

Homegrown Muslim Extremism in the Netherlands: An Exploratory Note

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Introduction

An Amsterdam taxi-driver told me a few years ago that cockroaches were colonizing the taxi ranks outside Central Station. The ‘cockroaches’ this taxi-driver was referring to were his Dutch-Moroccan colleagues. Some police officers and people working within the justice department refer to ethnic Moroccans as ‘rats’, from a conviction that they generally lie and deny that they have committed any offence, even when they are caught in the act or the offences are as good as proven.¹ One member of Amsterdam’s executive referred notoriously to a section of the city’s young Moroccan community as *kutmarokkanen*, ‘Moroccan [expletive]’. The ethnically Moroccan section of the Dutch community is frequently described in terms of harsh prejudice.² If one were to make a ranking order of groups in the Netherlands, ethnic Moroccans come last.³

These observations remind me of *Widening Circles of Disidentification: On the Psycho- and Sociogenesis of the Hatred of Distant Strangers* written in 1997 by the Dutch sociologist Abram de Swaan.⁴ De Swaan argues that enmity, hatred, and violent conflict occur most frequently among groups that resemble one another, in transitional phases in which the social differences between these groups are growing smaller. This contribution sets out to explore this thesis, in relation to the recent tensions in the Netherlands generated by a trend towards radicalization among ethnically Moroccan youths. In 2012 and 2013, more and more young Dutch citizens of Moroccan descent join the jihad in Syria.⁵ Fears about homegrown terrorism developed in 2004, when Mohammed Bouyeri ‘ideological’ killed Theo Van Gogh, modern filmmaker and great-grand son of the artist Vincent Van Gogh.⁶ A popular website from and for Muslim youngsters in the Netherlands says, “The real criminals are the U.S. and UK regimes not Abu Hamza!”⁷ On the site, a young Dutch Muslim writes he would like to become a Mujahideen. According to the extremist group Sharia4Holland, Holland is ready for Islamic law.

According to the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, the AIVD, young Muslims belonging to the second and third generation of Moroccan immigrants (primarily, but not exclusively, boys) have become easy to recruit for violent jihad.⁸ The results of a study made by Erasmus University Rotterdam and the Dutch Ministry of Justice confirm the findings of the

¹ Bovenkerk, Frank, *Etniciteit, criminaliteit en het strafrecht* [Ethnicity, criminality and criminal law] (The Hague: Boom Juridische uitgevers, 2009).

² *Jaarrapport Integratie 2011* [Year report Integration 2011] (The Hague: SCP/WODC/CBS, September 2012).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Abram de Swaan, “Widening Circles of Disidentification: On the Psycho- and Sociogenesis of the Hatred of Distant Strangers – Reflections on Rwanda,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 14:2 (1997): 105-122.

⁵ Emerson Vermaat, “More and More Young Muslims in Holland and Belgium Praise Hitler or Join the Jihad in Syria,” *PipeLineNews.org*, 25 March 2013, available at:

<http://www.pipelinenews.org/2013/mar/25/More-More-Young-Muslims-in-Holland-Belgium-Praise.html>.

⁶ Ruud Peters, “De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling van Mohammed B.” Experts’ report on Mohammed B., who murdered the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, commissioned by the Public Prosecutions Department for the use of courts of justice, May 2005, available at: www.sociosite.org/jihad/peters_rapport.pdf; Vidino, Lorenzo and James Brandon, *Countering Radicalization in Europe*. A policy report published by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR). (London: ICSR, 2012).

⁷ See <http://www.shariah4holland.com>, November 2012. Abu Hamza al-Musri is a violent jihadist linked to al-Qaida.

⁸ AIVD, the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, *Van dawa tot jihad. De diverse dreigingen van de radicale islam tegen de democratische rechtsorde* [Dawa and Jihad. Threats of radical Islam against democracy]. (The Hague: Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2004); De Poot, Christianne and Anne Sonnenschein, *Jihadi Terrorism in the Netherlands: A Description Based on Closed Criminal Investigations* (Meppel: Royal Boom Publishers, 2011).

