An Autoethnographic Study on Dutch Society

Narratives of Being and Belonging from the Perspectives of Young *Allochtoon* Dutch-Muslims

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To my grandfather, whose commitment to knowledge and love for art and stories has always been and will continue to be an endless source of inspiration.

Content

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List of Acronyms

AIVD   Algemene Inlichtingen en Veiligheidsdienst

CBS   Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek

HAVO   Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs

ISS   Institute of Social Studies

SPVA   Sociale positie en voorzieningengebruik allochtonen

VMBO   Voorbereidend Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs

VVD   Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie

VWO   Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This paper wishes to understand how Dutch-Muslim youth that come from families with migrant backgrounds give meaning to and position themselves within Dutch society. Written as an autoethnography, this paper consist of five essays that weave together my stories with those of my research participants'. Through my research, I explore the places my participants identify as essential to their experiences growing up in the Netherlands. These explorations are unpacked in this paper through narratives of whiteness, neighbourhoods, and the complexity of religious identities. I argue that these narratives are integral, not external, to our understanding of Dutch society. They represent a challenge to elite discourses that often generalize and misrepresent identities of young *Allochtoon* Dutch-Muslims.

Relevance to Development Studies

'The study of development as discourse is akin to Said's study of the discourses on the Orient'
(Escobar 2012: 6).

Development is no longer exclusively situated in the South nor the East. Migration has dissolved any illusions of geographic partitions. This paper brings our gaze to the West, particularly to the Netherlands.

By analysing personal narratives of young *Allochtoon* Dutch-Muslims, I illustrate how North-South, West-East relationships are reproduced through elite discourses on integration. Situated in places that represent narratives of belonging, I engage concepts that are critical to development discourse, such as race and whiteness, being and belonging, youth, and religiosity within the secular state. By understanding how participants insert meaning into and position themselves within Dutch society, we see how power relations are negotiated and reproduced in the Netherlands.

Moreover, my methodology, rooted in ethnographic research orientation and written as an autoethnography, contributes to development studies' reflections on conducting research and writing about 'the other'. The ethical decisions made during my research and reflected upon in my paper positions young people as active contributors to knowledge production, rather than passive participants whose identities are being discussed and scrutinised.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Dutch society, *Allochtoon,* youth, Muslim, integration, elite discourse, intersectionality, home, being and belonging, neighbourhoods, places, spaces, whiteness, the Netherlands.

Prologue

Dear Reader,

In your hands is a research paper that tells the stories of six main characters, Ilyaas, Akber, Mohammed, Doortje, Rudy, and Javed; told through the words and reflections of a seventh character: myself. These stories are collected, written, and analysed in response to elite discourses on the integration of young Muslims with migrant backgrounds in Europe and, in particular, the Netherlands.

My research attempts to answer the question: *How do Dutch-Muslim youth that come from families with a migrant background give meaning to and position themselves within 'Dutch society' as the space where they grew up?* In answering this question I will explore narratives of being in and belonging to Dutch society as expressed by six young people who identify as Dutch-Muslims of migrant descent. These narratives are then positioned to engage with existing elite discourses to reconstruct 'Dutch society' through the perspectives of 'the other'.

As you turn these pages, you will find that this is not your typical research paper. What I am attempting here is an autoethnographic piece; a paper meant to weave together my own experiences with the stories of others, a genre where autobiography meets ethnography, and where social science meets art (Behar 1996, Ellis 1999, Reed-Danahay 1997). Whether I manage to achieve this is entirely up to you to judge. However, before we go further, please allow me the liberty of anticipating and answering some questions you may have regarding the format of my paper.

The **first question** you might ask is: why write an autoethnography?

As a Muslim, a student, and an Indonesian, currently living in the Netherlands, I feel a certain degree of camaraderie with my research participants. While my own life differs in many ways from their lived experiences, I believe that my own ambivalent connection with the Netherlands has helped me connect with and understand theirs'.

I first stepped foot in the Netherlands on 27 August 2014, moving here to study at the International Institute of Social Studies. During my third week here, I wrote on a blog I share with my friend[1]:

> '… One thing I have learned from being here is an appreciation of the complexity of my Indonesian identity. It is a mixture of feeling pride for the potential we have in building our future and a feeling of inferiority that is the legacy of our ancestors' lived experiences and colonised narratives.'

My first direct engagement with the Netherlands opened up a colonial wound I did not know I had. This motivated me to conduct research that would allow me to reverse my gaze on the Netherlands as a former colonizer of my country. Perhaps, I felt by understanding narratives of being Dutch, I would somehow have a better understanding of what it means for me to be an Indonesian.

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[1] Unpublished work by M. S. Sadjad (09.15.2014) [translated from Indonesian]: https://berkirimkabar.wordpress.com/2014/09/15/ketika-membahas-yang-lalu-dan-yang-kini/

On 7 January 2015, as I was struggling to finish my first term assignments, two French gunmen of Algerian descent attacked the Charlie Hebdo satirical newspaper, killing 11 people and wounding 11 more. They claimed to be part of the Islamist terrorist group, Al Qaedah. This tragedy made me reflect deeply about my own identity as a Muslim and my presence in Europe. It also piqued my interest in existing debates about the integration of Muslim migrants in the West, especially in the Netherlands. So as my research topic progressed, I started to focus on young Dutch-Muslims that come from ethnic-minority backgrounds.

By weaving together elements of participants' life stories with my own experiences living in the Netherlands for the last 13 months, I attempt to understand how my research participants give meaning to and position themselves within Dutch society. This weaving together of life stories is the most telling characteristic of an autoethnography. According to Reed-Danahay (1997: 6), autoethnographies are texts that 'blends ethnography and autobiography… the writer does not adopt the "objective outsider" convention of writing common to traditional ethnography' and '…entails the incorporation of elements of one's own life experience when writing about others through biography or ethnography'.

This is what I will try to do throughout my paper's narrative. By doing so, I am looking at the Dutch society through the eyes of my research participants who share my religious and coloured identities. By inviting participants to take part in my research, I am asking them to reverse their gaze on the Netherlands along with me.

A **second question** to consider: Why is your own experience living in the Netherlands relevant to the overall discussion of being in and belonging to Dutch society?

Indeed the question of researchers' positionality is essential in an autoethnography. The insider status of the researcher lends authority to her work as she has 'authentic first-hand knowledge of the culture' (Reed-Danahay 1997: 7). However, it must be noted that insider status is not restricted to the term 'native'. It can be obtained through various forms of interactions and familiarisation with participants.

My interaction with research participants varied, from interpersonal to email interactions (more information on this in my first chapter). That said, my experience living in the Netherlands also includes casual discussions and participation in activities with other young Dutch-Muslims of migrant descent. These interactions play an important role in my reflections throughout this research[2].

Moreover, my own identity overlaps in several ways with my research participants. As a young Muslim, I identify with a sense of frustration and vulnerability that many Muslims around the world feel towards the injustices and stigmatization within elite discourses of the global war on terror (Peek 2005: 226), an essential backdrop to this research. As someone who spent almost seven years

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[2] It is important to note that I will be referring to some of these interactions in this paper without mentioning the names of individuals involved, since they did not explicitly agree to take part in my research.

(1987-1994) of her early childhood in Madison, Wisconsin, USA, I have been very aware from an early age about the need to balance my identity as an ethnic minority whose parents were quite engaged in the local mosque with the need to blend in. Even as a student now, I still face some challenges fitting in with my peers, many of whom do not share my religious and cultural backgrounds. These elements that constitute who I am, have helped me build rapport and engage with my research participants.

Final question: Why have you chosen to write in this style and format?

My research paper is written as a collection of essays. The decision to write in this way was inspired by Ruth Behar (1996: 20) who saw essays as a genre to attempt '…the dialect between connection and otherness… An amorphous, open-ended, even rebellious genre that desegregates the boundaries between self and other…' My first attempt to write an autoethnography requires a style of writing that allows me to reflect deeply about my own experiences and those of others. Indeed, when explaining my research I often call the endeavour a 'collection of stories' because I feel it best describes my efforts to listen and understand other people's stories and in doing so making them my own.

Following Behar's advice, I have written my reflections and findings in five essays, which you will find in this paper. Every essay explores specific themes that I have identified through my interactions with participants. Each essay starts and ends with one of my participants and is then woven together with reflections and stories of the others in order to examine these themes.

Each essay represents a chapter that can be read independently from the others. However, read together they discuss the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, life phase, and religion as part of my participants' lived experiences within Dutch society.

As bell hooks (1990: 146) repeatedly wrote: 'language is also a place of struggle'. We represent our truths through the words we choose and the sentences we construct. While the methods and reflections in my research paper can be judged based on their academic merit, in order to tell this story – my story – I need to use my own voice and resist the cold academic voice that I have been trained into.

Moving closer to the arts (Behar 1999: 483), I try to strike a balance between facts and meanings, prose and references. Understandingly, this raises the questions of validity, reliability, and generalizability in knowledge production. These questions are addressed differently in an autoethnography. Language is not transparent and there is not only one strand of truth (Ellis 1999: 674). Therefore, validity, reliability, and generalizability within an autoethnography depends on readers' and participants' engagement and acceptance of what is considered true.

Now that I have attempted to answer questions you might have, there are likely more to come. I hope some can be addressed through the following chapters. Those that are not, perhaps you can keep to accompany you on your own journeys to contemplate and unravel.

Kindest regards,

M. S. Sadjad

Chapter 1
Meetings and Methods

All stories start with a meeting and this one is not an exception. This chapter opens with my first meeting with Mohammed and Akber, during which I explain my research background and methods. Through this chapter I am setting the stage.

