in more detail later, this is just to show that the women in this group ask for a certain balance, which means that on the one hand they like to inform non-Muslims about their customs, and on the other hand, resist having to explain certain things over and over again.

We can see that the interpretation of multiculturalism by the women in the group interviews does not confirm the straight 'group rights' definition. The women from E-Quality, who stated that diversity is a key term for them (rather than multiculturalism), confirmed this. They aim to make people aware of the power relations in the Netherlands and for example try to resist when yet another white man

is appointed for an important job in government or administration (E-Quality, 47 min.). Just like the women of Daral Arqam these women argue that "the law itself is not the problem, but its implementation is" (E-Quality, 53 min.).

During the interview with E-Quality another issue was mentioned which I would argue should also be taken into account in our thinking about multiculturalism and feminism; namely the framing of the issues that is talked about and fight for. One woman from E-Quality argues that when they are thinking about issues such as circumcision they first of all start from the UN women's treaty (E-Quality, 70 min.). Another adds to this that with these kinds of issues, they believe it is important to look at the broader context (E-Quality, 71 min.). In other words, do not just focus on this one issue, but try look at how this issue is related to other matters that influence the lives of women. This way, one could for example work on a broader alliance against violence. The attractive aspect of this approach, I would argue, is that it helps us to bring together many women who can struggle together for issues that are important to them, without any particular group being attacked for its view on gender relations. Hence, the focus is on the problem, not the possible cultural or religious arguments that are used to back it up. Again this shows that the women's views on multiculturalism and feminism are often not about special group rights or relativism, but about re-framing our perspective on certain issues, or making more nuanced analyses of the problems and solutions.

Another aspect of the more dynamic perspective on multiculturalism in the discussions of the women involved in the interviews, is their emphasis on knowledge of their religion in general and the Qur'an specifically. In previous chapters, I described how Muslim women have developed various strategies when it comes to thinking about and working with their religion and emancipation. For instance, they develop multiple discourses connected to religious traditions, and re-interpret and re-translate holy texts (Cooke, 2002). Thus, they criticise individuals and institutions that limit and oppress them (both within and outside Islam) and argue that we need to invest in alternative explanations of the Qur'an, which start from the main messages of the Qur'an and also contextualise the texts (Barlas, 2005).

The women in the focus groups also referred to these kinds of strategies in order to navigate between religious traditions and obligations and emancipation. Their views on emancipation and feminism will be discussed in detail in the next section, here it is important to note how essential it was for many of the women in the interviews to

improve their (and other women's) knowledge of their religious and cultural customs. The differences between religion and culture are also part of this. One woman from Al Nisa for example argued:

> "We cannot just blame culture; religion also plays a part in it, and therefore it is so important that women have proper knowledge on for example the Hadith. If a man for instance uses a Hadith (…), which is very negative. (…) As a woman you should have knowledge of the Hadith so that you can say, ok, you have one, I can show you ten that say the opposite." (Al Nisa, 43 min.).

Another woman adds to this that we have to acknowledge the relation between culture and religion:

> "The traditional interpretations of the Qur'an and the Hadith are cultural and date from the 7th century Arabic peninsula, which was a patriarchal society. So it is not just culture. We have to be aware how culture has influenced religion and the interpretation of religion, and how it has become oppressive to women in certain ways" (Al Nisa, 43 min.).

The interesting aspect of this woman's argument is that she on the one hand tells us to recognise how culture and religion are interwoven in the interpretation of religion as we now know it (see above), but that at the same time we have to be aware of the distinction between religion and culture and recognise that Islam often leaves much more space to women than culture does (Al Nisa, 44 min.). This way, she can both criticise certain practices within her religion and resist those same practices by referring to holy texts. The key here is to recognise the power relations involved, the possible differences within religious traditions and the distinction between certain practices (or in this case religious traditions) and theory (or the holy texts). This approach opens a road to resistance from within, which is necessary, the women from Al Nisa add, because just recognising the differences between culture and religion and text and interpretation does not change anything about the interpretations that are still dominant (Al Nisa, 44 min.). An interesting example of this kind of resistance from within is the remark of one woman, who recalls the moment when a woman on the street addressed her about her blouse:

"supposedly my blouse was to tight on the back, because she saw a man looking at me. The only thing I told her was: then, why did you not approach that man then?" (Al Nisa, 53 min.).

Of course this is just an innocent incident, but it does show how one can make others conscious of the fact that being modest is not just expected from women, but also from men and hence, that it is a mistake to only hold women responsible for this. I would argue that this also relates to Rosi Bradiotti's interpretation of subjectivity as described in chapter 4. This woman's remarks are closely connected to the "multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions in and around the world we inhabit" (Braidotti, 2008 p 16) of which political subjectivity consists in Braidotti's words.

The Headscarf: Multiple Interpretations, Multiple Critiques

The headscarf is a much-discussed subject in popular media and politics. I have analysed the many arguments in *Opzij* about headscarves and burqas, as well as in the broader public sphere where it remains an important theme. In France there were extensive debates that eventually led to a general 'headscarf ban' at public schools.[91] In the Netherlands parliament has also been discussing a possible ban. Unlike the situation in France, the Dutch government only aimed at the face covering Burqa, but not just in schools; in all public spaces.[92] Most recently, politician Geert Wilders proposed introducing a tax for women who wear headscarves; they would have to pay

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[91] For more information, see for example: Scott, J.W. 2007. *Politics of the Veil*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
[92] This was the government standpoint in 2005, see for more information for example: http://www.nos.nl/nosjournaal/artikelen/2006/11/17/171106_boerka_verbod.html. The government at the moment of writing has a different standpoint and aims to ban burqua's first of all at schools and maybe also in other public spaces, such as public transport. See for more information: http://www.minbzk.nl/110521/brief-aan-tweede_1

1000 Euros a year to wear a scarf in the public sphere.[93] In my focus groups, the women also talked about the headscarf, in its many forms and meanings. Again we see that even though the focus groups dealt with multiculturalism and feminism in general, the actual discussions often moved to Islam related issues. This is partly related to the fact that quite a few Muslim women were present in the focus groups, but also because these themes are most recurrent in the popular media and politics. It was evident that the women were also trying to position themselves in these particular debates on Islam and emancipation.

Even though the women in the different groups did not always agree on the meaning of the headscarf, not one of the women I talked to was in favour of a ban. The reasoning behind this was that the decision to wear (or not wear) a headscarf is a personal one, and should always be left to individual women. The only thing opponents of the headscarf could do is to inform women and help them to make a conscious decision. In most cases however, the discussions went more in the direction of making opponents aware of the possible different meanings of the headscarf. In the 4th chapter of this thesis I described how this awareness of the multiplicity of certain traditions and customs is essential for Islamic feminism. The term 'multiple critique' is important in this context. The background for this is that many Muslim women are placed in a complex position. In order to combine their attachment to their religion with a desire for emancipation Muslim women have developed multiple critiques. This means that they discuss gender roles in their local and religious communities; challenge conventional interpretations of holy texts and traditions and at the same time defend their religious and national communities. This way, Muslim women are creating new histories and knowledges about their lives that were previously often only produced *about* them. Debates about veiling are an important example of the struggle of Islamic feminists. Where most outsiders see the veil as a sign of oppression, more and more women are now claiming that the veil can be empowering.

In the focus groups, these 'multiple critiques' are also recognisable. Three main themes were important: multiple meanings and context of the headscarf, the paradox of the anti-headscarf viewpoint and finally, the reasons and background why people from Islamic communities wear the headscarf. Let us first move to the paradox issue,

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[93] See for example:
http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2009/09/anger_at_wilders_headscarf_tax.php

which was mentioned in many focus groups (Interreligieuze Dialoog, Daral Arqam, SCALA, Yasmin, ZAMI). A woman from Daral Arqam argued:

> "If they say you are being oppressed; you shouldn't wear a headscarf, then they are also oppressing me. They are completely interpreting the situation for you" (Daral Arqam, 28 min.).

Hence, this woman and her colleagues are complaining about the fact that people so often think for them, instead of with them. In the SCALA focus group, one woman adds to this that feminists from the second wave have made it possible for many women to make their own decisions, at the same time however, some of them are now trying to prevent some women making their own choices. The SCALA group contextualised the headscarf discussion by connecting it to mini skirts and other possible forms of dressing that could be called 'anti feminist'. When we are talking about these issues, respect should be central, one woman argued:

> "If I get in such a situation, it is my responsibility to start a conversation about it and to say I respect your opinion, I understand you see it that way, I am also happy you don't do it yourself because I don't want you to do things that go against your values (…) This is who I am" (SCALA, 55 min.).

This first of all connects to how emancipation is interpreted and whether this is about 'a woman's own choices' or not. This will be discussed in the next section on emancipation and feminism. Another point of connection is the discussion that followed after Cisca Dresselhuys' famous words on headscarves as signs of oppression.[94] According to Dresselhuys headscarves are impossible to combine with feminist ideas. Other feminists have responded to her by arguing that Dresselhuys wants women to choose their own lifestyle, as long as it corresponds to hers (Prins and Saharso, 2001). Furthermore, even though Dresselhuys claims that feminist values are universal values, these remarks prove the exact opposite (Prins and Saharso, 2001).