AIVD. Especially second and third Moroccan-Dutch migrant youth are attracted by Salafist and jihadist groups.⁹ Why are they particularly receptive to political radicalization and religious extremism and not first generation Dutch Muslims? These experts emphasize lack of integration, feelings of being threatened as a group, and of exclusion and discrimination.¹⁰ The policy of Dutch authorities is based on the assumption that violent radicalization is the byproduct of a lack of integration into mainstream society.¹¹

In the field of criminology, research supports the assumption that juveniles raised with a lot of coercion and physical force are more likely to resort to violence.¹² Since ethnic minority youths have more frequently been socialized in ‘command families’ marked by an authoritarian structure and child abuse,¹³ they lag behind in the development of self-control, a skill that is expected of people living in the Netherlands. This is another point that is not discussed in the existing analyses of Muslim extremism. One can gain a better understanding of the growing radicalism among young ethnic Moroccans youths with analysis that incorporates the relationships within their families and those that exist between ethnic Moroccans and the wider Dutch community. This will be demonstrated in the following pages.

Command Families

Abram de Swaan has described long-term changes in the relationship between the powerful and less powerful in Western societies as a transition from ‘management by command’ to ‘management by negotiation.’¹⁴ He views the reduction of power differences between individuals as a condition for their changing styles of interaction, which include greater mutual consultation in the effort to reach a compromise. This change has occurred in relations between men and women, employers and employees, professionals and their clients, older and younger people, but also in families, for instance between parents and children. As the government’s influence has grown, the inequality between those with and without power has declined since the Second World War, according to De Swaan. This has led to restrictions for the powerful and more freedom for those with less power, such as children. Management by negotiation presupposes more equality and less direct coercion and force, for instance in relations within family life and upbringing. This imposes higher demands on people’s ‘self-coercion’. Rather than a number of fixed standards, imposed from above, more alternative modes of conduct and expressions of emotion have become permissible for those with less power, but always subject to the conditions of mutual consultation and mutual consent:

⁹ Fermin, Alfons, *Islamitische en extreem-rechtse radicalisering in Nederland* [Islamic and extreme right-wing radicalization in the Netherlands] (The Hague: Ministry of Justice, 2009). Vidino, Lorenzo and James Brandon, *Countering Radicalization in Europe*. A policy report published by the London-based International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), 2012.

¹⁰ Buijs, Frank, Froukje Demant and Atef Hamdy, *Strijders van eigen bodem. Radicale en democratische moslims in Nederland* [Home-grown Fighters. Radical and democratic Moslims in the Netherlands] (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006); Andrew Silke, “Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization,” *European Journal of Criminology* 5:1 (2008): 99-123.

¹¹ Vidino, Lorenzo and James Brandon, *Countering Radicalization in Europe*. A policy report published by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR). (London: ICSR, 2012): 31.

¹² Andrews, Don A. and James Bonta, *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* Fifth Edition (New Providence, New Jersey: LexisNexis, Anderson Publishing, 2010), 252, 253.

¹³ Esmah Lahlah, Leontien van der Knaap and Stefan Bogaerts, “Dangerous Boys or Boys in Danger. Ethnic differences in the prevalence of child abuse and its effect on juvenile violent delinquency,” *European Journal of Criminology* 10:6 (2013): 641-658.

¹⁴ De Swaan, Abram, *The management of normality: Critical essays in health and welfare* (London: Routledge, 1990).

“... people now compel others and themselves to take into consideration more aspects of more people at more moments, to arrange their relations accordingly and to subordinate their emotional management to these considerations.”¹⁵

Clearly, forms of interaction that are based on mutual consent are not accompanied by the use of force and violence.