Image 1: Digital flyer sent to potential participants

In discussions about the Netherlands, strong emphasis is often given to its environment: the unpredictable weather, its low lands and flat geography, the dikes and the drained swamplands. Scheffer (2011: 109-113) even argues that the relationship between water and people in the Netherlands is essential to understanding its society. It is said that Dutch society is one characterised by consultation ('*polder model*'), compromise, and conformity (Ibid. 110-111). Scheffer (Ibid. 109) writes: 'A connection is often made between this tradition of consultation and the battle with rising floodwaters. The Dutch had to cooperate or drown.' It is the interaction between people and places that interests and informs me throughout my research.

I met Akber and Mohammed for the first time on 8 July 2015. It was another grey summer day, rain was pouring very hard and the wind blowing in every direction. Mohammed was referred to me by Ilyaas, a research participant and contact in MashriQ, which is a network of students and young professionals with a shared interest in Eastern and Islamic values. I was introduced to most of my research participants through contacts I have developed while living in the Netherlands, whom in turn introduced me to their friends. The only exception is Doortje, whom I met during a discussion in Amsterdam organised by the Virtual Iftar Project.

I had contacted Mohammed via email to send him information about my research plans and asked whether he would be interested to participate. He agreed to meet in order to better understand my research and said that he would bring his friend, Akber, who was also interested.

Usually when I set up meetings with my research participants, I ask them to determine the meeting place since I want to talk to them in their own environment. However, since Mohammed did not offer any suggestions, I proposed to meet at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) where I study. The building was relatively empty thanks to the summer break.

I waited for Akber and Mohammed behind the school's front desk worried that the weather might deter them from coming. I sent a Whatsapp message making sure they knew the way to ISS since it would be their first time in the building even though they live nearby. I found first meetings with potential research participants quite nerve-wrecking. I felt the way I do before job interviews. First impressions are essential to securing their participation.

Mohammed arrived first, soaked after walking under the rain. Following local convention we chatted about the weather. Mohammed was friendly, easy to smile, and engaged in our short conversation. Fifteen minutes later Akber arrived and we walked up to the coffee lounge on the second floor of ISS.

After my guests were settled in their seats, I started the 'sales pitch' that I have grown accustomed to explaining during first meetings with potential research participants. I told them I was interested in weaving together stories of everyday experiences as told by research participants, whose past, present, and future aspirations are integral and contribute meaning to the Dutch society.

The reactions I received when pitching this research idea to potential participants were generally positive. The association of terrorism, radicalism, oppression of women, and dictatorial regimes with Muslim identities has positioned Dutch-Muslims, particularly those with migrant backgrounds, as external

to Dutch society, irrespective of one's citizenship, place of birth, and upbringing (Gazzah 2010: 313). My research was seen as a response towards this discourse.

Since members of ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands are overwhelmingly underrepresented in political participation, media, and academic research (Sharpe 2014: 87-100, van Dijk 1996: 92-94), existing discourse on the topics above can be understood as intragroup discourse by elite native Dutch majority about 'the other' (van Dijk et al. 1997: 145). Discourses produced by various elite groups have the power to dominate discussions, frame issues, and determine policies (van Dijk 1993: 10-12). While these elite discourses are not monolithic, they reproduce narratives of 'otherness' about young Dutch-Muslims with ethnic minority backgrounds.

When integration discourse blends into security discourse, young Dutch-Muslims with migrant backgrounds are depicted as a problem - a threat to security and social integration - that needs to be solved. There have been several studies that explore common narratives amongst young Muslims living in the West (Amir-Moazami 2010, Fleischmann and Phalet 2012, Gazzah 2010, Peek 2005). These studies show that young Muslims' narratives are influenced by or can be seen as responses to elite discourses on Islam, the West, and the global war on terror, therefore stimulating new consciousness among young Muslims from different parts of the world.

The studies in which these narratives are presented tend to put emphasis on resistance against elite discourses that try to define and problematize young people's self-identities. The narrative that I am interested in is a shift of this frame.

Rather than exploring how young people develop their self-identities in response to and in resistance to their societies, I am more interested in discovering narratives on how young people contribute meaning into and position themselves within these societies. I am interested in their subjectivities, struggles for identity, and their views about Dutch society. I am interested in how they believe they contribute to it, and what it means for them to be a part of it – all of which are often excluded from elite discourse. While their actions are often problematized, the motivations behind those actions are not. In fact, voices representing young Dutch-Muslims are often lost and overpowered by the elite discourses that try to define them.

After briefly explaining these objectives, I asked Mohammed and Akber why they were interested in my research. Mohammed told me he was interested in understanding more about my research process that focused on stories and lived experiences. Mohammed also said he wanted to contribute to the discussion about Muslim migrants in the Netherlands in any way possible.

Mohammed's motives spoke to the context of my research. Like my other research participants, he came already framing my research within existing discussions about security, multiculturalism, and integration in the Netherlands. After the tragedy of 11 September 2001, the world has been engulfed in a discourse of the global war on terror. This discourse has not only shaped post-Cold War geopolitics, but it has also emulated and strengthened the narrative of a 'clash of civilizations' as foretold by Samuel P. Huntington (Summer 1993); a clash between what is often referred to as western and Islamic civilizations.

This antagonistic narrative between Islam and the West took root in the Netherlands through several unrelated incidents such as the assassination in

2002 of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn[3], who took a hard stance against immigration and was openly critical towards Islam, and the murder in 2004 of Theo Van Gogh, who directed a short movie criticizing the submission of women in Islam. These incidents occurred amid existing debates on multicultural policies in the Netherlands, which many view as having failed in driving migrants to culturally integrate into Dutch society (Geschiere 2009: 136). These incidents set the stage for stricter policies on immigration and integration, influencing public perceptions about Islam and its followers, particularly those with migrant backgrounds.

Akber, who was the quieter of the two, took time to think before he answered. He said he was interested in participating because he felt that by being Indonesian, I would be able to offer a more objective analysis to the subject. I carefully explained that my nationality only meant that I would likely come with a different set of biases.

Using an ethnographic research orientation, I do not believe that a researcher is immune from or innocent in propagating her paradigmatic presuppositions that construct her version of reality (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 11-12). Rather than instructing researchers to distant themselves from their subjectivities, ethnographic research orientation requires researchers to acknowledge, reflect on, and inform readers about their positionalities *vis-à-vis* their research participants, the issues at stake, and knowledge production at large.

Understanding my participants' narratives is central to my research. In understanding Dutch society, I echo the epistemological position inherent in ethnographic research orientation that perceives realities and knowledges as constructed. My interest starts from the ontological assumption that society is a dynamic space constructed by agents within it. This is consistent with Bourdieu's (1985: 196) representation of the social world as a multi-dimensional space where agents position themselves *vis-à-vis* each other based on distribution of properties active within the social universe. The social world is a product of agents' perceptions, which are constructed based on their relative power positions to one another.

The elite discourse described above is coloured by perceptions of and experiences related to race, ethnicity, age, and religion. These perception and experiences are also gendered and influenced by class and education backgrounds. Therefore it is important to be attentive to nuances and explore the intersecting identities that influence research participants' subjectivities as young Dutch-Muslims with migrant backgrounds.

It was important for me to explain as best as I could the epistemological underpinnings of my research to participants before they decide whether they were interested in contributing to my research. Usually researchers talk about how they selected their research participants. In my case, it felt more like I was applying for the privilege of hearing their stories.

I took a moment to check whether any of them had any questions about my research focus and objectives. Mohammed looked interested and potentially

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[3] Fortuyn was assassinated by Volkert van der Graaf, a white-Dutch environmental and animal rights activist. Van der Graaf perceived Fortuyn as a treat towards society for his stigmatizing remarks against Dutch Muslim minorities (CNN. 23 November 2002). Van der Graaf was released in 2014.

excited about my research while Akber seemed more cautious. I then continued to explain what their commitment to my research would entail.

By the time I met with Mohammed and Akber, I had already gone through one interview cycle with Doortje. Based on this experience, I explained that my research process consist of at least three interactions with participants.

Ensuring multiple interactions with research participants allowed me to engage with nuances that could only be explored through in-depth conversations that focus on members' meaning of terms, categories, concepts and how they use it in relation with others (Emerson et al. 1995: 140). The information that I gathered through these interactions was used to develop distinct narratives of what it means to be in and belong to Dutch society. Narratives are powerful tools to shift the frame in which social and political issues are discussed, bring groups together, and establish collective identities (Polletta 1998: 422-425). These narratives can be found in the following chapters of this paper.

The first of these multiple interactions was the introduction meeting, which I described above. The aim of these meetings were for me and my potential research participants to get to know each other, for me to explain my research and its process, and for the potential research participants to ask questions and comment on my research plans. Since I do not speak Dutch, our discussions were done in English and these first meetings were also necessary to make sure that language would not be a barrier.

At the end of these meetings I asked research participants to map their hometown and highlight places they felt were important to their experiences growing up and living in the Netherlands as Muslims and ethnic minorities. This map became the basis for the second meeting.

Once they agreed to commit to the research process, I arrange a second meeting with the research participants to guide me on a tour to 2-3 of these places. During these tours I conducted informal interviews in relation to the places they selected. This method was loosely inspired by transect walk methods (Catcomm.org). The purpose was to trigger personal narratives by visiting places that were important to my participants and observe how participants and other people acted and interacted within these spaces (Emerson et al. 1995: 112-113). I also engaged participants in discussions about growing up in their neighbourhoods, their relationships with their family members and peers, their opinions on events such as the Charlie Hebdo attack on January 2015, their interests, and their activities.

If more information was required, this part of the cycle could be concluded with an interview based on the sequential interviewing process (Small 2009: 25). After every meeting, I write down detailed accounts of the interactions in my notebooks and on my laptop using OneNote 2013.