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[94] See chapter 1 for a description of this debate

The above was just one example of many forms of criticism the women in my focus groups presented when it came to 'outsider discourses on the headscarf'. In the next paragraph I will look at another part of the discussion: the criticism from within. Even though almost all women argued that wearing a headscarf is a personal choice and emphasised the different meanings of the headscarf, there was also criticism. In some cases, this took the form of a distinction between a woman's own perception and 'general religious rules'. This kind of criticism of the headscarf acknowledges that individual women can have different reasons for wearing a headscarf, but at the same time believes that the general background of the piece of clothing is to control women and their sexuality and is thus linked to patriarchal views on women. Most women however, presented a less fixed interpretation of the headscarf. Even though this last view is less stigmatising to individual women; it does not leave much space for transformation or change.

In the Al Nisa group a more dynamic form of criticism was the subject of the discussion. One of the women argued that because of the aggressive media debates, Muslims themselves tend to be more defensive and less critical about the headscarf. We could have a more open discussion on how we deal with the headscarf:

> "I believe that it is very often thought that the headscarf's function (…) is to control sexuality and that it is assumed that therefore the woman is responsible for sexual behaviour of men. (…) That premise cannot be found in the Qur'an, (…) but is very dominant and oppressive to women" (Al Nisa, 51 min.).

Women are held responsible for the behaviour of men and that is oppressive, she argues. The interesting aspect of this nuanced analysis is that this woman recognises certain dominant views, argues for discussion about them and presents an opening by referring to the Qur'an. This makes this quote a very good example of the concept of 'multiple critique'. Furthermore, it opens up possibilities for women without stigmatising a whole group or community. Finally, the remark she makes about the headscarf's function in Muslim societies needs more investigation. In an article on the headscarf debates in France, Joan Scott also refers to this aspect of the discussion. She argues that part of the reason why the French were so critical about the headscarf is because it was conflated with the French republican notion of sexuality (Scott, 2005). Where the French interpretation is based on sameness and abstraction of differences,

the headscarf does the opposite: it emphasises sexual differences between men and women. These remarks about sexual difference, sexuality and the headscarf raise many new questions regarding the exact relation between these concepts and need more research. Here it suffices to say that this woman tells us to recognise the difference between the command to dress modestly and the responsibility to control sexuality. Emphasising this distinction might help in the discussion about emancipation and the headscarf.

Would You Call Yourself a Feminist?

In the above, I mentioned the word 'emancipation'. In the interviews this was a much and rather easily discussed theme. When the word 'feminism' was brought up however, the atmosphere changed almost immediately. Laughter and yelling were in many cases an important part of the response. Some women instantly said they were feminists; others were opposed to using the term. In this section, I want to discuss the different interpretations of feminism and emancipation that were presented during the focus groups, the themes that were put forward as important and the proposed strategies of the women.

The different interpretations of feminism and emancipation were important to many women in the focus groups. In the focus group with Al Nisa women for example, we had an interesting discussion about calling yourself a feminist or not. All the women in the group were interested in Islam and emancipation (those were also the central themes of their organisation), but the term feminism lead to a rather heated debate. What is a feminist was their main question. The first woman who tried to answer the question argued that if there were any term she would like to use to describe herself, it would be 'Muslim woman'[95] (Al Nisa, 30 min.). In her view, this word automatically entails all the other things that are important in life. This connects to remarks made by the women in Daral Arqam. The argument is that as a Muslim you are already committing to constant learning and developing the self and hence to emancipation. This means that she does not just argue that emancipation and Islam are compatible or

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[95] She used the Dutch term 'Moslima'

that Islam inspires her in her struggle for emancipation, but that Islam is emancipation. This interesting perspective could have consequences for how we look at the relationship between culture/religion and emancipation/feminism. I would argue that her remark perfectly shows why we first of all have to re-think the link between emancipation and feminism, and secondly the concept of feminism itself and how it is connected to culture/religion.

The differences and similarities between feminism and emancipation were mentioned in almost all the focus groups. In most groups, women could not agree on what feminism was or is, but very often it was associated with a struggle for and by women (for example Al Nisa, FNV, Daral Arqam), contrary to emancipation, which was considered to apply to everybody. Some women did not want to call themselves feminists because they associated it with 'hating men' or 'being against men' (see for instance Yasmin). The relationship between feminism and men was discussed in more focus groups, and I will return to it later. Here I want to focus on the reasons why some women do not want to call themselves feminists. Besides the above-mentioned and rather stereotypical argument, the most mentioned reason was a general feeling of alienation from most Western mainstream feminism, or 'Cisca Dresslhuys feminism', as the women from Al Nisa called it (Al Nisa, 37 min.).

It appeared that many women associated feminism with the standpoints of *Opzij*, and for that reason do not call themselves feminists (Al Nisa, 37 min.). Feminism in this interpretation is based too much on the male norm:

> "They want women to become 'less female'[96] and that goes against my views on the relationship between men and women. And also within Islam you can't work on feminism and emancipation this way. (…) You should actually stay close to the people that are close to you. Within Islam there is more than enough space to emancipate and become feminist. So I would suggest making a clear distinction between Opzij feminism (…) and Islamic feminism, which all women in this group would support. " (Al Nisa, 37 min.).

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[96] She said: "Ze doen aan ontvrouwelijking"

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As becomes clear from this quote, it is almost impossible to discuss the relationship between feminism and emancipation without addressing the negative associations many Muslim women have with (mainstream) feminism. These women are interested in a feminist struggle, but not as it is interpreted by certain Western feminists at this moment. One of the main reasons for this seems to be a different interpretation of sexual difference. Or, as one of the women in the focus groups argued:

> "All kinds of ideals related to women's appearance are not criticised; nudity, being young and all the photo-shopping, and the women who want something else, than what men want, are not accepted" (Al Nisa, 37 min.).

This is an often-heard comparison or complaint: women with a headscarf are criticised for being anti-feminist and women in mini-skirts are considered to be feminists. As mentioned above, these different views on feminism can be related to religion, but first of all seem to refer to a different interpretation of sexual difference. Or, as Joan Scott describes so clearly to explain the French headscarf debates:

> "French feminists, who in the name of the emancipation of Muslim girls, rushed to support a law that offered the status quo in France (women as the object of male desire) as a universal model of women's liberation. Entirely forgotten in the glorification of the freedom of French sexual relations was the critique of these same feminists, who for years have decried the objectification of women and the overemphasis on their sexual attractiveness." (Scott, 2005, p 29).

According to Scott, French republicanism deals with sexual difference by denying it, Islam on he other hand, acknowledges that sexual difference can cause problems in society and should therefore be managed. Hence, the discussions about the headscarf might not be about equality between men and women, but about making Muslim women equal to French women. Apparently, French women could only be 'equal' by openly displaying their sexuality and sexual desire. The real problem of the headscarf, from this perspective, is that by 'covering women's sexuality', the Western secular view of sexual difference is countered. Of course the French debates on headscarves are particularly located in the French context and cannot be too easily be compared to

discussions in other European countries, but we can use the argument proposed above. For example if we apply the ideas about the importance of sexual difference to the remarks made by the women of Al Nisa, we see that these women not only have different ideas about the relationship between religion and feminism, but from there also make different feminist analyses.

The above-described criticism of certain interpretations of feminism was broadly shared in most focus groups. For some women however, this led to the belief that we have to fight for different interpretations of feminism, others felt more for the term emancipation and did not want to be associated with feminism. I would agree with scholars such as Miriam Cooke that feminism is not just a political ideology, but instead refers to a certain attitude about the role of gender in society: "feminism seeks justice wherever it can find it" (Cooke, 2002, p 143). This means that in my definition of feminism, many of these women's ideas about emancipation would be included. Of course I respect these women's own choices, so I will not press my terms on them, but when I theorise different interpretations of feminism, I will take their views on emancipation into account and will therefore use the concepts of feminism and emancipation simultaneously in certain arguments.

Thinking through Different Feminist Waves

When the women of SCALA discussed the problematic associations with the word feminism and asked themselves whether 'feminists' should for that reason come up with a new term, it was argued that this would be disrespectful to the generations before us who had achieved so much already in respect to women's rights (SCALA, 50 min.). Very soon after agreeing on having respect for previous generations however, the tensions between these different generations turned up. Especially with the women from SCALA and ZAMI, the discussions showed very explicitly how we have to find a middle ground between respecting the achievements of previous generations and at the same time accept the fact that different circumstances can lead to new feminist analyses. The women of SCALA experienced the differences between generations in their own group, for instance in the following conversation between two women:

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"There are certainly tensions, especially when we talk about clothes."

"You should hear them, if my heels are too high."

"That's why I am an older feminist; you don't show your body in public.

"I think she rather sees me in a burqua than in a miniskirt."

After this, a discussion followed on (symbolic) meanings of things like miniskirts and the difficulties in deciding when a woman makes her own choice or not. The 'younger' woman makes the following argument:

"Second wave feminists made it possible for us to make our own choices, but are now also stopping us from making choices that they don't like" (SCALA, 55 min.).

This connects to remarks made by other women, such as those in the ZAMI group. A woman in this focus group explained how 'second wave' feminists stick too much to just sexual difference and neglect to pay enough attention to other axes of difference, such as ethnicity or religion (ZAMI, 17 min.)[97]. So because they look at different issues, they make a different analysis of problems and solutions. Before I explain this further, let me make clear that these women are not making the same point as I made above about different interpretations of sexual difference. They are not arguing for a focus on sexual difference solely, but for an intersectional analysis. As I explained in chapter 3, this means that you look at gender, ethnicity, sexuality (and maybe other axes of difference) at the same time and analyse how these influence each other. In other words, you imagine people to be positioned at an intersection where all kinds of different aspects of their identity come together and influence each other.