Although the importance that is generally accorded to the inter-generational transfer of violence, and to the role of upbringing in the genesis of violent and coercive behavior, none of the studies published thus far of radicalization among Moroccan youths in the Netherlands have taken these aspects into account. The main losers in processes of modernization appear to be fathers in traditional ethnic minority families, who are losing power to their wives and their adolescent children. They have little status in their children's eyes, because of their low social status in the Netherlands and their poor command of the Dutch language. Their position of authority is gradually eroded. Some fathers react with a renewed 'command offensive', by imposing even more draconian discipline and punishments than before, enrolling their children at Islamic schools or even sending them to Morocco. Others try to develop new ways of relating to their children by calmly talking things out and responding to their children's desires and choices with consultation and negotiation.¹⁶ Management by negotiation, where Dutch mainstream society is based on, presupposes more equality and less direct coercion and force, for instance in relations within family life and upbringing.

What chiefly emerges from interviews with Moroccan youths in the Netherlands, is that many families still operate with a large measure of authoritarian control.¹⁷ Dutch-style 'management by negotiation' appears to be very remote from today's reality. Many of the young people interviewed say, for instance, that their parents 'lay into them' or 'lash out' or describe the poor communication with their parents as follows:

“Well, like, ordinary Dutch people, they can just drink alcohol ... And they can just go home afterwards, their parents know they drink, it's o.k. But if [Moroccan youths] go home then, it's a big problem. So you start off by lying ... or perhaps you start just not coming home.”¹⁸

A number of studies suggest that relations among the various members of Moroccan families in the Netherlands are frequently dysfunctional.¹⁹ Many fathers spend a lot of time outside the home, with other men, and scarcely concern themselves with their young children's upbringing.²⁰ They see childcare and upbringing as women's work. The father is someone who has to be obeyed, not someone with whom the children discuss their problems. Many mothers act as go-betweens in the relationship between father and children. Since mothers and daughters

¹⁵ Ibid, 155, 156.

¹⁶ Pels, Trees, *Respect van twee kanten. Een studie over last van Marokkaanse jongeren* [Respect from Both Sides. Antisocial Behaviour among Moroccan Boys] (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2003).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid, 69.

¹⁹ Werdmölder, Hans, *Een generatie op drift. De geschiedenis van een Marokkaanse randgroep* [A Generation a Drift. The History of one Moroccan Peergroup at the Edge of Dutch Society] (Arnhem: Gouda Quint, 1990); Werdmölder, Hans, *Marokkaanse lieverdjes. Crimineel en hinderlijk gedrag onder Marokkaanse jongeren* [Moroccan Sweethearts. On Moroccan Juvenile Delinquency and Antisocial Behaviour] (Amersfoort: Balans, 2005).

²⁰ Pels, Trees, Marjolijn Distelbrink and Liselotte Postma, *Opvoeding in de migratiecontext* [Childrearing in the context of migration] (Utrecht: Verwey-Jonker Instituut, 2009).

spend a lot of time at home, they often develop a close relationship. Boys, on the other hand, may not develop a close relationship with any adult, and thus lack good role models.

In their publication *Dangerous boys or boys in danger* the Dutch psychologists Lahlah, Van der Knaap and Bogaerts of Tilburg University demonstrate that Moroccan-Dutch boys are significantly more likely to report exposure to severe child abuse than Dutch boys.²¹ In addition, differences in exposure to child abuse are of sufficient magnitude to partially explain the observed differences in levels of violent offending between Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch boys. None of the studies sketch a positive picture of upbringing in Dutch-Moroccan families. Compared to ethnically Dutch parents, Moroccan parents are less accustomed to talking problems out and more inclined to resort to punitive action. In general, they are also less well able to help their children with their schoolwork. They appear to use punishments and beatings as important instruments in child raising.

According to Patterson, coercive patterns of upbringing are the main precursor and predictor of severe delinquency and violent or threatening behavior on the part of young people in situations outside the family.²² A negative parent-child relationship can lead to hostile emotions and antisocial behavior.²³ A characteristic shared by youths who display violent delinquent behavior and religious extremism is coerciveness. They generally try to attain their goals by using verbal or physical intimidation or violence. This coercive behavior is learned in the family situation in interaction with parents and other family members who serve as models, illustrating this behavior on countless occasions.