Finally, the third meeting occurred near the end of my writing process. In autoethnographic research, reliability in its conventional sense does not exist (Ellis 1999, 674). Personal narratives of situated locations are inherently subjected to the limits of memory, perceptions, and imagination. However, one might do what Ellis calls a 'reliability check' when other people are involved in the research process (Ibid). Following Ellis' advice, I arranged for one last meetings with my research participants. With the exception of Doortje who did not

respond to my messages after moving to eastern part of Netherlands, my participants and I went through my draft together and they were invited to comment and offer their insights in order to enrich my own.

While my research plans were quite elaborate, the execution varied. From all six participants, I interacted the most with Ilyaas. When we first met, my initial intention was to bounce ideas off him and connect with potential research participants through his MashriQ network. However, after interacting with him through several discussions and events, I decided to ask him to participate in two semi-structured interviews so he could contribute his own insights and perspectives to my research. Since his initial role was as a gate keeper and not a participant, I did not ask him to make a map for me.

My other five participants drew maps of places that they felt were essential parts to their experiences growing up in the Netherlands. With the exception of Rudy and Akber, I have visited all places on everyone's map. Rudy had identified four places on his map. However due to limited time, I could only visit him at his caravan and on separate occasions I visited the mosque on his map without him. Meanwhile, Akber proposed a different method for himself.

'The process would require you to commit your time. Overall it shouldn't take over six hours that can be allocated to suit your schedule. Are you interested in becoming participants?' I asked, looking hopefully at both Akber and Mohammed.

'I'm in,' Mohammed said, with no hesitation. Mohammed and I set a time on our agendas to meet up after he returned from his summer holidays in Morocco.

'I will need to think about it first,' Akber said, 'I'm not sure I would be comfortable answering questions about my upbringing. I could answer your questions in writing if you send them to me.'

I hesitated, 'That's not really how I work. As I explained, since I don't come from the Netherlands, context is key and it would be difficult to obtain this through written interviews,' but I added, 'Please, could you drop me an email whatever you decide in the end? I would like to know your reasoning.'

A few days later Akber sent me an email stating, 'I do not feel comfortable sharing my particular history by showing and walking along places that played a big role in my upbringing. However as I told you I am willing to provide answers about my upbringing in – and interaction with – the Dutch society in a written form.'

I decided to take up Akber's offer. After this initial meeting, Akber and I interacted via email where he answered several questions and follow up questions that I had. We ended the interaction when he indicated that school had started and he would not have time to elaborate his answers at length.

I was initially disappointed when I read Akber's first email but accepted that my research methods could be considered quite intrusive and too time consuming for some. Indeed, out of eleven young Dutch-Muslims that I approached, only six responded positively, while the other five did not respond at all. My contact that works in an organisation for interreligious dialogue also could not find anyone among his Turkish-Dutch network to participate in my research.

My research did not include any participants of Turkish descent, which is the second largest minority group in the Netherlands. My participants come from various ethnic backgrounds, three of which have one parent that is native Dutch. It is important to emphasise that my research does not aim for statistical representation and neither is it driven by any intentions of generalisation (Abbott 2007: 217, Hammersley and Atkinson 2007: 32). Instead, the goal is to evoke further conversations on the topic of integration, conversations that are driven by readers' ability to resonate with, rather than detached from, participants' experiences (Ellis 2004: 22).

All of my participants are Dutch citizens and, with the exception of Ilyaas who migrated from Tanzania with his native Dutch mother when he was nine years old, all of them were born and raised in the Netherlands. Their ages range from 19 to 25. Not unlike myself who turned 29 during the writing of this paper, they too are experiencing the liminality of youth; a phase between memories of childhood and demands of adulthood, between obtaining independence and being dependent, and between the hopes and risks that come with future aspirations (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 21). This adds a specific life phase dimension to the intersection of class, ethnicity, race, gender, and religion.

Another common feature among my research participants was that they were all attending a form of higher tertiary education, with the exception of Rudy who graduated last year. Their privileged education background meant that my participants could not represent the entirety of young Dutch-Muslims. Their education likely exposed them to experiences that might not be relevant to the majority of their peers. That said, taking into account the importance placed upon education and employment within integration discourse, those without the advantages of higher education likely face stronger experiences of displacement and exclusion compared to my participants.

Moreover, I am very aware that my identity as a young, independent, female researcher likely influenced the group of people who volunteered as research participants. Based also on my own experiences growing up among Muslim communities, interactions between genders could be a sensitive issue that young people approach differently depending on their perceptions of social interaction within 'legitimate Islamic framework' (Amir-Moazami 2010: 197-198). Therefore, male participants in particular were likely those who were more comfortable with interaction between genders. This also influences issues that participants were willing to discuss with me.

After our first meeting ended, I walked Mohammed and Akber out of ISS. The rain had finally stopped and I watched as they walked away from ISS. The last person standing at the doorway was my final research participant: myself.

While I aim to understand Dutch society through the perceptions of young Dutch-Muslims that come from families with migrant backgrounds, the narratives produced in my research are the results of my understanding and interpretation of the data I collect. This is consistent with the interpretative approach used in ethnographic research orientation (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007: 25). Rather than claiming to achieve an objective narrative on Dutch society, my research represents my participants' perspectives that was situated within a particular context, from which my own positionality cannot be detached. My experiences and reflections are integral to my research and would be found interwoven into the stories of my participants.

Chapter 2
Waiting and Whiteness

I open this chapter with my contemplations while waiting for Mohammed at Spui Square in The Hague. These contemplations inspired me to explore the racial underpinnings of being Dutch from the perspective of 'the other'. I argue that the implied 'whiteness' in the Netherlands integration discourse creates a ceiling to belonging.
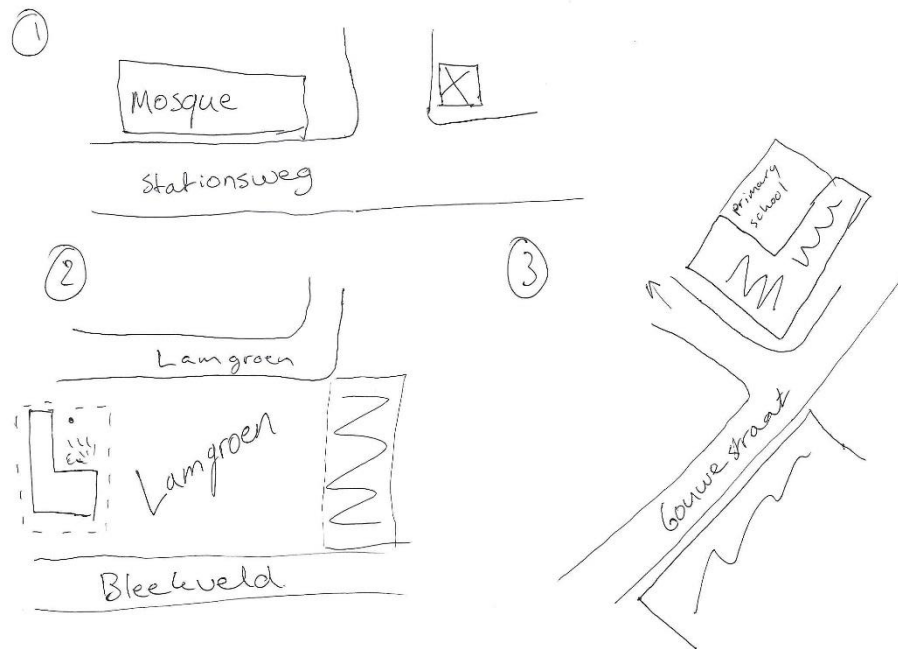

Image 2: Mohammed's Map

I imagine in every research there are moments when the only thing one can do is wait. There are times when these moments are small pockets of peace; moments when waiting for someone gives me time to get lost in a thought, a paragraph, a playlist, or an observation. Every time I agreed to meet with a research participant I would arrive about thirty minutes early, giving myself a chance to sit down at the meeting location determined by my research participant.

One of these moments came on a bright Wednesday afternoon when I was waiting for Mohammad at Spui Square (*Spuiplein*). The day displayed the Netherlands' summer at its best. Like most of the meetings I had with my research participants, Mohammed had suggested our meeting point. I agreed and came half an hour early. I decided to sit on the steps on the right side of the square as it gave me a perfect view of the activities on the square. With a book on my lap that I occasionally glanced at, I took the liberty to watch and listen to my surroundings.

It was 11.30 am and people were mostly sitting around. Most people were sitting together on the large futuristic steel benches located at the front of the square. A couple to my lower left were enjoying a sandwich under the sun, while a bald man in a business suit to my upper right was hovering over documents and talking into his phone. Every now and then groups of people passed. While these groups of people were of different colours, shapes, and sizes, they mostly were grouped homogenously with people whose skin colour was similar to theirs.

A woman with blond hair exited the restaurant doors of the Lucent Danstheater with four blond children, three young girls and one little boy. Two of the little girls separated themselves from the group, running and dancing up the steps where I was sitting. One little girl had long blond hair and wore a full light white dress and yellow sandals while the other wore her blond hair in braids, wearing blue shorts and a rainbow-coloured tank top. I watched as they ran around holding hands and listened to their giggling smiles until the woman called for them.

As I watched this little group, I found myself thinking: 'How much easier life would be if I were white'. I was surprised by my own thought. I turned the thought over in my head and realized that this was not the first time I had felt that. Walking through the streets of Holland, backpacking to different cities in Asia and Europe, even during business meetings in Jakarta, it often felt to me as if no one really scrutinised the presence of a white man or woman in any given place. A female Indonesian friend once complained to me that during business meetings people would often greet the white Australian male intern who was working for her first, even though she was the organisation's deputy director.

Of course, it is difficult to isolate skin colour from one's gender, class, or nationality in a discussion about privilege. As bell hooks (1990: 59) illustrates, race and sex are overlapping discourses where masculinity and femininity are relative gender constructs influenced by race and class status. However, studies on gender and race, more often than not, focus on studying 'Others', leaving 'whiteness' unscrutinised: 'In far too much contemporary writing – though there are some outstanding exceptions – race is always an issue of Otherness that is not white; it is black, brown, yellow, red, purple even' (hooks 1990: 54). By failing

to reflect on whiteness, studies on race and sex continue to position white as a starting point, a standard, to which 'Others' are often defined.