To summarise the women's arguments on generations; it was first of all argued that 'second wave' feminists made it impossible for women to actually make their own choices and secondly that they are too much focussed on sexual difference. Another point, which is related to this, is that most 'second wave feminists' are paying too much attention to the issue of work: the only thing women still have to achieve is to work more and to get to higher positions (Al Nisa, 38 min.). These generational

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[97] Please note that this does not apply to all second wave feminists. As I described in chapter 3, many feminists from that generation worked on these issues.

differences are very apparent and need to be theorized further, also in the context of multiculturalism and feminism. As becomes clear in the previous statements, many women in my interviews have certain complaints about 'second wave feminism' and they connect it to the issue of difference. To put it bluntly: second wave feminism is associated with a limited interpretation of feminism that focuses on sexual difference and issues such as work, and does not leave much space for other interpretations. This brings many questions to mind: how we define 'second wave feminism', which feminists are 'second wave' (is it automatically linked to age?) and how generations are connected to each other?

The history of feminism is mainly understood in waves. This helps us to understand and recognise certain peaks in feminist thought and activism, but at the same time it also erases other feminist instances and the differences between feminists within a certain time. Furthermore, it easily leads to linear thinking about feminism; moving from a basic conception to a more and more nuanced analysis for example. Finally, this perspective on feminism is very centred in the West and does not really recognise non-Western feminist developments. If we connect these issues to the subject of this thesis, all kinds of other questions come up, such as: how we can locate Islamic feminism in this account of history. Are there first and second Islamic feminist waves? Or, is Islamic feminism part of the third feminist wave? It would take another thesis to answer all these questions, but I do believe that we need to take this 'generational issue' into account when we think about multiculturalism and feminism. We first of all have to be conscious about the fact that feminist waves are constructions that need to be used critically. Secondly, thinking about new interpretations of feminism for some means talking about a 'third wave'. We have to think about how this wave is located, both chronologically and geographically.

In her work on epistemology of different generations of feminism, Iris van der Tuin investigates how we can capture generational change (Van der Tuin, 2009). She proposes a methodology of 'jumping generations', in order to use and implement parts of second wave feminism, where it is useful for current generations, without falling into the trap of linear thinking. We should neither idealise previous feminist generations nor reject them completely. This is exactly how I read the remarks of one of the women in SCALA: she did not want to let go of the word feminism, but to start from the struggles that previous generations have fought and think how we can conceptualise feminism from there, taking into account changes in our societies. One

of these changes, I would argue, is that religion has become such an important issue that feminists have to take it into account in their analyses. The women in ZAMI, who also described how problematic it is to ignore religion as an important factor in feminist analyses, confirm this:

> "For white women religion apparently is not an issue, but for black, migrant and refugee women it is. But also politically it is an important issue, aren't these women looking at our society? It is on the political agenda. These were all second wave feminists, and they are completely outside of reality" (ZAMI, 16 min.).

This woman's remarks are rather harsh towards second wave feminists, but I would agree with her that, even as a secular/atheist feminist, you couldn't ignore the political developments in the world. Or, as Rosi Bradiotti puts it "feminists cannot be simply secular, or be secular in a simple or self-evident sense. More complexity is needed" (Braidotti, 2008, p 4).

Concluding, I would argue that generational developments are important in relation to feminism and multiculturalism. Furthermore, we have to find nuanced ways of looking at these developments and the differences between generations. Making use of the feminist ideas of previous generations and combining them with changes in our current societies would be a good starting point. One of the women from SCALA connects to this with her remarks on the third wave:

> "if you want to make the new wave a vibrant one, you have to create a situation where women can be themselves, where women (…) can choose to do what they want " (ZAMI, 57 min.).

Or, as she put it earlier in the interview: the third wave should be a "warm wave" (ZAMI, 36 min.). In this context she proposes to think through connections instead of all working on our own 'little corners'.

Back to Basics?

The above remark on focussing on connections is a very important one regarding the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. Connected to this are questions such as: which themes should be on the feminist agenda and how will we try to achieve what we want? The next section will focus on different feminist strategies, but here I want to pay attention to the different themes that are important for feminism at this moment and how we want to approach them.

One of the things that came up in many of the interviews was the question: how do we frame the subjects that we are fighting for? One can for instance focus on something like circumcision, but another possibility would be to concentrate on broader issues that can connect more people; violence against women for example. This vision seems to correspond to the remarks described above where a woman proposes to think through connections instead of "working on our own little corners". Also in the E-Quality focus group, the women aim to work through such a model. They want to work on equality and equal opportunities for everybody in the Netherlands: male and female, secular and religious, 'autochtonous' and 'allochtonous'.

> "Autochtonous women can learn from for example Surinamese women, because they dealt with work issues and participation in a different way. Allochtonous women are not in all cases in a disadvantaged position. There are areas in which black, migrant and refugee women are ahead, we can learn from that and there are areas where it is the other way around, or where men are in a worse position, that also needs attention. In that context all inequality is problematic" (E-Quality, 27min.)

The starting point for E-Quality is the concept of 'equal opportunities'. This makes it possible to produce a more nuanced analysis of the problems and solutions at hand. It also helps them to go beyond the dichotomous relation of the supposedly oppressed Muslim women and the emancipated 'autochtonous' women. This means looking at economic positions, educational levels, and social influence (E-quality, 10 min.). The advantages of defining feminist struggle on such a broader basis, is that it will probably appeal to more women, but also that there is less chance of denigrating

women from certain cultures/religions. The struggle for equality is central, not the supposedly oppressed or oppressive group.

Another issue put forward by the women of E-Quality was the focus on women at the top. Feminists such as Cisca Dresselhuys they argued, talk too much about the 'glass ceiling' and forget about what happens on the 'ground floor':

> "You cannot work at the top if you do not combine that with looking at what happens below. If you do this, you turn the pyramid upside down, and it will fall down. What about girls in primary schools, who are still advised to go the 'safe' way, and choose for alpha courses, instead of stimulating them to do beta[98]. The situation is much more complex than people make us believe it is." (E-Quality, 11 min)

Summarising the above arguments, we see that these women propose to make more nuanced analyses of what inequality means and how we can work on equal opportunities. Furthermore, they emphasise the importance of not focussing on specific issues connected to specific groups of women, but building alliances and joined struggles between women. One of the ways to achieve this is to work on broader themes that prevent women being divided into 'the oppressed' and 'the emancipated', and make space for more dynamic cooperation. This could entail a return to certain 'classical' feminist themes, such as safety, economic independence and equal opportunities. But it doesn't mean that feminism should be restricted to these issues or that they are the same issues as 30 or 80 years ago. or that we should approach them as it has been done in the past: "certain discussions are being repeated over and over again. The issues are still important, but the methods are not always up to date anymore" (SCALA, 37 min.).

The women also warned against focussing solely on work related issues; emancipation for most of the women in the focus groups was about making your own choices. Emancipation should not only be about work or having a career. A woman in Daral Arqam explained very clearly that emancipation is about making choices within a certain context:

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[98] Alpha courses are for example history and English; beta courses are chemistry or physics

"Emancipation is about making your own choices, but everybody makes those choices within a certain framework. For me this means that I am emancipated because I most of the time choose to do what I want, but I also take into account the needs and wishes of my husband and children." (Daral Arqam, 17 min.).

If we bring these remarks about emancipation together with the above, we can conclude that the women in the focus groups are constantly emphasising the importance of broadening and contextualising the debates and struggles for emancipation. Their aims are to work with broader themes to enhance solidarity, with broader definitions to include more women's perspectives and adjust analyses to current and local situations.

Before I link the previous statement to the different approaches women proposed towards feminism and/or emancipation, I would like to add one more issue that came up in many of the conversations on emancipation: men. A common complaint of many women in the focus groups was that feminists often exclude men, both from their analyses and their activities. Emancipation is both about women and about men, was an often-heard statement. They propose an interpretation of emancipation that does not focus on a male norm (women have to work just as men do) and wants women to be proud of themselves as women, and at the same time they want to include men, so that they can work on emancipation together: "we always say include men in the struggle for emancipation; white women on the other hand often say, men, no we don't want that" (ZAMI, 17 min). The difference between white and black, migrant and refugee women that is put forward in this quote is probably partly related to the different struggles they are fighting for. The latter group is not just suffering from sexism, but also from racism.[99] One of the consequences of this is that these women often do not want to fight against men as white women sometimes do/have done. Another point that might have to do with the difference in the in/exclusion of men is connected to the difference between emancipation and feminism. Most women who call themselves feminists often look at this as a female identity. In the focus

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[99] Note that they are not suffering from racism and sexism separately, but from the intersection of racism and sexism.

groups, it was also regularly argued that men could not be feminists and that the feminist struggle was a female one. These were mainly the women who did not want to include men in their struggles; men could not feel what being a woman is about and could therefore not be feminists (FNV Vrouwenbond, 70 min). The women who preferred to use the term emancipation on the other hand, had a more practical approach and explicitly aimed at both men and women (see for instance Al Nisa, 30 min.). In one group the women explicitly argued that feminists couldn't afford to exclude men from their struggles anymore:

"What is the ideal situation that we as feminists aim for? (…) You cannot conclude anything else but that we strive for equality. That means that men also have to take this route together with us. (…) If you look at it form this perspective you cannot argue anymore that feminists are women" (SCALA, 43 min.).

Another woman in the group directly supports these remarks when she adds:

"We cannot afford standpoint theory anymore anymore. (…). We have to think contextually. We need Gloria Wekker's intersectionality, we need hybridity. It has to be about that." (SCALA, 44 min.).