Muslim extremism in Holland seems to be a manifestation of heated coercive behavior. Socialization in a 'command family' produces a greater risk of coercive and violent extremism.²⁴ This parental approach produces arrears in training in self-control in the sense of a good management or controlled expression of emotions and managing relations through negotiations with one another. It leads children to avoid their parents and to decline to accept their authority.²⁵ This estrangement between parents and children means that the latter tend to orient themselves strongly, as soon as they are able, towards peers with similar experiences. This helps them develop their own identity, but it also encourages behavior that can easily bring them into conflict with the rest of Dutch society. The multi-ethnic global culture also provides a range of unfavorable possibilities for identification, from the miserable, insecure situation of

²¹ Esmah Lahlah, Leontien van der Knaap and Stefan Bogaerts, "Dangerous Boys or Boys in Danger. Ethnic differences in the prevalence of child abuse and its effect on juvenile violent delinquency," *European Journal of Criminology* 10:6 (2013): 641-658.

²² Patterson, Gerald, *Coercive Family Process* (Eugene, Oregon: Castalia, 1982); Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington, "Verschillende oorzaken van delinquentie tussen etnische en nationale groepen? Longitudinale analyses van criminaliteit onder jonge mannen in Pittsburgh en Londen" [Causes of Delinquency among Different Ethnic and National Groups. Longitudinal Analysis of Male Juvenile Delinquency in Pittsburgh and London] *Tijdschrift voor Criminologie* 46:4 (2004): 330-347.

²³ Carolyn Smith and Terence P. Thornberry, "The relationship between Childhood Maltreatment and Adolescent Involvement in Delinquency," *Criminology* 33:4 (1995): 451-482; Carolyn Smith and David P. Farrington, "Continuities in Antisocial Behavior and parenting across Three Generations," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45:2 (2004): 230-247.

²⁴ As can be read for instance in the biography of student Lhabib B. and the report professor dr. J.T.V.M. de Jong wrote as an expert witness for the court where Lhabib B. was tried. Lhabib B. was a member of the Hofstadgroup, a loose-knit radical Islamist group youngsters, promoting the legitimacy of killing non-Muslims. With them was Mohammed B. – the murderer of filmmaker Theo van Gogh. The members of the Hofstadgroup are predominantly of Moroccan descent. I would like to thank professor De Jong for giving me the report.

²⁵ Mieke Komen, "Dangerous children: Juvenile delinquency and judicial intervention in the Netherlands," *Crime, Law & Social Change* 37:4 (2002): 379-401.

North African young people in the *banlieues* of Paris, Marseille, and Lyon to the struggle and hardships of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and elsewhere. Some young people who have been born and bred in the Netherlands call Osama bin Laden a ‘cool guy’. They identify with ‘martyrs’ who are prepared to die (and to kill) for their faith and their ideals, on the principle: “I die, therefore I exist.”²⁶

Emancipation

“And I am indeed urging that young people be recruited for the Jihad: WAKE UP! LOOK AROUND YOU! MUSLIMS ARE BEING SLAUGHTERED AND YOU CAN’T DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT BECAUSE YOU’RE BLEEDING TO DEATH YOURSELF! Liberate yourself! Get out of that coffee shop, get out of that bar, get out of that corner. Answer the call LA ILAHA ILLA ALLAH. Join the caravan of the Martyrs. Rise up out of your deep sleep, rise up and shake off the dust of humiliation. Rise up and answer the call of HAJJA AL JIHAAD. ...” (letter entitled ‘To catch a wolf’ written by Mohammed B., the murderer of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, March 2004).²⁷

From Buijs and Harchaoui’s research of the literature, it emerges that more highly educated young people are more susceptible to radicalism.²⁸ They have developed their abilities, have the prospect of improving their position in society, and are poised for assimilation into that society, but they are confronted with forms of discrimination and social exclusion that arise directly, in their eyes, from the prejudices of the established classes.²⁹

In an essay on the causes of criminal behavior among ethnic minorities, the criminologist Frank Bovenkerk shows that ethnic Moroccans in the Netherlands adapt far more rapidly than other groups of migrants.³⁰ The number of ethnic Moroccans entering higher education has doubled over the past ten years. Dutch-Turkish people, for instance, are far more enclosed within their own ethnic enclave. They focus heavily on contact with their own ethnic group, and are far less progressive in their views.³¹ Social and cultural integration appears to correlate positively with the extent of registered crime in certain ethnic groups.