Although hooks speaks mainly about racial and gender discourses in the United States, similar observations can be made in the Netherlands. However, discourses on race and ethnicities in the Netherlands are often obscured by discourses on ethnicity, cultural compatibility, class, and integration.

In the Netherlands 'race' is often perceived as a 'non-scientific concept', therefore while it exists today in Dutch laws through antidiscrimination legislation, it is absent from Dutch political discourse (Essed and Trienekens 2008: 55). Whiteness in the Netherlands is generally unscrutinised; even areas such as minority research 'operates almost exclusively through white and male dominated networks' (Essed and Nimako 2006: 296). Discourses on migration, minority groups, and gender are discussed through the perspectives of whiteness, leaving the mention of race out of the discussion and often leading to the misled conclusion that racism does not exist.

During several discussions with research participants, I have encountered a common reluctance to refer to their Dutch peers on the basis of skin colour. When comparing themselves with their white-Dutch counterparts, my research participants would start by contrasting between 'Muslims and Dutch', 'Moroccans and Dutch', or 'mixed group and homogenous group'. I questioned whom they were referring to when they said 'Dutch', since presumably the groups they were referring to were all Dutch citizens. They responded by saying 'Dutch-Dutch', 'real Dutch', 'hard-core Dutch' or one time 'students whose parents are both Dutch'. There is a consistent avoidance of any racial denominations even though race and ethnicity is implied.

Doortje, one of my research participants talked about her experience being bullied by two popular girl groups in her high school, 'There were two popular girl groups in my school, the homogenous group and the *Allochtoon* group[4]. They both wanted me to be part of their group. But I didn't want to… So they bullied me.'

I asked her to explain what she meant with homogenous groups. She replied, "Dutch girls."

"What do you mean by Dutch, girls? Aren't you all Dutch?" I asked.

"Yes, but the homogenous group were for the Dutch girls and the other group, the *Allochtoon* group, were mostly Turkish," she said.

"When you say Dutch girls, do you mean they are white-Dutch?" I introduce race into the conversation to see how she would react.

"Yes, white-Dutch. They didn't like me but they weren't as bad as the Turkish girls. They bullied me harder…"

This snippet of our hour-long conversation sitting on the green grass of a Tilburg park is consistent to what Yanow and van der Haar's (2012) sees as an undertone of race in *Allochtoon-autochtoon* categories. Integration discourse in the

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[4] The topic about being bullied in school came after a brief discussion on *Allochtoon-autochtoon* categories, which she had said were not categories that are often used on a daily basis. So her categorization of the second girls' group, *Allochtoon,* was likely influenced by this previous conversation.

Netherlands is mainly discussed in relation to the two main categories used in national census, *Autochtoon* (citizens of Dutch birth and ancestry) and *Allochtoon* (citizens of non-Dutch birth and ancestry – including mixed ancestry).

The genealogy of these words can be traced to its use in geology to categorise rocks, mineral deposits, or other elements that are not indigenous to where they were found (Yanow and van der Haar 2012: 11). Historically, they are rooted in classical Athenian autochthony and were used by the French to administer occupied territories in the African continent in the 1900s (Geschiere 2009: 7-16). While similar debates about integration and 'belonging' exists throughout Europe, these terms are most widely used in Netherlands and Flanders (Dutch-speaking part of Belgium) since the 1970s (Ibid. 130). Therefore these categories, entrenched in colonial history, are used especially in the Netherlands to position citizens based on the origin of their ancestries.

Since ancestry is essential in the Netherlands' integration discourse, it is intermingled with notions of race and ethnicity. Yanow and van der Haar (2012, 23) write: '*Allochtoon-autochtoon* categorization thereby becomes a racial discourse carried on implicitly in a setting in which the use of the term "race" may be verboten, but where "everyone" knows, and understands, tacitly, the unspoken text.' Naturalized migrants and the descendants of migrants are categorised as *Allochtoon,* regardless of where they were born and raised.

In practice the term is more often understood to specifically imply its sub-categorisation *'non-western Allochtoon*[5] that mainly consist of Turkish, Moroccan, Surinamese, and Antillean descents (Sharpe 2014: 83-84). Originally intended for migration policy, this categorization has become a basis for racial profiling of particular migrants groups, the non-western *Allochtoon.*

While *Allochtoon* consist of different ethnic and racial groups, the *Autochtoon* category consist exclusively of native Dutch. Other groups are given an additional ethnic or national identity to their Dutch identity. As a consequence, in conversations with research participants about growing up in the Netherlands, there is a tendency to refer to *Autochtoon* – which is perceived to be synonymous with 'white-Dutch' – as a standard for being 'Dutch', whereby everyone else is the 'Other'. Although mention of race is avoided, there is an implied whiteness to being 'Dutch'.

Moreover, whiteness in the Netherlands is not only a matter of racial essentialism; more often it is about 'cultural normativities, political appropriations, and social-economic practices, privileging whites compared to other populations' (Essed and Trienekens 2008: 54). This widens our understanding of racism to include other racial markers such as colour, ethnicity, language, culture, and/or religion (Grosfoguel et al. 2014: 2).

Integration discourse positions those who are categorised as *Allochtoon* as 'culturally inadequate' and therefore they must acquire Dutch values and behaviour to be acknowledged as an integral part of society. However, even if they succeed in acquiring a 'degree of Dutchness', due to their ancestors' origin, they cannot be considered as or equal to *Auchtochtoon* (Essed and Trienekens 2008:

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[5] The opposite sub-categorisation, Western Allochtoon includes migrants from Europe, North America, Oceania, Japan, and Indonesia

59). Integration discourse reproduces a hierarchy where members of the *Autochtoon* group are considered culturally superior due to their genealogy regardless of individuals' values or behaviour.

One of my research participants, Rudy, told me that five years ago his mother who still holds her Indonesian passport had to retake a language course to test her command of the Dutch language. The course was mandatory for her even though by then she had stayed in the Netherlands for 20 years, married to Rudy's native Dutch father, and had given birth to and raised her two Dutch children.

'For one of the tests, she had to show she could use an ATM', Rudy said, 'It's so stupid.'

Rudy expressed his disagreement with the blanket policy that made the course mandatory for people like his mother who had been living in the Netherlands for a substantial amount of time. 'There should at least have been a test to see if someone needed to take the course.' One is presumed to be culturally inferior or incompatible, therefore must be 'taught' how to integrate through mandatory courses.

Similar inferences can also be found in the Netherlands Annual Integration Report 2014 published by CBS Statistics Netherlands. In this report integration is assessed based on several indicators with emphasis on education and employment performances of Dutch youth from selected ethnic backgrounds (CBS Statistics Netherlands 2014: 7). According to the CBS' press release on this report, integration is described as an 'uphill struggle' for 'young people with non-western background' who need to 'catch up' with the standards established by their native Dutch counterparts (CBS Statistics Netherlands. 20 November 2014). The press release implies that integration is the responsibility of *Allochtoon* youth and the 'top of the hill' is a standard or goal determined by the performance of 'native Dutch' students.

However, if one's native-ness is defined mainly by her ancestry and therefore by the colour of her skin, would socio-economic performance help them achieve Dutch-status or would the word 'Dutch' continue to refer to whiteness in everyday conversations regardless of how one performs?

One key indicator used to determine young people's performance in the 2014 Integration Report is enrolment in higher tertiary education. In the third year of secondary education, only half as many *Allochtoon* attend higher general secondary education (HAVO) and preparatory academic education (VWO) compared to their native Dutch peers (CBS Statistics Netherlands. 20 November 2014). With the exception of Doortje and Rudy, all of my research participants are currently attending HAVO and VWO. Rudy completed his higher tertiary education last year, while Doortje, who dropped out of secondary school due to experience with bullying, completed preparatory middle-level professional education (VMBO) this year and continued her education studying theatre. Most of my research participants are part of a more privileged group of young *Allochtoon*. Yet, despite having the advantages of higher education, my participants still expressed feelings of displacement and challenging experiences of being *Allochtoon* in Dutch society.

A young Dutch-Muslim whose parents migrated from Morocco told me during a casual conversation we had at Leiden University College in The Hague

that he felt strongly against being categorised as 'second generation migrant', adding that the categorisation of *Allochtoon-autochtoon* was 'absurd'. Born and raised in the Netherlands, he could not accept categorisations that would constantly position him as a migrant, albeit a second generation migrant. To him a multi-cultural Dutch society should expand to include young people like himself as an integral part of the society rather than a part that needs to integrate into it.

Meanwhile, for Akber and Mohammed, the terms *Allochtoon-autochtoon* are not inherently problematic. While their historical origins can be problematized, to them the words are neutral when used for research purposes. This view was echoed by a Turkish-Dutch student who was doing research on Muslim youth and identity. He expressed his concern with the racial undertones of these categories, but at the same time understood that they were needed for 'statistical purposes'.

By turning integration into quantifiable measurements, integration discourse omits any mention of racism, cultural superiority, and identity. It places the blame on individuals' poor education and employment decisions and structural problems that has made it difficult for young *Allochtoon* to integrate themselves into Dutch society. The elite discourse reproduced by CBS Statistics Netherlands depoliticises integration into a matter of statistical outcomes, ignoring the bias of defining integration based on standards established by native Dutch majority and problematizing young people's compatibility to these standards.