This argument shows, among other things, that thinking about a more inclusive feminism is not just about the themes you work with, but also very much about the approach you take to these issues. This particular quote includes many small statements about different feminist approaches (against standpoint theory, in favour of intersectionality and hybridity). These concepts have been important throughout this thesis, but in the next section I will pay specific attention to the arguments of the women in the focus groups regarding these different approaches towards feminism.

Approaching Feminism and Diversity

In many of the interviews, the women in the group suggested that if we want a more inclusive feminism, we need to contextualise and be open to alternative

interpretations of feminism. The SCALA woman in the above quote has clear ideas about what road feminism should take. We need to take the context into account, according to her. Everybody brings his/her background into the feminist struggle and this background is constructed through many different axes of meaning (gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, ability etc). Feminist standpoints cannot be formed (automatically) through one's gender anymore, she argues. In other words, she opposes the argument that women can automatically produce more objective knowledge about society because they are in a marginalised position (see also chapter 4). She does not explain this more elaborately, but my reading of her statement would be that instead of applying rather fixed ideas about female standpoints, feminism should start from the idea that gender alone does not explain a person's position and that we should always look at he context of a certain issue before we make a judgment. An example of this is put forward in this focus group in the discussion about the tensions between individual choices and general principles:

> "When I make a choice I start from the situation as I experience it, at that moment. (…). When we think about these choices, an outsider can only help with   making the best possible choice and talk to this person and make sure they make a   conscious   decision,   well   informed   about   the   possible consequences." (SCALA, 58 min.).

The women later explain this further by arguing that feminists cannot make general and in principle statements about women's individual choices, but have to look at the context of each situation. When we think about virginity for example, we might want to put an end to virginity ideals and forbid doctors to do virginity tests etc, but in certain cases the only way to save a woman could be to (accept the tradition as it is and) give her a blood pill (SCALA, 63 min.).

Women in the ZAMI group also argued that we should not try to pin down what feminism is. Feminism in their view is always about diversity (ZAMI, 34 min.). In that context one woman in this group introduces the (as she calls it) "and/and strategy"[100]:

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[100] She used the term "en/en strategie".

"we should let go of the either/or strategy of referring to people as either woman, or black. You are a black woman, a mother maybe. That perspective gives you the total image." (ZAMI, 37 min.).

When I asked the women in this group whether they are sometimes confronted with issues that make it difficult to think through the "and/and strategy", they mentioned some cases in which it is difficult to see whether something needs to be respected as a different interpretation of emancipation or considered as a harmful tradition. But according to another woman in the group it is important to realise that:

"the and/and strategy does not mean that you cannot be critical or search for dialogue. Being critical and the search for dialogue also help with consciousness raising" (ZAMI, 43 min.).

This important remark can be helpful when one combines it with the contextualising strategy in the previous paragraph, but it also shows a certain tension within these women's thinking on feminism. On the one hand they want feminism to be inclusive and respectful towards diversity; on the other hand they want to raise women's consciousness. In the beginning of this chapter (section on Multicultural Politics) I briefly introduced this tension; here it is important to look at it from the perspective of creating an inclusive feminism. One woman in the ZAMI group emphasises the importance of getting to know each others' standpoints and working together, despite certain differences:

"Try to find reciprocity and create something new that way, use your creativity. This way you do not hold on to your own thing, but by working together you create something new (…) a new society, that starts from working together" (ZAMI, 45 min.).

So, the starting point for the women in this group is respect for difference, being open to other women's standpoints, experiences and strategies and creating a dialogue and maybe cooperation from that. However, as I mentioned before, this does not necessarily mean agreeing on everything; rather it means beginning with an

open mind. If you really believe something needs to be changed or that women should become more conscious on certain issues, you can always try to convince them, but only in an open dialogue. Or, as one woman put it: "you have to work on different levels, you have to fix things in more areas than one" (ZAMI, 52 min.). In some cases these different levels will work simultaneously, in other cases there might be tensions that need to be discussed in their own context: "we shouldn't try to pin everything down beforehand" (ZAMI, 58 min.).

In the focus group with the women from FNV Vrouwenbond, another tension in their thinking about diversity arose. In the ZAMI focus group the women themselves discussed how to work with the tensions within their own ideas about feminism and diversity. In this focus group only I was of the opinion there was a tension in their ideas and policies. Let me first explain that this organisation is the women's group of one of the biggest trade unions in the Netherlands, which means that their main themes are work (paid and non-paid) and care-related. According to their own mission statement diversity is a central issue in their work and at the time of the focus group they were working on conducting several analyses in order to find out how they could improve diversity in their organisation (FNV Vrouwenbond, 87 min.). After listening to their main aims, I asked the women in the group whether diversity in their organisation was mainly about representation or whether they also tried to diversify the content of their work (FNV Vrouwenbond, 92 min.). The answer was positive, but they also made clear that they did not want to go beyond their main themes. One woman gives the following example of what they do with diversity:

> "We already try to have more allochtonous women in higher positions (…). We try to make employers more conscious of the advantages of hiring more allochtonous women" (FNV Vrouwenbond, 93 min.).

In my view, this confirmed that diversity in their work is more about representation than about diversifying the content of their work. One of the women in the group mentioned the issue that certain female Muslim nurses do not want to bath men, and in her view this was not something the FNV should address:

"women can make their own choices, but you cannot change certain jobs, a job is a job, you cannot become a surgeon and say you are only doing certain tasks." (FNV Vrouwenbond, 103 min.).

I tried to argue that we could compare this situation with the case of a woman who wants to have a higher position in a company without having to work 80 hours a week. If they would support such a case, they are also changing the interpretation of a certain job. After a long discussion it became clear that we could not come to an agreement about what diversity means and how you can or maybe should apply it in your organisation. In a way this shows how difficult it is to have an open dialogue, as proposed in the ZAMI group. While the women of the FNV argued that diversity is a key issue in their organisation, I would say that this was only the case on the level of representation, not on the level of content. Important to note at this point however is that the woman who was against 'cutting down on jobs', did emphasise that women can make their own choices (in their private lives).

In the above, I have paid attention to the importance of contextualising issues before making judgments, to the importance of taking into account the different interests at micro and macro level and finally to the challenges and tensions that are faced when one works through the concept of diversity. Before I conclude this chapter, I would like to move our focus to one more aspect of finding the right approach towards feminism and diversity. This was mainly discussed in the focus group with Al Nisa, but also briefly put forward in other groups where Muslim women were present. The main difficulty these women were faced with lies in bringing together the intellectual and more activist strands of Muslim Feminism. In the section on religion and power, I discussed the importance of finding the right strategies for improving the position of women in Muslim communities. In the context of the issues of feminism and emancipation this theme came back in the interviews:

"I think it is a challenge for Al Nisa to bring together the more intellectual branch and the activist one. It is very nice to work with Asma Barlas and Amina Wadud etc, but try to apply their theories to you own life that is a completely different story." (Al Nisa, 61 min.).

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One woman replied that we couldn't do everything at the same time; you have to start somewhere. Another woman argued that we should not want to rush things, but take them step-by-step. It would be very difficult and also undesirable to produce a general answer to this question at this point, but it is important to note that together with the knowledge on contextualisation, and different approaches towards diversity it does become possible to generate a more nuanced analysis of the issues at stake in the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. This analysis should eventually function as a road map that can help us to navigate between the themes, approaches and tensions.

Towards a More Comprehensive Understanding of Multiculturalism and Feminism

In this chapter I have described and analysed the results of the nine focus groups I held with women from various women's organisations in the Netherlands. The main aim of these group interviews was to produce alternative and situated knwowledges about various issues related to the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

The chapter, like focus groups, was divided into three main issues: media and representation, multiculturalism and culture/religion related issues and finally feminism and emancipation. In the first part the women discussed the strategies and arguments of people like Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders, but also the more general debates about Islam in the Netherlands. It appeared that when the women talked about Geert Wilders they were mostly thinking about the question 'should we take him seriously or not?'. With Ayaan Hirsi Ali on the other hand, her chosen strategies were mostly at the centre of the debate. Often the women were sympathetic to Ali's aims, but her approach was considered very problematic. Furthermore, the women talked about the broader Islam debates in the Netherlands, such as those on the headscarf, and the influences of those debates in the lives of the women in the group. It appeared that, for example, some young girls applied for jobs much below their educational level, just because they would not have any trouble with their headscarves in such occupations. From there the interviews moved to issues of multiculturalism and feminism.

From the many conclusions that we can draw from these conversations, it is first of all important to note that the women's interpretations of what multiculturalism means or should mean were not so much about extra group rights, but more about recognition of difference and finding ways to live together in a positive manner. The women argued against developing grand universal theories, and in favour of more nuanced and contextualised analyses and decision-making. Furthermore, they made it clear how knowledge about religion can help to fight traditions that are considered to be oppressive to women. Finally, they were active to develop multiple critiques about certain traditions within their communities as well as the negative discourses about their communities. This way they tried to navigate between possible harmful (interpretations of) religious/cultural traditions and the stereotyping of their community/faith.

Feminism was a rather contested term among the participants of the focus groups; often they referred to interpretations of feminism that either completely ignored culture and religion in their analyses or had a very different perspective on what sexual difference is. Moreover, the women emphasised a clear difference in thinking about emancipation and feminism between the different generations. Some mentioned the fact that many 'second wave' feminists are ignoring religion and culture in their feminist analyses; others noticed generational differences within their own group, for example regarding clothing styles. In several groups the women theorised what a third wave should look like; warm and inclusive was the general outcome of these discussions. Other conclusions that came out of the interviews were related to the issues at stake and the approaches to take towards them. Several women warned against fighting for 'your own little corners' and instead proposed to frame problems in a larger context in order to make it possible for women to connect on these issues. Finally, they argued for a contextualised and intersectional approach towards feminism.