The growing equality in the relations between native Dutch ‘established’ and ‘outsiders’ gave more freedom and more possibilities to the latter, inclusive of ethnic minority youth. Ethnic

²⁶ Lecture given by dr. Miriyam Aouragh as part of seminar held by the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, on 16 May 2006.

²⁷ Quoted [in Dutch] in Ruud Peters, “De ideologische en religieuze ontwikkeling van Mohammed B.” Experts’ report on Mohammed B., who murdered the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh, commissioned by the Public Prosecutions Department for the use of courts of justice, May 2005: 11, available at: www.sociosite.org/jihad/peters_rapport.pdf. Theo van Gogh made a film about the Koran and violence against women. LA ILAHA ILLA ALLAH = ‘There is no god but Allah’; HAJJA AL JIHAAD = ‘Join the jihad’.

²⁸ Frank J. Buijs and Sadik Harchaoui, “Islamitisch radicalisme en rekrutering in Nederland,” in Frank J. Buijs and Mieke Komen (eds.), *Terrorisme* [Terrorism], Special issue of *Proces, Journal of Criminal Justice* 82:2 (2003): 98-109; Cf Ben-Simhon, Ron, *The Motivational Elements and Characteristics of ‘Home-Grown’ Islamic Terrorists. A Comparative Study* (Herzliya: ICT, International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2012).

²⁹ Roy, Olivier, *Globalised Islam: the Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004).

³⁰ Bovenkerk, Frank, “Essay over oorzaken van allochtone misdaad” [Causes of Crime Among Ethnic Minorities], in Jan Lucassen and Arie de Ruijter (eds.), *Nederland multicultureel en pluriform?* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2002), 209-246.

³¹ *Jaarrapport Integratie 2011* [Year report Integration 2011] (The Hague: SCP/WODC/CBS, September 2012); Huijnk, Willem and Jaco Dagevos, *Dichter bij elkaar? De sociaal-culturele positie van niet-westerse migranten in Nederland* [Closer together? The social-cultural position of non-Western migrants in the Netherlands] (The Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 2012).

minorities' emancipation improved their position in society.³² Compared to Dutch-Turks, Moroccan youngsters (including those involved in terrorist activities in the Netherlands) are quite well integrated into mainstream society—according to standards like their language fluency, levels of education and levels of contact with native Dutch and non-Muslim society.³³ Moroccan youngsters are nearer to native Dutch and non-Muslim society than their parents or Dutch-Turks.

But while it is true that Dutch-Moroccan young people have more opportunities than their fathers (to study at university, to find a good position on the labor market, for instance) they have still fewer opportunities than their ethnically Dutch contemporaries.³⁴ Many ethnic-minority youths regularly encounter discrimination.³⁵ Highly educated Dutch Moroccans report more discrimination than those with less education.³⁶ Discrimination and prejudice expressed by police officers, politicians and others reveal to them the feelings of aversion they arouse among the Dutch establishment classes. Precisely those who belong to the second and third generations of migrant groups refuse to accept this. They do not want to be treated like foreign visitors.

Negative images do not vanish by themselves, however, they can be dispelled only by rejecting them and by exerting pressure on the established classes—by making unequal power relationships equal. Precisely in power relationships that are in the process of becoming more equal, such as those between Dutch-Moroccan and ethnically Dutch people in the Netherlands, there is an increase of resistance among the second and third generation of those with less power, and more irritation, distaste and conflict between the established order and the 'outsiders'. Whether boys who feel rejected and sidelined become apathetic or become radicalized and recalcitrant seems to depend on what stage the emancipation process in which the group to which they belong has reached. From this vantage point, it is not surprising that some second and third generation Dutch Moroccans are becoming radicalized, have an increasing readiness to join violent movements within radical Islam, and that they cherish feelings of resentment towards the majority.