However, even statistics that are used in elite discourse as objective indicators for integration outcomes are loaded with existing racial and cultural biases associated with the *Allochtoon* category. In 2005, the word 'Muslims' replaced '*Allochtoon*' as the most dominant identity signifier in all news articles on multicultural society in the Netherlands (Essed and Trienekens 2008: 62). In 2007, a front page article on the respected newspaper, *NRC/ Handelsblad* reported that by year 2050, 29 percent of the Netherlands' population would consist of *Allochtoon* (Geschiere 2009: 151). Even though accompanying graphics stated that half of these statistics will consist of western-*Allochtoon*, many people associated the figures immediately with Muslim immigrants, stirring up debates where the nuances between different racial and ethnic groups were forgotten (Ibid.). The intersections between race, ethnicity, and religion add to the complications of integration discourse.

As Essed and Trienkens (2008: 63) conclude: '… in the Netherlands 'race' is not mentioned, but inherently subsumed, repressed under the coverage of cultural and religious references'. Rather than increasing objectiveness and clarity in integration discourse, the term *Allochtoon* has led to overgeneralisations that reinforce existing stigmas against minority groups, particularly Muslims.

One Moroccan-Dutch student who was born and raised in the Netherlands told me, 'If I marry a Dutch woman then my child will be an *Autochtoon*. I remember asking this in school, just to be sure.' While I have heard contrasting accounts regarding the categorizations of third and fourth generation youth, what first struck me about this comment was again the hidden assumption of whiteness in his mention of 'a Dutch woman'. Does integration require the blurring of racial lines among future generation? Is 'whiteness' a standard that people consciously or subconsciously aspire to in order to become accepted as an integral part of being Dutch?

For Rudy, whose mother is Indonesian and father is native Dutch, having mixed ancestry didn't stop him from being bullied throughout primary school for being 'brown'. Meanwhile, Doortje, whose mother is native Dutch and late father migrated from Indonesia, does not struggle to categorise herself as 'Dutch-Dutch'. However, she too found herself uncomfortably positioned between two popular girl groups that were distinguished based on their ethnicity and skin colour. She refused to be a part of either.

As I sat there that Wednesday, waiting for Mohammed and watching the group of blond children pass by, I realised that I felt a strong sense of displacement. I did not belong there. My nationality, ethnicity, race, the veil wrapped around my head that signalled my religion - were these tell-tale signs of my foreignness? The idea of whiteness took shape in my head as a shield - an invisibility cloak - that would deter any possible scrutiny towards my presence. Was it a required badge to belong?

For my research participants, it was unclear what is required of them to finally be considered 'integrated'. During one of our conversations Mohammed said to me rather irritably, 'They tell us to integrate into the Dutch culture, but no one can explain what the Dutch culture is.'

At the same time my research participants' insinuation of whiteness when talking about 'the Dutch' reproduces a discourse that makes being 'Dutch' less accessible to them. At the end of the day, it seemed to me that integration into Dutch society is an unending process of waiting to become 'white'.

Chapter 3
Narratives of Neighbourhoods

I was biking through the streets of Tilburg as Doortje told me stories about her hometown. In this chapter, I weave together different stories that my research participants have shared about the neighbourhoods where they grew up. I argue that the elite discourse on the Dutch identity have excludes everyday narratives of locality that can be found in narratives of neighbourhoods.
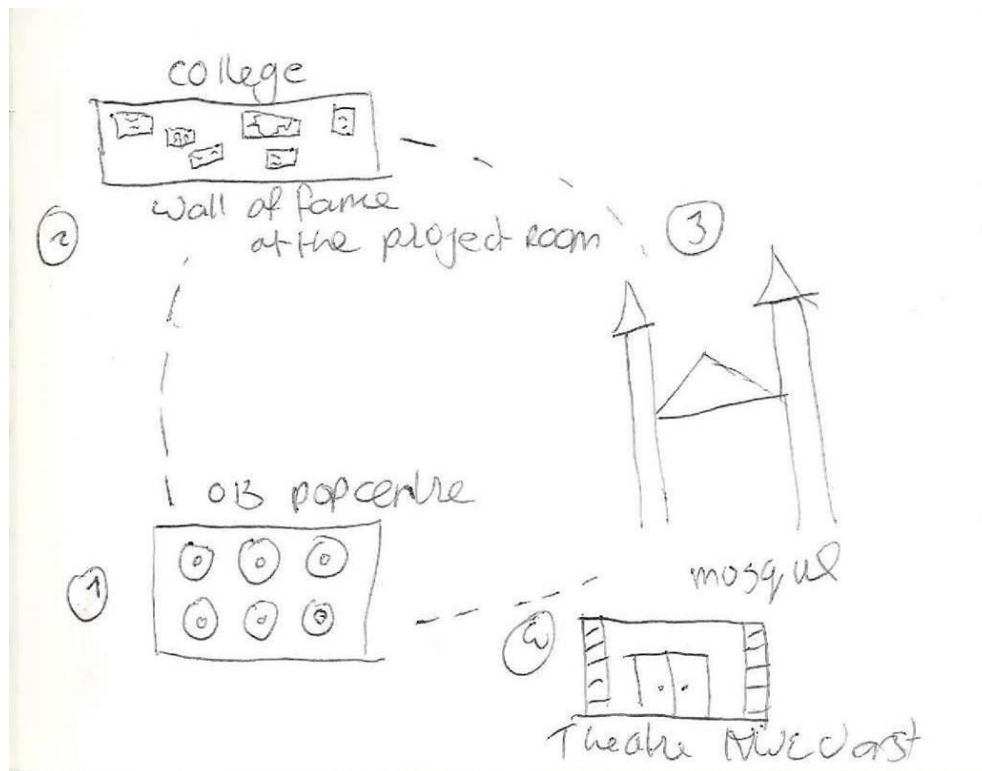

Image 3: Doortje's Map

It was the last day of Ramadhan, a holy month when Muslims around the world fast from sunrise to sunset. Doortje and I had spent half the day going to different places in Tilburg that she identified on her map as important to her experiences growing up in the Netherlands. I had brought my bicycle with me and under the mild heat of that beautiful summer day, we cycled through the streets of Tilburg.

In the afternoon we rode our bicycles to the house where Doortje lived with her mother in a small town at the outskirts of Tilburg, thirty minutes from the city's central station. We rode leisurely on the wide bicycle paths that led to Doortje's hometown. I watched as Doortje showed me some tricks on her bicycle. The sun was shining down her long, straight brown hair, her slim, fair arms lifted above her head and she proudly shouted, 'Look! No hands!'

As we neared Doortje's house, we passed an empty, green park and the old church where Doortje used to sing in the choir. It was a quiet neighbourhood with only a handful of people seen riding bikes or walking their dogs. Doortje grew up in this neighbourhood and claimed to know almost everyone on her street. However, her neighbourhood was not on the map of places to visit. After primary school, Doortje commuted to her school in Tilburg, which became the centre of most of her activities. We were going to her house that afternoon to pick up the jacket I had left on her bicycle during my first visit.

From six of my research participants, only Rudy drew his parents' house where he grew up and the caravan where he was currently living in on his map. Other participants highlighted a playground, football fields, and mosques that were located near their residences. The places they identified represented the neighbourhoods where they lived, grew up, and developed a sense of belonging (van Eijk and Blokland 2010: 316). We spent a significant amount of time during our discussions recalling experiences they had growing up in their neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhoods are places where my participants experienced the intersections of social, political, and economic relations that contributed to their social identities (van Eijk and Blokland 2010: 316). In these spaces young people's identities are 'made and (re)made through the sites of everyday life' (Holloway and Valentine 2000, 18). Their ideas of self and their perceptions of different spaces/ places inform each other (Ibid.). By exploring these experiences, we can gain insight on how everyday narratives influence social constructions within and beyond the neighbourhood.

We parked our bicycles outside a small brick house that stood connected to identical-looking houses on both sides. A Dutch flag hung above the front door and from the pole hung an old backpack, a gold medal, and a tattered notebook. Doortje explained to me that it was Dutch tradition to hang up used school bags and notebooks in front of the house when someone in the household graduates.

After showing me her house, Doortje asked me to wait as she returned a phone call from her 'sister'[6]. When we left, I asked whether everything was fine.

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[6] When Doortje used the term '*sister*' she did not refer to a family member but to sisters of Islamic faith, particularly female members of the mosque located next to her school who had mentored

She answered, 'Yes, she was just inviting me to spend *Eid*[7] at her house. My husband and I, we've been going there every year to celebrate *Eid*. But this year we'll be celebrating Eid at my friend's house in The Hague because the day after I'll be travelling to Istanbul with my friend and we'll be leaving early for Schipol.'

In 2012, Doortje's then boyfriend told her that he was interested in converting into Islam. Originally surprised, Doortje took a one-month course in the mosque near her school. This is how she met her sisters. According to Doortje, converting to Islam was part of her calling as a 'truth-seeker'. Her journey as a Muslim was mainly done in connection with communities from this mosque and a smaller mosque near her husband's apartment, both located in Tilburg.

In 2015, Doortje met her friend through a Facebook group for Dutch-Muslims. She found that her views about Islam were more aligned with those of her new friend's than her sisters' views, which she categorised as 'conservative'.

Doortje's friend invited her to attend a seminar by a controversial Muslim writer and thinker, Adnan Oktar. The celebrated *Eid* and travelled to Turkey together afterwards. Doortje had told me that her sisters warned her against attending the seminar, but Doortje had politely dismissed their concerns.

Doortje's decision to celebrate *Eid* with her new friend in The Hague and travel to Turkey marked a time in her life when she branched out from the comfort of 'home'. Yuval-Davies (2006: 197) discusses 'home' in relation to 'belonging' as 'emotional attachments about feeling 'at home' and 'about feeling safe'. Home is tied up to one's conception of self; an interplay between space, society, and self-identity.