Chapter 7   Weaving the Threads Together: Situated Knowledges on Multiculturalism and Feminism

Introduction

In this thesis I have investigated the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, focussing on recent debates in the Netherlands. It was long assumed that both multiculturalism and feminism are connected to progressive movements and hence have comparable and compatible goals. However, both in academia and in the popular media the critique of multiculturalism has grown and is often accompanied by arguments related to gender equality and/or feminism. This thesis started with the well-known article of Susan Moller Okin, in which she argues that there are incompatibilities between multiculturalism and gender equality. Many others have made similar comments, some of these are directed, like Okin's, towards multiculturalism in general, but often criticism is centred on Islam and Muslim traditions.

How feminism should deal with difference is (and has been for a long time) an important question for the feminist project. Women from various backgrounds, areas and generations have confronted this issue and theorised feminism's relation to difference. As this work is largely ignored in many of the arguments about multiculturalism and feminism (or Islam and gender equality) the first aim of this thesis was to include it in these debates. I have broadened the interpretation of feminism, in relation for example to the one proposed by Susan Moller Okin, by taking into account these theories of difference, I have also evaluated the common comprehension of multiculturalism. By critically evaluating the key concepts, the issues at stake become more apparent. Furthermore, as has become clear in the previous chapters, it is important to discuss the possible meanings and conceptualisations of feminism and multiculturalism, in order to make the debate more productive.

However, as much as I believe that these re-conceptualisations of multiculturalism and feminism are essential, I do not believe that they provide us with final answers to the questions and issues at stake. In order to give proper attention to all arguments and

statements, we need to broaden the debate further. It is important to become conscious of the many aspects of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism and to understand that tensions can arise for many reasons and also be addressed in many different ways. In order to do this properly, we have to be accountable for our own position (recognise whiteness for example), recognise the historical relations between feminism and colonialism, take into account the intersections between gender and ethnicity, critically evaluate our conceptualisation of agency and finally analyse the discursive elements of the debates. In this thesis I have worked with all these aspects of the debates and in this final chapter I will weave all the threads together to develop a more productive, positive and inclusive way of thinking about multiculturalism and feminism.

Summing up

This thesis combines a theoretical approach towards the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism with extensive empirical research. The reason for this approach is that our understanding of this topic is greatly strengthened by a combination of detailed knowledge of the different discourses, practical arguments and experiences of stakeholders, along with critical exploration of relevant theories.

I started by outlining the debate as initiated by Susan Moller Okin. Even though Susan Moller Okin was not the first to discuss or theorise the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, she doubtless refuelled the debate with new clear-cut arguments and statements. In her view there are serious tensions between the commitment to gender equality and the desire to respect the customs of minority cultures (Okin, 1999a). Therefore, she concludes that if we take gender equality in our societies seriously, we should not allow group rights that are a potential threat to such equality. Okin's statements led to a complex and highly important debate that was not restricted to academia, but also moved into popular media. In the Netherlands, the relationship between multiculturalism and gender equality has been high on the political agenda. Moreover, the Dutch discourse on multiculturalism has become more and more intensive; the neo-realist genre that arose within it was identified by fierce directness (i.e. 'daring to face the facts') and with common references to gender equality and women's issues. After several critical essays about Islam and

multiculturalism by male politicians in which gender equality was mentioned, Ayaan Hirsi Ali (a champion of neo-realism) brought the issue to the centre of the national debate by her harsh and uncompromising vision of Islamic culture.

In the theoretical chapters, I developed a more critical view on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism than I had encountered in either the academic or the public debate in the Netherlands. I analysed the two main concepts of multiculturalism and feminism, and scrutinized the notion of experience. In this manner I was able to show different possible interpretations of multiculturalism and feminism, investigate how these are connected to the issue of difference, and finally develop a more comprehensive understanding of these concepts that could lead to a new relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

Multiculturalism can generally be described as the normative response to a multicultural society. Okin mainly refers to multiculturalism as 'group rights' but there are many possible interpretations of what multicultural politics ought to entail. Different forms of multiculturalism start from various ideas about the value of culture and how it influences people's lives, what equality means, and how it is related to difference. New notions of multiculturalism move beyond the concept of culture and incorporate the notion of difference in an alternative way. If we move away from the traditional interpretations of multiculturalism and emphasise the issue of difference (e.g. discrimination) while acknowledging the importance of people's daily interactions, we can look beyond the limited issue of group rights and promote a multiculturalism that is more dynamic, practical and compatible with feminism.

When we concentrate on the concept of feminism, we see that difference has been, and still is, very important. Whereas Okin applies a rather straightforward interpretation of gender equality, various feminist theorists have pointed out the problems that arise when 'women' are considered to be a homogeneous category. It is evident that women's experiences are determined by various parameters, such as race, sexuality, class, religion, ability etc. These categories of difference do not shape women's lives separately but instead converge into an interdependent whole. Separating gender from ethnicity in an analysis would therefore prevent us from truly understanding how their combined influence works. Furthermore, a more comprehensive understanding of feminism demonstrates that it is important to acknowledge that whiteness is also a racial position. For example, through the notion of 'politics of location' researchers should be accountable for their position and

consider how their location influences their experiences and ultimately their research (e.g. questions, methods and results). Such an interpretation of feminism not only accounts for difference between women but also demonstrates why we cannot actually separate multiculturalism and feminism but have to develop a 'multicultural feminism'.

Related to the definition of feminism are the conceptualisations of 'experience' and 'subjectivity'. In the debates about multiculturalism and feminism, people often show their concerns for gender inequality in Islam. Although one could refer to interpretations of feminism and multiculturalism in such arguments, this would leave the issue of experience unresolved. I have put forward two important arguments for taking into account the experiences, opinions and strategies of the women involved in the debate. First, there are many women from minority groups who are also fighting for equality in their own particular way and from within their communities. They deserve the support of (other) feminists and their experiences and opinions should be included in the debate about multiculturalism and feminism. Secondly, not all women want the type of freedom and equality that feminists like Okin fight for. If we want to understand the lives and experiences of these women and take them into account in our analyses, we need to develop more nuanced frameworks and better definitions of notions such as agency, subjectivity and experience.

Whereas the theoretical analysis of the thesis worked to create a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the relation between the notions of multiculturalism and feminism, the empirical work exposed the rules of the discourse and content of the arguments that leads to an alternative perspective on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

In *Opzij,* many authors and interviewees referred to subjectivity and the value of women's experiences in the debates about multiculturalism in general, or Islam in particular. An important result of this analysis is that, although there were many interviews with Muslim women (they were certainly not ignored by the magazine), there was a clear difference between the articles on/with Muslim women and those with non-Muslim women. Whereas the articles on Muslim women mainly focussed on *why* these women make certain religious or cultural choices, the other articles explicitly discussed *how* feminism should deal with culture and religion. In other words, there was one category of articles in which feminism and feminist standpoints

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were *theorized* and a separate one in which Muslim women's choices were *investigated*.

Another important result is the apparent discrepancy between those who focus on certain interpretations of feminist values and those who consider feminism to be more a process or a guide to help us think about progress. Some women argued that white feminists should get more involved in the struggles of Muslim women; others disagreed and argued for more fixed interpretations of feminist values such as equality. The last group was generally more critical towards multicultural politics while the first was more focussed on informing themselves about Muslim women's struggle for equality. Furthermore, those who were critical about multiculturalism often referred to certain dominant interpretations of culture/religion, while authors/interviewees who were positive about it, had a much more personal and flexible view on these issues. In general, the analysis made it clear that the debates and arguments about multiculturalism and feminism are multi-layered, but often these layers are not made explicit and prevent the discussants actually exploring the issues at stake.

Among the participants of the focus groups, alternative interpretations of cultural and religious traditions were important. Multiculturalism was for them not about group rights but rather about recognition of difference and finding ways to co-exist in a positive manner. The women argued against developing 'grand universal theories' and were clearly in favour of more nuanced and contextualised analysis and decision-making. Also, they were clear that knowledge about religion helps to fight traditions that are considered to be oppressive to women. In most focus groups, feminism was a rather contested term. The women often referred to interpretations of feminism that either completely ignored culture and religion or had a very different perspective on what sexual difference is. Most of them therefore preferred to use the term 'emancipation' instead. Moreover, participants emphasised a clear difference in thinking about emancipation and feminism amongst different generations. Some mentioned the fact that many 'second wave' feminists ignore religion and culture in their conceptualisation of feminism. In several groups women theorised what a 'third wave' should look like: warm and inclusive were the prominent characteristics suggested. Other points in the focus groups were related to the issues that feminists fight for and the approaches taken towards them. Several women, for instance, warned

against fighting for 'your own little corners' and instead proposed to frame problems in a larger context in order to make it possible for women to connect on these issues.

Redefining Multiculturalism

The theoretical and empirical work in the thesis allows us to develop alternative interpretations of the notions of multiculturalism and feminism. This is necessary in order to reconceptualise the relationship between them.

We have seen how multiculturalism is generally described as an ideology that aims to give space to the different cultures that live in a society by granting them specific group rights. Central to this interpretation of multiculturalism are the concepts of culture, group identity, recognition and legal rights. However, it is clear from the media analysis and the group interviews that different groups describe multiculturalism differently. In the *Opzij* articles, the main focus of the debate was on Islam, and hence not only on one particular group (instead of several) but also a religious group (rather than a cultural one). Furthermore, some describe this religious group as not only 'non-secularizable' but also prone to fundamentalist interpretations. More importantly, a direct link is made between religious traditions and gender inequality. Many authors and interviewees are concerned about certain dominant interpretations and traditions and their symbolic meanings. These concerns represent a larger development in the Netherlands against multiculturalism. Most statements in the public discourse are about integration (and sometimes assimilation) of minority groups and hence the restriction of group rights.