Several decades ago, the sociologists Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson researched the relations between the original inhabitants and newcomers in a working-class neighborhood of an industrial city in England.³⁷ In an introductory essay, Elias presents a theory of stigmatization: once a particular section of the population has a sense of 'us', it leads to the stigmatization of outsiders. The established classes regard the newcomers as inferior and see themselves as superior. In his introduction, Elias maintains that the usual tendency to explain tensions between established groups and outsiders in terms of racial, ethnic or religious differences is misguided.

³² Emancipation is seen as a (complex) process by which people get more possibilities and freedom to manage and organize their own lives (not only in the field of income and career).

³³ Vidino, Lorenzo and James Brandon, *Countering Radicalization in Europe. A policy report published by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR)* (London: ICSR, 2012).

³⁴ Boog, Igor, *Monitor Rassendiscriminatie 2005* [Monitor Race Discrimination] (Rotterdam: Argus, 2006): 61.

³⁵ Nievers, Eline and Iris Andriessen, *Discriminatiemonitor niet-westerse migranten op de arbeidsmarkt 2010* [Monitor Discrimination against non-Western migrants on the Dutch labor market 2010] (The Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 2010); Andriessen, Iris, Eline Nievers and Jaco Dagevos, *Op achterstand. Discriminatie van niet-westerse migranten op de arbeidsmarkt* [At a disadvantage. Discrimination against non-Western migrants on the Dutch labor market] (The Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research, 2012).

³⁶ Boog, Igor, *Monitor Rassendiscriminatie 2005* [Monitor Race Discrimination] (Rotterdam: Argus, 2006): 8.

³⁷ Elias, Norbert and John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Inquiry into Community Problems* (London: Frank Cass, 2nd ed., London: Sage, [1965] 1994).

In his view, these are all secondary matters. As long as there is a really big gap in power between the established classes and outsiders, tensions and conflicts remain largely dormant. They are not expressed until the balance of power shifts in favor of the latter.

A shift of this kind appears to be taking place in the relationship between Dutch-Moroccan and ethnically Dutch groups in the Netherlands. Precisely because the position of Dutch Moroccans has become stronger, they feel prejudice, disadvantage and discrimination more keenly, and have more opportunities to fight back. Islam-bashing stimulates them to accentuate their Islamic identity and seek confrontation with ‘the West’.

Conclusion

The growing susceptibility of young Dutch Moroccans to radicalization is the outcome of inter-related behavior, experiences, motives, feelings, and views about good and evil. In the literature, little attention is paid either to the relationship between religious extremism and coercive patterns of upbringing, and to changes in the balance of power between Dutch Moroccans and the wider Dutch community. The customary management of emotions and relationships in Dutch Moroccan families is at present remote from the negotiation management that is customary in the ethnically Dutch community – in the family, at school, and at work. Socialization in a ‘command family’ is likely to foster coercive and violent behavior in later life. The inequality between the powerful and those with less power has declined in the Netherlands. This has led to more freedom for those with less power, such as Dutch-Moroccan youths.

Young Dutch Moroccans have better prospects than their parents, but their opportunities on the education and labor market, and hence their chances of achieving prosperity, are less than those of their ethnically Dutch peers. Meanwhile, their position within Dutch society is stronger than in the past, and this ironically generates more tension. Especially more highly educated Dutch-Moroccan youths are sensitive to discrimination, bashing and inequality, and appear to be quicker to react than past generations. They are more susceptible to radicalization and extremism than their parents—and more than their Dutch-Turkish peers—because they are more like ‘us’.

Dutch authorities focus initiatives to prevent the radicalization of new ones on the reinforcement of social cohesion and integration, debates on Islam and programs to learn how to deal with criticisms of their own faith. These responses are ineffective. Because it’s not the growing contrast between Dutch Moroccans and the wider Dutch community that give rise to homegrown violent Muslim extremism but the loss or diminishing of social differences. Political radicalism among young Muslims in the Netherlands is promoted not by Islam or a lack of integration, but precisely, by emancipation.