Doortje's narratives are in line with common depictions of youth that often stands for 'old hopes and new frontiers' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006: 20-21). The places she drew on her map, such as Poppodium 013 where she partied during her mid-to-late-teens and the local theatre where she helped organise several performances and debates, brought up memories of activities and people that she no longer engaged with, but were integral to her life growing up. While Doortje identified Tilburg as her hometown, it was also a space that produced repeated narratives of displacement among her peers at school, in her choir, and her local mosque.

After summer, Doortje had established plans to move to a city in the eastern part of the Netherlands, near the German border, to continue her studies in theatre and performing arts. She told me that after moving she planned to attend regular meetings held by a Muslim community just across the border in Germany. She talked about her plans with optimism despite the existing risks that come with the new and relatively unknown. Her narratives were coloured by interests she has left and those she had picked up, of ambitions to become an 'activist, artist, and educator', and the worries that came with them.

Despite her orientation on future plans, visiting places on her map brought back memories that shed light on both past and present experiences. As hooks (1990: 147) wrote:

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her before she converted into Islam. Doortje identified this mosque as a Turkish Mosque and her sister as a young Dutch with Turkish background.

[7] *Eid Al-Fitri* is one of the two most important religious holidays that Muslims celebrate after one month of fasting during Ramadhan. The other is *Eid Al-Adha,* mentioned in Chapter 5.

'Thinking again about space and location, I heard the statement "our struggle is also a struggle of memory against forgetting"; a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present.'

Visiting their neighbourhoods and engaging in memories they had growing up allowed my research participants to reflect on the past and articulate how they currently view themselves and their environments.

During my walk with Mohammed in The Hague, one of the places we visited was a playground in Bleekveld where he spent most of his time as a child. When he was in primary school, he and his friends would spend a lot of time on this playground to play football, hang out, and just cause a racket.

However, when we arrived, the playground no longer seemed to have space for the activities Mohammed described. According to Mohammed about 3-4 years ago the local council built a playground on what used to be the empty bricked lot of his childhood. We decided to sit on a cement bench at the side of the playground and chat. As we did, a mother and her toddler son came to play on the swings. Other than the four of us, the playground was empty.

I asked Mohammed to describe what he and his friends used to do on this playground. Mohammed pointed to the white apartment building to our left, 'Do you see the two grey cellar windows there? The space in between used to be the goal when we play football.' He described 'we' as a group of seven, consisting of six boys and a girl who were descendants of Indonesian, Moroccan, Turkish, and Surinamese migrants.

I looked towards the direction that Mohammed was pointing. 'Was the fence always there?' I asked, referring to a short green metal fence that separated the playground and the apartment building.

'No,' Mohammed answered. He explained that the white apartment building was different from the other buildings surrounding the playground. Unlike other apartments that provided subsidised housing, occupants of the white building owned their apartments and consisted mainly of 'Dutch families' which he later described as mostly white and middle class. 'Maybe the fence was put up so kids would stop using the apartment's wall as a goal.'

Mohammed's description of his neighbourhood is consistent to urban restructuring policies adopted by several Western European countries, including the Netherlands, to discourage segregated housing and encourage social mixing in neighbourhoods by replacing affordable rental dwellings with more expensive owner-occupied dwellings (Sykes 2011: 608, van Eijk and Blokland 2010: 315, Visser et al. 2014: 203). However, as van Eijk and Blokland (2010: 327) concluded, diverse neighbourhoods often do not translate into diverse social networks.

Mohammed mentioned that growing up, most of his interactions with occupants of the white apartment building were related to complaints they had over the noise he and his friends made on the playground until late at night. He had said that a major difference between his group and the native Dutch children in his neighbourhood was the latter rarely hung around outside after dark. He

added diplomatically that looking back he could understand why the noise his group made had provoked a lot of complaints.

Similar to Mohammed's observations, research conducted in seven neighbourhoods in Utrecht indicated that 'youths from a non-Western background spent significantly more time than native Dutch youths at the community centre or in meeting friends on the street' (Visser et al. 2014, 210-211). Therefore the restructuring of neighbourhood environments often affects leisure time among young people with ethnic minority backgrounds more than it does their native Dutch counterparts.

I looked around the playground where we sat. I found it difficult to imagine children playing football and causing trouble on this playground. Instead of an empty lot, the playground now had a slide, swings, a spinning wheel, and a climbing set – playground equipment that would likely attract younger children accompanied by parents rather than young boys and girls such as those Mohammed described as his peer group.

The changes that Mohammed illustrated resonate with the playground movement in Cambridge, Massachusetts in early 1990s (Holloway and Valentine 2000: 13). While the development of playgrounds in the North were mainly driven by safety concerns for children playing in public places, Gagen's study in 1998, shows how middle-class Americans' concerns over the assimilation of immigrant children into 'the national way of life' played a big role in fuelling the development of new playgrounds (Gagen in Holloway and Valentine 2000: 13). Like schools, playgrounds are also neighbourhood institutions through which adults attempt to control children and where gender, ethnic, racial, and class differences are reproduced.

Mohammed's recollection about his experiences on the playground and the positioning of his peers based on class and ethnicity were echoed during many experiences that he shared with me while we walked. Existing plans to close his secondary school, his preference for football over field hockey, and the localisation of prostitution in his neighbourhood were experiences that were explained by but also contributed to his understandings of racial, ethnic, and class relations.

A similar narrative was echoed by Javed during a religious retreat to a Sufi centre in Kall, Germany. We were drinking tea and sharing a piece of cake in celebration of three wedding rituals that the *Syeikh* had officiated that night. Earlier, Javed's friend who was born and raised in Rotterdam, had identified himself as a 'Rotterdammer'. Asked what differentiated a Rotterdammer from other Dutch people, he had answered, 'We are more honest, our language is rougher, and we work harder than everyone else.'

As the three of us were sitting enjoying our cake the topic of Javed's friend being a 'Rotterdammer' came up again. Javed responded by saying, 'I always say I come from Scheveningen. If you say you come from The Hague and you are coloured, people automatically assume you come from neighbourhoods where a lot of criminality occur.' According to Javed, these assumptions stem from social stigmas that associates race, class, and criminality.

On one hand, these narratives express a strong ethnic, racial, and class awareness in relation to the cities and neighbourhoods where my participants

grew up. On the other hand, my participants also showed a strong sense of belonging to these places despite experiences of exclusion they might have felt as a result of existing ethnic, racial, and class relations.

While sitting in a park near his local mosque, Mohammed told me about a scandal that the local *Trouw* newspaper faced after a report was published on 18 May 2013, titled 'If Your District Turned into a Small Caliphate'[8]. The report claimed that The Hague's Schilderswijk district was a 'Sharia Triangle' dominated by orthodox Muslims that harassed people on the street for not dressing or acting according to Sharia law (DutchNews.nl 19 May 2013). In December 2014, it was found that this report, along with others written by journalist Perdiep Ramesar, had been fabricated (Zantingh 20 December 2014)[9]. Mohammed expressed his astonishment that people actually believed the reports in the first place.

'The Hague is a very safe place,' he had said. The ability to feel at home and safe are essential elements to developing a sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2006, 197). After several months studying technical engineering in Eindhoven, Mohammed decided he preferred living in The Hague and moved back to continue his studies in his hometown.

Neighbourhoods are essential in developing this sense of belonging. However, my participants' relationships to their localities are excluded from elite discourses on integration in the Netherlands.

A controversial theme within the Netherlands' integration discourse is defining what it means to integrate into Dutch society. The 2011 Integration Policy emphasises the importance of learning Dutch language, participating in the labour force, and denouncing customs that are deemed to be against Dutch values such as face-coverings, polygamy, forced-marriages, marriage between cousins, honour-related violence, and female genital mutilation ('Integratie, Binding, Burgerschap' Government of Netherlands 2011, 7-8). However, for young people who were born or raised in the Netherlands, these policies do little to clarify what values and behaviours are necessary for them to acquire a Dutch identity.

In 2000, Dutch author and professor of European studies, Paul Scheffer published an acclaimed essay titled 'The Multicultural Drama' that challenged the Netherlands' multicultural approach towards integration and advocated for cultural integration policies for ethnic minority groups (Spiecker and Steutel 2001, 298, Geschiere 2009, 136). For Scheffer, Dutch identity can be stimulated through historical consciousness. Citizenship is signified by one's contribution to the wider surroundings and only those who are convinced that they are part of a continuing history will contribute (Scheffer 2011, 139).

Another response to the question of Dutch identity was presented by Duyvendak and Hurenkamp who identified a growing conformity in Dutch society towards superficial aspects of everyday behaviour that they considered the framework for integration (Duyvendak and Hurenkamp in Geschiere 2009, 142-143). They highlight the notion of "community lite" that is understood as '… a light association around common consumer preferences, emotions, and fashions, but allowing for difference' (Ibid, 143). This idea suggests that integration

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[8] Title translated by Google Translate
[9] All of the 126 news articles that Ramesar had written have been taken down from the *Trouw* newspaper website and are only available for download (*Trouw* Newspaper. 29 December 2014).

is already in progress through participation in 'modern cosmopolitan life' and national values are less important to this process.

Both these views are problematic as they fail to acknowledge existing racial, ethnic, and class relations that contribute to how individuals position themselves within society. While national history and relics of the past are important elements of Dutch heritage, places like the *Rijksmuseum* that Scheffer (2011, 138) mentions may inspire less feelings of being and belonging compared to neighbourhood institutions that have been part of people's lived experiences growing up in the Netherlands. It is the experiences people have in their locality that could feed into larger narratives of being and belonging within and beyond their neighbourhoods.

Amin Maalouf (2003, 39-40) wrote that there are two extreme ideas in the matter of immigration: the first idea regards the host country as 'a blank sheet of paper on which everyone can write whatever he pleases' and the second idea sees the host country as 'a page already written and printed, a land where the laws, values, beliefs and other human and cultural characteristics have been fixed once and for all'. Neither of these extreme ideas correctly portrays immigration. As Maalouf (Ibid, 40) beautifully writes: '… a host country is neither a tabula rasa, nor a fait accompli, but a page in the process of being written'.