In this thesis I propose a redefinition of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism because I believe these concepts can and need to be defined in more positive and productive terms. As I explain in chapter 2, some authors (who are also in favour of a politics of difference) find the term multiculturalism so troubled that they have developed alternative concepts to deal with difference. Even though I agree with some of their critiques, I would argue that as public discourse in many European countries (such as the Netherlands) is rather negative about multicultural societies and the influence of different cultures on these societies, alternative arguments need to engage in the discussion about multiculturalism. As many critics use the concept of multiculturalism to point out that 'political correctness' and relativism have led to

many problems, I believe that a redefinition of this much contested term is necessary (rather than the introduction of new and - for many people - abstract terms) to show that different cultures are valuable in our societies and that it is possible to give more space to difference yet still be critical about certain problems, such as gender inequality.

In that context I agree with Tariq Modood who also defends multiculturalism and makes clear why multiculturalist ideas are compatible with democratic politics:

> "Multiculturalism of course challenges certain ways of thinking and certain political positions but the challenge is of inclusion and adjustment, not of giving up one comprehensive politics for another" (Modood, 2007, p 19).

This quote shows that contrary to what certain critics would have us believe, multiculturalism is not a threat to democratic values, but an asset. It helps us to develop ways to include different cultural and religious groups in our societies. Hence, in order to connect to the recent debates about migration and integration, and to put forward more inclusive perspectives, critical theorists need to develop more comprehensive ideas about multiculturalism.

Both in *Opzij* and in the focus groups we also find many positive statements about multiculturalism or the influence of religion/culture in people's lives. Often though, women do not defend the interpretation of multiculturalism as described above but propose a more dynamic version. In *Opzij* for example, more practical approaches towards multicultural issues, such as the headscarf, were put forward. Also some of the women in the focus groups emphasised that it is more important to guard the interests of individual women than to fight certain patriarchal traditions in general. In this context, they proposed the use of 'virginity pills' if women ask for it. Note though that even though such an approach might be helpful for individual women it does not leave much space for alternative interpretations of cultural and religious traditions, and hence for change. Therefore, I would argue that even though it is important to take the above into account, it is not enough to change the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. It is probably most fruitful to combine such practical perspectives with more critical ones.

Many women in the interviews emphasised how important it is to know more about their religion and the holy texts and develop a better understanding of the relationship

between religion and culture. This way, women can criticise certain religious traditions by referring to holy texts. The key here is to recognise the power relations involved, acknowledge the possible differences within religious traditions and create distinctions between certain practices (or in this case religious traditions) and theory (or the holy texts). This brings Muslim women into a complex position; in order to combine their attachment to their religion and to emancipation, Muslim women have developed multiple critiques. This means that they discuss gender roles in their local religious communities by challenging conventional interpretations of holy texts and traditions while at the same time defending their religious communities. Through multiple critiques women show that certain cultural traditions can be interpreted in misogynist ways but in fact have multiple meanings. For instance, many women point out the many different meanings of the headscarf: even though it might be a sign of oppression to some, for others it shows their relationship to God without this affecting their notion of emancipation.

If we take these arguments back to the definition of multiculturalism, we should first of all conclude that multicultural politics need a combination of more practical approaches with critical perspectives. Furthermore, one needs to be aware that critique and change do not automatically lead to an aversion for multiculturalism. Muslim women have shown very well how they criticise certain interpretations of religious traditions without turning against their religious beliefs or communities. Moreover, besides a critical and practical view towards cultural and religious issues, the concept of multiculturalism itself can also be approached differently. Many made it clear that group rights were not really an issue for them; instead the focus should be on respect for difference in daily life. They wished they would not have to explain to strangers on the street why they wear a headscarf or ask their colleagues to make sure there is halal food for lunch. This connects to the alternative views on multiculturalism that I discussed in chapter 2 and confirms the importance of difference and daily encounters for these interpretations.

The final aspect of multiculturalism is the importance of making local and contextualised analyses, rather than developing general theories. We should always take into account the specificities of certain cases and recognise that the same phenomenon can have different meanings in different situations. One way of responding to these more localised analyses is to frame multicultural issues differently. Connected to this is the idea that multicultural issues should be approached

as processes; there cannot be instant changes. Therefore, it is important to make it possible for people to grow (through education) and to prevent one group dominating another (both when it comes to gender and ethnicity) and to remain open to the possibility that we can learn from each other. Or as Tariq Modood puts it:

> "we are not asked to approve or disapprove in an ultimate way but allow co-presence, public support, interaction and societal redefinition" (Modood, 2007, p 67).

Redefining Feminism

Okin argues that feminism refers to "the belief that women should not be disadvantaged by their sex, that they should be recognized as having human dignity equal to that of men and that they should have the opportunity to live as fulfilling and as freely chosen lives as men can" (Okin, 1999a, p 10). This might sound like a rather straightforward and broadly shared interpretation of feminism but, as I demonstrated in chapter 3, the term 'feminism' is rather more contested and difficult to define than Okin lets us believe. The media analysis showed that one of the main points of discussion was who is included in the feminist 'us' and who is not. The key concepts in these discussions were experience and solidarity. Can feminists develop general ideas about what feminism is or should they be more open to the experiences and opinions of other women? The essential question here is: when we talk about experience, whose experience do we mean? Those who want to take experiences into account seem to refer to a specific, rather political, interpretation of standpoint theory. They do not propose to ask 'average' women what they think of certain issues, but instead propose to work more closely with Muslim feminists. The opponents of this approach, on the other hand, often mention a much more individualistic interpretation ('taking average women's experiences into account'). In chapter 4, I extensively discussed the issue of experience in feminist research and activities and argued that there are good reasons to produce knowledge from a marginalised position. However, I also mentioned the importance of developing critical standpoints and warned that people in a marginalised position do not automatically provide better knowledge. Through for example the idea of multiple critiques, Muslim feminists have developed

critical standpoints and important alternative knowledge that should be taken into account in the debates about multiculturalism and feminism.

Another conceptual issue that was highlighted in the empirical research is the co-existence of gender and ethnicity. The women in the focus group mentioned that in order to develop a feminism that appeals to different women, not only sexual difference should be taken into account, but also other axes of difference, such as ethnicity, sexuality, class and religion. Some argued that white second wave feminists especially centre their struggles on sexual difference while ignoring how ethnicity is related to gender and gender relations. In my theoretical chapters I demonstrated how various categories of difference arise together and influence each other, for example through the work of black feminists, such as the Combahee River Collective. Hence, in order to understand the lives of women from minority groups, feminist analysis should include the effects of culture, religion, class and sexuality (and the intersections between these categories) on the experiences of these women. Moreover, feminists should not solely focus on stimulating women to work, but also pay attention to other issues. Women from different regions and generations might point out different key issues. For that reason it is highly important to feminism to find productive ways to develop through different generations. Van der Tuin's concept of 'jumping generations' (2009) is in my view a good starting point for this and very helpful in the debate about multiculturalism and feminism as it provides us with an instrument to see possibilities of change within feminism, without linear thinking or turning away from the struggles of previous generations of feminists.

Interpretations of feminism and emancipation varied greatly between the different women in the focus groups. Some women instantly acknowledged themselves as feminists while others were opposed to using the term. In the case of the latter, many preferred to think themselves as 'emancipated'. These women are interested in a struggle for equality but not as it is interpreted by certain Western feminists at present. Some women therefore argue that we have to struggle for different interpretations of feminism; others prefer to use the more neutral term emancipation. For most of the women in the focus groups, emancipation was about making your own choices and not just about having a career. Furthermore, the women made the important point that emancipation is about making choices within a certain framework, such as the needs and wishes of your friends and family. In that sense they explicitly criticised individualistic interpretations of emancipation that ignore these ties. This connects to

the politics of location and accountability for one's background; all women have a certain background and are influenced by their previous experiences, locations and surroundings. Feminists should not ignore these, but include them in their analyses and be accountable for them. The results of the focus groups show that a more inclusive feminism can be applied in practice by working with overlapping themes in order to enhance solidarity, developing alternative definitions of emancipation to include more women's perspectives and adjusting analyses to current and local situations.

Revisiting the Debate through Critical Theory

In the course of this research project, more and more literature has been published that could be called 'postsecular'. Postsecular theorists aim to develop a better understanding of current issues related to religion, by moving beyond the strict differentiation between religion and secularism. They criticise religious fundamentalism as well as strict secularism and argue that both approaches essentialize religion, either by affirming or negating the concept. William Connolly for instance, argues that we should acknowledge the instances in which secularism becomes too narrow and intolerant and that we have to explore new possibilities in order to accommodate a wider variety of claims and to imagine pluralism on that basis (Connolly, 1999).

This thesis has been much inspired by this postsecular turn, and in this conclusion, I would like to make it explicit that even though I write this as a non-religious or secular feminist, I believe that feminism can no longer afford a strict secular approach. First of all, this would exclude a large group of women for whom religion/culture are very important. And secondly, it seems impossible to disconnect this approach from islamophobist politics. In many public debates, gender equality functions as one of the arguments against multiculturalism in general or Islam specifically. Sometimes this means that feminism is (mis)used for racist purposes. I do not mean to argue that this kind of misuse of feminist theories should automatically mean that feminists have to change their ideas, but I do think that we might need to reconsider our strategies. In my view postsecular theory can be an important step in that direction and help to rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism.