As I biked behind Doortje through the streets of Tilburg, I took mental notes as she pointed to places with stories, 'I used to go there to watch concerts, my friends and I were the centre of attention when we danced', 'Every year there's a carnival here, that's why we need to take a detour', 'I used to sing in that church, but I wasn't really friends with others in the choir', and 'I pass this road almost every day to school. I know it by heart'. Adding to Maalouf, a nation is not just a page. It is a collection of stories, narratives of neighbourhoods that shape the individual histories of its citizens; allowing them a sense of being and belonging to the places that they call home.

Chapter 4
Contemplating Conservatism

Visiting Rudy in his freshly renovated caravan, I declare myself 'non-conservative'. I reflect back and problematize the narratives that my declaration represents. I argue that integration discourse in the Netherlands positions Muslim and Dutch identities on opposing sides of a spectrum. This discourse does not provide space to accommodate my participants' varied experiences as young Dutch-Muslims.
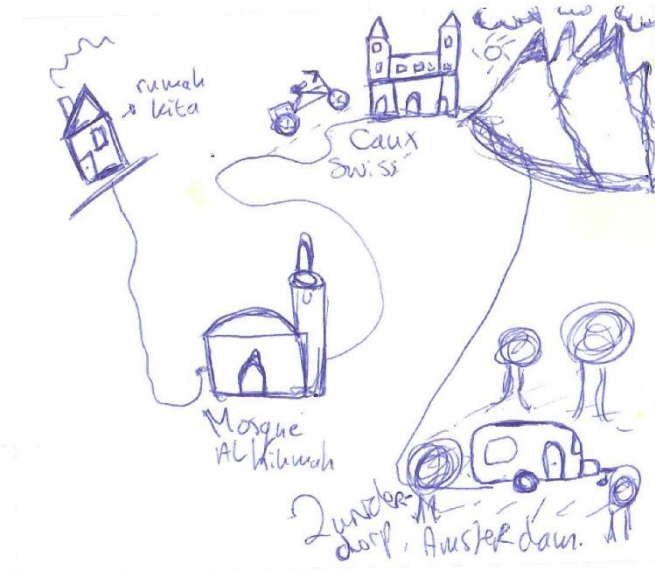

Image 4: Rudy's Map

I was sitting in the small dimly lit caravan that Rudy has been calling home for the past few weeks. From the corner where I was sitting, I watched as Rudy reheated a pan of leftover vegetable curry for me. While I was there as a researcher, I accepted the role of a house guest and fell into conversation with my host, while taking mental notes of the interior of Rudy's cosy caravan.

I was sitting on a futon that likely functioned as both a sitting and sleeping area. There was a small stove towards my left with a matching cabinet above it, and a closet for storage on my right. A few books and some figurines ornamented the walls, giving it colour. Despite the humble surroundings, I found it very comfortable – there was a gentleness to it that seemed to suit its current owner. A lean man of regular height, Rudy gave me the impression of someone who was easy going, quick to laughter, thoughtful, and kind.

One of the places that Rudy identified on his map was the caravan he inherited from a friend who had left the Netherlands. He renovated the caravan after returning from his cycling trip to Switzerland and was very proud of it. Located in a campsite in Zunderdorp, the caravan is a 15-20 minute bicycle ride to Amsterdam where Rudy works. However, the village landscape we passed on our way to the site and the clear night sky full of stars made me feel quite disconnected from the hustle and bustle of crowded Amsterdam.

'Do you drink?' I asked as he reheated my dinner.

Like all my other research participants, he answered, 'No'.

'Why not?' I asked again, thinking his answer would give me insight to his religiosity.

'I don't see the benefit of it. I know people who have had to deal with alcohol addiction and it was horrible. Plus I think drinking just benefits the large industries that promote it. So listing the costs and benefits, I've decided not to. What about you?'

I hesitated, 'I drink an occasional glass of wine every now and then.'

I had made a commitment early on in my research that I do not have a monopoly over questions. I try to answer questions directed at me as honestly as I felt comfortable. While I never hid the fact that I occasionally drink wine, this question was never directed back towards me during the course of previous discussions with participants, so I wasn't sure what reaction I would get.

'But I avoid getting drunk!' I said quickly – perhaps a little too quickly, too defensively.

'That's good, that's important,' he said, smiling.

I shrugged and said, 'I guess I've never really been that conservative'. As these words came out of my mouth, I realized I was positioning my own life style decisions against his on a vague spectrum of religious conservatism.

Reflecting back, I have found that my self-identification as 'non-conservative' in this conversation can be understood in relation to debates pertaining Islam and the West. Individuals' decisions made entirely or partially on the basis of religion are often pitted against a standard defined by the West as 'secular', 'modern', or 'free' (see Hoodfar 1993, Turner 2002, Ramadan 2004). Through this frame, I was positioning our different lifestyle decisions upon a spectrum

where tolerance for alcohol is the norm and abstinence from alcohol is labelled as 'conservative'.

This construct of incompatibility between Islam and the West has been reproduced through various narratives that can be traced back to colonial representations of the Orient. These narratives highlight a traditionalist Islam that is hostile against 'modernity' (Turner 2002: 112), a culturally conservative Islam that challenges Western notions of freedom and secularism (Maussen 2012: 346), or an Islam that promotes self-control and discipline against Western hedonistic consumerism (Ramadan 2004: 118-119). While these narratives are at times nuanced, they tend to reproduce similar contention between the West and Islam. Within this frame, identifying with one is done at the cost of the other.

This zero sum game that colours the relationship between Western and Islamic identities manifests itself in the Netherlands' integration discourse. Conducting a comparative study between Muslim ethnic minorities in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, Güveli and Platt (2011: 1009-1012) hypothesised that education and assimilation over time would lead to less religious participation among Muslim migrants in western societies.

While their findings were not conclusive, the study problematized one underlying premise of the 1998 Social Position and Provision Ethnic Minorities Survey (SPVA) its main source of data for the Netherlands (Ibid. 1014-1023):

> 'In the SPVA, the respondents could either identify with their own ethnic group or with being Dutch… Thus the question on Dutch identity required people to position themselves as either Dutch or as of minority ethnicity. An inspection of the Dutch results alone might lead to the inference that greater religiosity fosters lower Dutch identification and by extension to an assumption that religious Muslims are alienated from the host society.'

Güveli and Platt (Ibid.) point out that the survey mistakenly assumes group attachments are 'two ends of a single pole' rather than different dimensions of identity that operate differently depending on any given situation.

Elite discourse influence the basic assumptions made on religion, ethnicity, and integration that feed into government surveys and policies such as the SPVA. These discourses fail to explore the lived experiences of people in manoeuvring the ambivalences of constructed identities. For my research participants, navigating between their religious beliefs and their upbringing in the Netherlands is not a matter of choosing one over the other.

Ilyaas, for example, who is still very connected with both Tanzania where he was born and the Netherlands where he was raised and holds citizenship, acknowledged that the Netherlands offers more challenges in practicing Islam:

> 'For me it's easier to practice Islam when I am back in Tanzania because the people around me are Muslim, mosques are around every corner, the *Adzan* is out loud – for me, it's easier to be a Muslim. So it is two different worlds but I think I've been raised that way so it's good - I've gotten used to it… For example [in the Netherlands] the *Adzan*, the mosques are not allowed to have a call for prayer out loud. Which then for you as a Muslim at times in Tanzania you are used to hearing the call for prayer and heading out and just go. Here you don't hear it. So there already you

have to put more effort. So I think it is more a matter of effort really, the difference between the countries. You have to put more effort in practicing Islam and being a Muslim here.'

Even though there were moments when these challenges had been difficult to overcome, it was not understood as a trade-off between being Dutch and being a Muslim.

Instead, it was seen as part of a personal process, 'There has never been a moment when I was like, 'OK, I'm done with this'. No, no… not at all. But there have been moments when I have been slacking or lacking. So like not praying five times a day, or not reading Quran - doing the things that you would otherwise do.' Regardless of the fluctuations in his religious practices, Ilyaas' identification as a Muslim never wavered. He was able to engage in activities common among his peers such as partying and interacting with friends of the opposite sex without sacrificing the limits he had established for himself.

When it came to relationships, dating, and sex, my participants' limits vary. During our walk, Mohammed told me that he abstained from dating. However, what dating meant to my participants is not straightforward.

Ilyaas, for example, said that he tried to abstain from dating even though people's attitudes had become more tolerant when it came to relationships between opposite sexes. Compared to the experiences of his older cousins in the past, Ilyaas found his parents more open to the idea of him closely interacting with girls that might lead to serious relationships.

He admitted there had been instances when his relationships with certain girls became more than just friends. For Ilyaas, dating meant meeting up with girls, texting and spending time with them. However, he added, his definition of dating differed from his native Dutch peers, particularly when it comes to physical intimacy and sex. This was where he drew the line.

Rudy had a similar stance. He said, 'I understand the different opinions people have when it comes to dating, but in the end I chose what I felt was right for me.'

He told me a story about the first relationship he had when he was 17. The girl he was seeing did not share his religious beliefs and wanted to have sex, 'I wasn't comfortable and this made me realize she was not the one for me'. He admitted that his refusal angered her, prompting her to make remarks questioning his sexual orientation.

Meanwhile, Doortje and her then boyfriend decided to get married when they were 20 years old after they both converted into Islam in 2012. At the time they had been dating for several years and were already living together. Doortje's stories of finding a balance between her newly found faith in Islam and her desire to express herself were very different from my other participants. Being a woman new to Islam made her journey more 'turbulent' – a word her husband used to describe her in a casual conversation with me.