Bracke and Schmitt argue that despite of the: "historic reluctance of traditional left wing and feminist movements, we can already recognise a greater interest in religious issues and identities within these groups" (Bracke and Schmitt, 2006, p 11). This is connected to the above-mentioned conservative claim on secularism and the consequential link to racism and islamophobia. Another important reason to commit to religious or postsecular dialogues is to create a pluralist alternative to the current polarization. Interestingly, this approach can often borrow ideas and approaches from other groups from outside of Europe (e.g. anti-colonial movements), who do include religion in their struggles. I argue that feminism cannot be strictly secular anymore and that the postsecular turn needs to be taken into account in the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism. In other words, a critical perspective on secularism and its relation to religion is a necessary aspect of a productive redefinition of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, in which terms such as religion and secularism are often taken for granted. Among other things, this includes critical analyses of what secularism is and does in our society.

Secularism builds on a certain concept of the world and the problems in that world (Asad, 2003, p 191-192). This means that it has different meanings depending on time and location. Thus above all, secularism is not the logical and reasonable 'successor' of faith. Bolette Blaagaard refers to this simplistic dichotomous use of secularism and religion as 'secular illiteracy' (Blaagaard, 2007). She argues that both secularism and the Enlightenment have strong ties to Christianity and that only forgetfulness makes the strict opposition between a religious 'them' and a secular 'us' possible. Furthermore, the ignorance of the secular legacy is closely connected to whiteness, or the invisibility of the white norm. Therefore, we need more knowledge and understanding of the relationship between Christianity, secularism and so-called enlightened Western societies (Blaagaard, 2007, p 13). I absolutely agree on this and would like to argue that an inclusive feminism should invest more in critically evaluating feminism's (assumed) relation to secularism. This connects to the accountability and recognition of power relations that I described above. Furthermore, it removes the 'Other' from the centre of attention and creates space for a feminist analysis on a broader basis, without stigmatizing certain groups of women.

Another aspect of the postsecular turn is the critical evaluation of terms such as agency and subjectivity. The women in the focus groups mentioned that they want to become emancipated in a non-self-centred way and take into account the wishes and

needs of their families and friends. This connects to the work of Saba Mahmood, who, among other things, reconceptualises the traditional conception of agency by detaching it from the simply dichotomous relation of subversion and subordination and leaving open the possibility of learning from others (Mahmood, 2005). However, despite the fact that it is important to note that there is agency beyond oppositional consciousness, the comments of the women in the focus groups on religion and knowledge also show that we need alternative analyses of what oppositional consciousness is. I would like to refer again here to Rosi Braidotti's conceptualisation of political subjectivity, that starts from "multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions" (Braidotti, 2008, p 16). This interpretation of subjectivity is a crucial instrument in many debates about multiculturalism and feminism, because it helps us to conceptualise a feminism that can fight certain harmful traditions or customs, without condemning religions or cultures in a general and stigmatising way.

The final aspect that I would like to mention at this point in regard to rethinking multiculturalism and feminism through critical and postsecular theory, is the concept of 'affirmative ethics'. In the above discussion we could already read how the women in the focus groups argued that we should not try to create general theories about multiculturalism and feminism, but should produce more contextualised and situated analyses of the issues at stake. One of the consequences of this approach is that we have to acknowledge the fact that we cannot change the world in a second; change takes time. Or as one of the women said: we have to see this as a process and not try to pin everything down beforehand. I would argue that we could theorise these remarks further through Braidotti's ideas on 'affirmative ethics'. This interpretation of ethics is not "tied to the present by negation", but is instead "affirmative and geared to creating possible futures" (Braidotti, 2008, p 11). Thus, instead of trying to deconstruct or criticise certain identities or subjectivities, we should affirm them and think about the possibilities they create and the alternatives they can offer to current views on these issues. This means that difference is regarded as positive (instead of negative) and can form the basis of transformation or "creative becoming" (Braidotti, 2008, p 11). Central to Braidotti's approach is that we affirm otherness and hence do not focus on sameness. According to Braidotti, we can do this by changing our view on pain and suffering. Instead of dealing with pain by denying it, or trying to go against it, we should find ways to work through the pain (Braidotti, 2008, p 16). This confirms the argument of the women in the focus groups that we should approach the relationship

between multiculturalism and feminism as a process, rather than trying to achieve instant change. Furthermore, it connects to the idea that it is more productive to develop alternative interpretations of certain traditions and practices, rather than dismissing them altogether.

Ground Rules for More Nuanced and Productive Debates

While postsecular theories offer important insights into the re-conceptualisation of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, they still leave some issues unresolved. Demonstrating the complexity of these debates is one of the main aims of this thesis. Here I would like to describe what other dimensions were made explicit in this research project and how we can transform its conclusions into ground rules for the debate. As became clear in the focus groups, it is impossible (and undesirable) to develop general theories about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism, but that does not mean that we cannot develop certain road maps that help us to better understand the issues at stake. Depending on the argument or statement one would reply to, different aspects of this reconceptualisation of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism can be applied.

First of all I would like to point out again how important it is to recognise the many layers of these issues and also the connections between these layers. In that context, I would argue that Okin's interpretations of the tensions between multicultural group rights and gender equality are not necessarily incorrect, but only cover a small part of the equation. I acknowledge that it is impossible to always take everything into account, but one can recognise complexity and acknowledge one's starting points and prevent generalisations. Okin would probably have received more positive responses if she had focussed on criticising certain problematical cultural practices, rather than dismissing multiculturalism as a whole.

Secondly, I want to emphasise the importance of the discursive aspects of multiculturalism and feminism. How is the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism discussed? What frameworks are used? And, who is talking and who is talked about? I have described how the Dutch public discourse can be recognised by speakers who aim to break through taboos and 'dare to face the facts', claim to speak for 'normal' people and are critical of left-wing elites. It is important to recognise

these discursive aspects, as they resonate in other aspects of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. The many attacks on Islam in the public sphere, for example, make it more difficult for Muslim women to change things from within.

Another point that I believe should be taken into account when thinking about multiculturalism and feminism is feminism's connection to colonialism and the long history of exclusion. Throughout the first wave for example, white women felt the need to save others, and 'civilise' colonial societies. Furthermore, they often referred to the supposedly 'backwards position of indigenous women' to promote their own emancipation. One of the consequences of this is the construction of women from the colonies as 'victims of their brutal men'. Not only is their suffering under imperialism not taken into account, they are also presented as ignorant, poor women who need help from Western saviours. In order not to repeat these approaches, it is important that feminists are conscious of the differences between women and the power relations at play, recognise the strategies of resistance of formerly colonized women and acknowledge how important religion and culture can be. Through a politics of location women can be accountable for their background, avoid easy generalisations and ask themselves under which circumstances (when/where) their statements are true. Furthermore, in this context it also becomes clear that rather than 'helping other women', one can better think about strategies for combined struggles.

Fourth, I would like to emphasise again the importance of understanding the connections between gender and ethnicity. Intersectional theory demonstrates how various axes of difference coincide and influence each other: gender is 'ethnicised' and ethnicity is 'gendered'. Also in the group interviews women underlined both their gender and their ethnicity and the fact that they could not and would not choose between the two: they were both and needed to develop a framework for emancipation accordingly. In that sense, it is a mistake to separate multiculturalism and feminism, and a necessity to find a way to combine them. Furthermore, it demonstrates that any feminist attempt that starts from the idea that women have to give up their cultural/religious identity in order to be emancipated is highly problematic. It would be more productive to think together about 'how' to develop alternative views on certain traditions and 'how' to fight misogynist interpretations.

A fifth point that is important in this context is the interpretation of subjectivity. Alternative views on this key concept can help feminists to open up alternative ways of structuring one's life and achieving change. This approach would also make it

possible to start a dialogue amongst women about feminism, without asking minority women to give up their beliefs or cultural background. A radical dismissal of these beliefs and traditions on the basis of certain dominant views would completely erase these women's struggles and power to achieve change. Furthermore, it prevents feminists from actually discussing the issues at stake, rather than constantly emphasising certain principles.

Feminism in Multicultural Societies

"if you want to make the new wave a vibrant one, you have to create a situation where women can be themselves, where women (...) can choose to do what they want. We have to make the third wave a warm wave" (ZAMI, 57 min.).

In this final chapter I have presented the outcomes of this thesis and put forward an alternative perspective on the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. As becomes clear from the various chapters of this thesis, this relationship is highly complex and multi-layered and needs an approach that corresponds to this. Even though I appreciate Okin's attempt to defend the rights of women from minority groups, I do not support her methods and interpretations of the issues at stake. Not only does her conclusion reflect just one of the many aspects of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism but her perspective also corners minority women even more. Gender equality is often misused as an argument in islamophobic and anti-migration discussions that harm the position of minority women. Therefore, in order to rethink the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism in a more fruitful manner, we need to acknowledge the different aspects of it, rather than focussing on only one. This includes taking into account related (and possibly older) debates, such as those of feminists about difference and multiculturalists about culture. But more recent developments and considerations also need our attention. In this context one can think of the postsecular turn and its critical work on secularism and the relationship between secularism and religion, but also of recent debates among feminists about a possible third wave and the notion of 'jumping generations'. Moreover, a fruitful discussion about multiculturalism and feminism not only critically

evaluates the notions of feminism and multiculturalism, but also includes accountability of the positions of the speakers, and takes into account the intersections between gender and ethnicity, as well as developing critical accounts of religion and secularism, colonial history, theories of agency and discourse. This might sound rather impractical to some, but the empirical research in this thesis has clearly shown that most women actually approach the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism in such a way.

Appendices

Appendix I: Information Sheet

Information sheet for focus groups

MULTICULTURALISM AND FEMINISM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEBATES IN THE NETHERLANDS

You are being invited to take part in a PhD research study conducted by Eva Midden, Centre for Professional Ethics, University of Central Lancashire, UK. Before you make a decision it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

Aims of the research

The main aim of this research is to discuss the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. According to several academics and politicians like Susan Moller Okin or Ayaan Hirsi Ali, there are fundamental conflicts between our wish to achieve gender equality in society and the desire to respect and protect the customs of minority cultures and religions. They use examples like forced marriages, female circumcision and burqas to show that multiculturalism could be bad for women. Therefore, they say, we should not permit cultural traditions that could be oppressive for women.

Claims like those of Okin and Ali have led to a significant debate. Many people don't agree with them and have responded to their arguments by saying that their ideas are one-sided and biased from a Western perspective. Another important point of critique is that this perspective has a view on cultures that ignores progressive forces, like younger people, that might want to and have the ability to change certain norms.

Overall, the academic debate on this subject is highly charged but also very theoretical. The aim of this research is to provide more practical input by asking members of the public belonging to organised groups of minority cultures to express their views on the subject of the relationship between multiculturalism and gender equality.

What will happen to me when I take part?

A number of focus group discussions (ca 5-9) will be conducted as part of this study. The discussion you will participate in will take about 60-90 mins and there is no need for preparation. The discussion will be tape-recorded.

During the focus group the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism will be discussed. Most questions will refer to general themes such as culture, religion, emancipation, rights, empowerment and participation. As a participant you can also introduce new themes that are important in this debate according to you.

Why have I been chosen?

A main aim of this research is to get a better understanding of the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism by analysing it from a lay person's perspective, looking at daily experiences and provide a voice for cultural minority women in the debate. Since most debates refer to minority women without providing evidence, it is important to ask them directly to take part in a research that analyses this debate.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

You will not be identified by name in this research and all information that is collected about you will be kept strictly confidential. During the discussion only your age, ethnic background, education and profession will be asked. The discussions will be recorded and later transcribed anonymously. The tapes will be kept in a secure location by the researcher and later destroyed. No direct comparisons between organisations taking part in the study and participants will be undertaken and as such it is guaranteed that no one will be able to identify you on the basis of the results in the PhD thesis.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

None of the participants will be identified in any report or publication that comes out of this research. The research is expected to be concluded in September 2009. All participating organisations will receive a copy of the research report.

Contact for further information

Contact details for further information or questions:

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Mobile number in the Netherlands: 0031 6 28467683

Thank you for considering taking part in this research.

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Date:

Version number:

Study Number:

Interviewee Identification Number for this trial:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:

MULTICULTURALISM AND FEMINISM: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DEBATE IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated for the
above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. ☐

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at
any time without giving any reason. ☐

3. I understand that I will be identified as the author of the views expressed in this
interview for subsequent analysis and publications of thesis results

☐

4. I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

Name of Interviewee   Date   Signature

Researcher   Date   Signature

1 for interviewee; 1 for researcher; 1 to be kept with other notes

Appendix III: Questions for the focus groups

Basic structure of the interviews

1. Personal Introduction
2. Introduction group
3. Public debate
4. Multicultural Issues
5. Feminism/Emancipation
6. Other issues/ Conclusions

1. Personal Introduction (5 minutes):

- Personal Background

- Professional background and current position

- Research project content and aims

2. Introduction questions for group (10 minutes):

- When and with what goals is your group founded?
- How would you describe your background?
- What kind of work/activities do you do with the organisation?
- How is that work related to multiculturalism? (basic)
- How is that work related to feminism? (basic)

Explain what plan is for this focus group (time, subjects, questions etc)

3. Public debate: general and feminists (25 minutes):

Introduction:

In the popular media many statements are made about multiculturalism, religion, Islam, the emancipation of Muslim women, etc. Very often these statements are rather negative. In this part of the interview I would like to discuss with you what you think about this and how it influences your own ideas and struggles. In this discussion I would like to separate the statements from male (non-feminist) politicians such as Geert Wilders and those of feminists, such as Cisca Dresselhuys.

Questions:

A. There has been a lot of discussion about the film of Geert Wilders, but before the film came out, he also made many remarks about Islam and Muslim women, such as: "I could eat Muslim women raw". In this quote he refers to the fact that we should convince women not to wear headscarves.

- What do you think of such remarks?
- Are these kinds of statements important points of discussion in your group?
- How do they influence your standpoints in your struggle for emancipation and does it change people around you?

B. Remarks like those of Wilders are very provocative and rather radical. Also feminists have argued they are worried about the emancipation of 'allochtonous' women. Cisca Dresselhuys argued that women who wear headscarves couldn't work for her because she believes that the headscarf is a sign of women's oppression. But also others, such as Nahed Selim have talked about the possible tensions between multiculturalism and feminism.

- Is there a difference according to you between the remarks and arguments made by politicians like Geert Wilders (but also Ellian, Ephimenco, Cliteur, etc.) and feminists like Cisca Dresselhuys?

- Do you ever read Opzij? Is it an interesting magazine for you?
- What do you think of the interpretation of feminism in Opzij?
- Do you identify with the articles in Opzij? Do they correspond to you own ideas and experiences? Are the issues that you find important (related to multiculturalism) discussed?

C. The above statements are rather extreme examples of the Dutch public debates about these issues. If we could influence the media, what would you want to come forward in the discussions?

- How would you like that popular media in general and feminist media such as Opzij discuss the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism?

4. Multicultural Issues (25 minutes):

Introduction:

Political scientist Susan Moller Okin argues that cultures are suffused with practices and ideologies concerning gender and that most cultures facilitate the control over women in various ways. Okin concludes that there is a fundamental conflict between our commitment to gender equality and the desire to respect the customs of minority cultures and religions. If we agree that women should not be disadvantaged because of their sex, we should not accept group rights that permit oppressive practices, she argues (Okin, 1999). In this part of the interview, I would like to discuss how you deal with cultural and religious issues in your lives.

Questions:

A. In a Meetlat interview with Cisca Dresselhuys in Opzij, Afshin Ellian argues that the government should be more restrictive when it comes to certain cultural traditions (for instance headscarves). This, he argues, will help Muslim women in their discussions at home about these issues.

- What do you think about this? Do you agree with Ellian?
- Have you had an experience that either confirms or goes against this statement?
- How do remarks like these about religion of culture influence your personal lives?

B. Because home is the place where culture is practised, preserved and transmitted to the young, Susan Moller Okin argues that the defence of cultural traditions will have much more influence on the lives of women and girls, since they spend most of their time and energy preserving and maintaining the personal, familial and reproductive side of life. She believes this will also have an effect on women's and girls role in the public sphere and hence for emancipation.

- Do you consider yourself as religious? How do you experience your religion, in connection to emancipation?
- What about culture? Some people argue that not religion but culture is related to oppressive practices, do you agree with this?
- Do you believe that women should/could decide themselves whether certain customs are acceptable? Or should the government interfere, for instance when it comes to traditions such as circumcision?
- Do you think that the Dutch government should have a more multiculturalist approach, and give more (legal) space to certain religious/cultural traditions?

5. Feminism and Emancipation (25 minutes):

Introduction:

In this last part of the interview, I would like to move attention to feminism and emancipation related issues. In many debates about multiculturalism and feminism, the women involved are considered as possible victims, instead of political actors. One of the aims of your organisation is the emancipation of women, how are your own struggles connected to (debates about) the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism and how would you interpret feminism and emancipation?

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Questions:

A. In statements such as those from Okin or Dresslhuys, multiculturalism is discussed as a possible threat to gender equality. Gender equality itself however is considered as something fixed: about freedom and equality. How do you experience feminism?

- What does feminism mean to you personally?
- Would you call yourself feminist?
- What does emancipation mean to you?

- Do you think that religion and feminism can be combined in a constructive way, and if yes how? What could cause tensions do you think?
- How do culture and religion influence your struggle for emancipation?
- What are important feminist/emancipational values and can they be interpreted differently for different groups?

B. In *Opzij,* Jolande Withuis says that feminists should show more solidarity with Ayaan Hiris Ali and her struggle against gender oppression in Islam, others say that we should show more solidarity with Muslim women. When you think about your own experiences within your group, and the influence of culture/religion on emancipation, how would you think about these issues?

- Do you experience in the work with your group that women are somehow oppressed because of their culture? How do you deal with that?
- Have you experienced racism and does that influence your standpoints on these issues?
- What should feminist/female solidarity look like according to you?

C. In the previous we discussed whether there are different ways of thinking about feminism and thus also about the relationship between multiculturalism and feminism. This still implied that women, even though in different ways, somehow

fight for the emancipation of women. In 2005, Saba Mahmood argued that feminists should also try to understand the choices of much more orthodox women. Women do not necessarily need to resist patriarchal customs in order to have agency, she argues.

- What do you think about this?
- Where to you draw the line when it comes to recognising differences?

D. In several articles of *Opzij* it seemed that there might be a generational aspect in the discussions about multiculturalism and feminism. One author for instance clearly stated that she could not understand that young women who convert to Islam voluntarily give up the rights that her generation fought for so fiercely.

- Do you have clear differences of opinions within your group between different generations of women?
- Have you experienced generational differences otherwise?
- Do you believe that the discussions between feminists on issues of multiculturalism, religion and culture are related to the differences between Second Wave and Third Wave feminists?

6. Other issues/conclusions

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