In January 2015, Doortje felt pressured to wear a *hijab* by a sister in the mosque she went to. Doortje originally felt content with this decision but found it constrained her in many ways, particularly when interacting with peers of the opposite sex. She started to question the obligation for women to wear a *hijab* and in July 2015, she decided to take it off. She said she never felt at peace while

wearing a *hijab*. She also felt it was easier for her to engage non-Muslims in discussions about Islam when she did not wear a *hijab* and for her this better served her obligation towards her faith. To her, engaging people in discussions and converting others into Islam were parts of her main obligations as a Muslim.

Her decision to not wear a veil made her feel excluded from the Muslim community in her mosque. However, she found a new community of Muslims through an online forum that better suited her religious views. When I asked Doortje how she felt about the sisters that went to her Mosque, she said, 'They have a very conservative view of Islam and they mean well within their understanding of it'. Her categorisation of the sisters as conservative did not imply that they were more or less Muslim than herself.

Ramadan (2004: 122) writes: 'The heart of the message of Islam is that a living spirituality comes at the price of willingly making the effort to come back to what is essential, to contemplate the world and to take the road back towards one's self.' For my participants being a Muslim indeed lied in the practices, rituals, and communities that were socialised as part of their religious identities. However, more than that, being a Muslim was a consciousness, an awareness, that did not simply give way when there is a shift in one's place, practice, or perspective.

Rudy captured this sentiment when he contemplated a shift in what he believed was a spiritual connection with God during his dawn (*Fajr*) prayers 'I used to feel God watching when I wake up for *Fajr* prayer. Now I go through the prayer routine but I have to hurry, my mind goes places'. Rudy found that the growing demands of his busy life had made it difficult for him to concentrate and meditate during prayers.

As a Muslim who faces my own struggles practicing my religion, I could relate to Rudy's admission. However, I believe these struggles do not necessarily reduce the value of my spiritual journey. Religion is not a simple choice between total devotion and none at all. Instead, it is a personal journey of tracing back connections we may have encountered in the past, connections we miss or long for, as our bodies continue to move forward in time.

These nuances that exist in the everyday lives of young Muslims are missing from the dominant narratives of Islam. Islam is often portrayed as monolithic in the West, particularly in Western Europe. The history of secularism in Western Europe equates the separation between church and state with notions of personal autonomy and freedom, particularly 'free from oppressive religious/ sexual regimes' (Verkaaik and Spronk 2011: 85). As a result, 'In state policies on migration and national identity, sexuality has replaced religion as the body-politics through which hegemonic ideology becomes internalized, naturalized, commodified, and authentic' (Ibid.). The increasingly visible migrant Muslim population in Western Europe is often seen as a threat towards secular values.

The insertion of free sexual expression into the political discourses of secular states, particularly in debates pertaining the migrant Muslim population, plays out a life phase dimension that particularly affects young people. Conducting research among young Muslim women from migrant families in Germany and France, Amir-Moazami (2010: 191-192) argues that young Muslims' decision to limit interaction between people of opposite sex, to abstain from experiencing and experimenting with sexuality, and women's decision to wear a veil in public

are seen as a threat towards secular norms. These decisions are perceived as oppressive and deprive young people from what is understood to be 'legitimate youthfulness' (Ibid. 192). Such religious views and decisions seem less problematic when expressed by older generation of migrants, but are incomprehensible when practiced by a growingly visible young Muslim generation who was born, raised, and educated in Western Europe.

Secularism in the Netherlands developed differently from that in France, as its history of pillarization gave more room for religious institutions to receive state support for educating and socialising religious values to their groups' members (Maussen 2012: 339-340). However, accelerated secularization in the late 1960s, has led to the association of individual freedom with freedom from tutelage and has reduced government support towards religious institutions (Ibid, 340).

In December 2004, the General Intelligence and Security Services (AIVD) of the Netherlands published a report titled 'From Dawa to Jihad', highlighting the threat of radical Islam towards the West. The report casted a very wide net over radical Islam, including in its discourse an understanding of radicalism that includes movements and groups that threaten democracy and social integration. The report further emphasises how young people, especially those from ethnic minority groups, are more vulnerable to radical Islamic influences because of 'identity problems' that many of them face (General Intelligence and Security Service December 2004: 28).

Despite the known involvement of native European converts in radical Islamic groups such as the Hofstad Network (Richburg. 5/12/2004), young Dutch-Muslims from ethnic minority backgrounds face increased scrutiny. Their different dimensions of identity are perceived as a 'problem', rendering them exceptionally vulnerable and threatening.

Such views are played out in political discourses on secular populism, from both the left and the right (Verkaaik and Spronk 2011: 86). During the Free Speech Conference on 14 June 2009, Dutch right-wing politician Geert Wilders delivered a speech addressing an international audience in Copenhagen, Denmark. During this speech, Wilders (06/15/2009) declared Islam as 'evil', 'a Trojan Horse', a totalitarian ideology equivalent to 'Nazism'. He says (Ibid.): 'Ladies and gentlemen, wherever Islam and cultural relativism, advocated by Shariah-socialists, come together, freedom of expression is threatened. In Europe in particular, freedom of expression is at risk'.

Asking my research participants how they felt about existing depictions of Islam in western media, I received varied answers. Doortje, who identified strongly with being Dutch due to her mixed ancestries and being raised by her Dutch mother, agreed that Muslim migrants have a harder time integrating into Dutch society but disagrees with existing propensities to discriminate against migrants. For her, integration was about 'give and take', where both 'Muslims' and 'Dutch society' needed to change to suit each other.

Meanwhile, other participants respond to these depictions with frustration. Mohammed called existing depictions of Muslims as '*bull shit*' and Akber wrote in an email that he felt 'disappointed'. Akber believed the media misrepresented Islam and Muslims by directly connecting it with terrorism and violence. During a group discussion held by MashriQ in August 2015 on Islam and Social Justice,

one female participant of Moroccan decent expressed her frustration at what these narratives implied: that despite her being born and raised in the Netherlands and her perfect Dutch, she would never be accepted as Dutch. The monolithic dominant narratives that exist on Islam have particularly affected young people who feel their nuanced religious faiths and varied realities are being misrepresented and excluded from the discussion.

Later that night, Rudy took me to the nearest bus stop on his bicycle. I noticed a woman sitting at the bus stop across the street staring at us. I wondered whether she found it strange seeing a woman wearing a veil laughing at the back of a man's bike at 10 pm on the outskirts of Amsterdam. Did she recognise that I was a Muslim and categorise us as acting 'non-conservatively'? Did our image present a challenge towards the dominant narratives of young Muslims in the West? Perhaps the lady was in fact thinking of something completely unrelated, not making any assumptions about us. But equally possible, perhaps she was and the answer to both questions could be 'yes'.

Neither Rudy nor I are likely to appreciate judgements that may undermine our identification as Muslims. Yet, at the same time to categorise us into one box of 'non-traditional', 'non-conservative', or 'moderate' Muslims, would ignore different opinions, experiences, and decisions we have as Muslims.

One thing we agreed that night as we were talking in his caravan was that our experiences as Muslims had been a long journey of learning, unlearning, and self-reflection. Unfortunately, within elite discourses on Islam in the West, there seems to be no place for these varied experiences. The positioning of Islam within political discourse in the secular state continues to exclude the voices of young Muslims, overpowering them to the point where nuanced lived experiences are simplified and young people are increasingly driven to make 'either-or' decisions on a one dimensional spectrum.

Chapter 5
Explorations and Endings

This chapter ends my collection of essay by returning to my research question. This chapter centres the discussion on a question Javed raised during Eid Al-Adha. Drawing upon previous chapters' explorations of race, class, and religiosity, I end by offering a nuanced interpretation of Dutch society based on my participants' personal narratives of being and belonging.
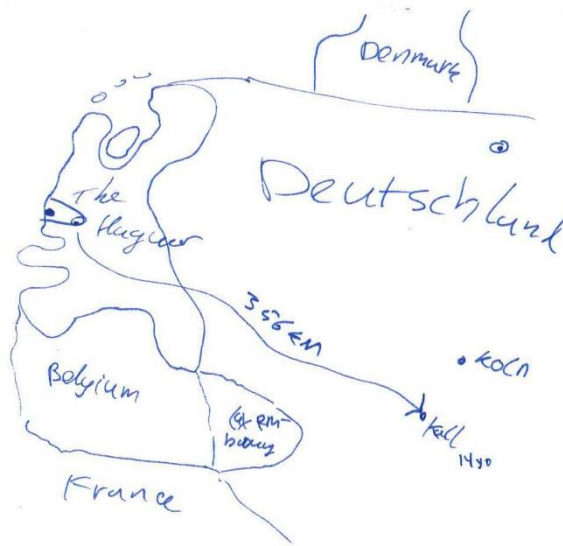

Image 5: Javed's Map

I was a guest at an *Imam's*[10] apartment, where Javed attends weekly meditations. Javed had identified this location on his map and invited me to join his Sufi community's *Eid Al-Adha* celebrations and *Dhikr* rituals[11]. I was eager to come. My curiosity, both as a researcher and a Muslim who had very limited knowledge about Sufism, was intrigued.

After a fascinating *Dhikr* ritual that was very different from what I was used to, I sat down to eat and chat with Javed. The excitement of the night had raised a lot of questions I wanted to discuss with him. We talked about Sufism, about growing up practicing Islam in the Netherlands, and about the bearded men in the photographs that decorated the living room's green walls. Finally he stopped me to ask, 'How can any of this, what we talk about and you being here, help you understand Dutch society?'

This question often followed discussions with my participants. Every time this question and those similar to it came up, I could feel myself react defensively. I felt that my claim for doing 'research' was suspect. Since autoethnography doesn't stick to any 'traditional theory' and thrives on 'theory through stories' (Ellis 2004: 18), I follow the narratives my participants choose to tell me. Faced with these questions, I try my best to hide the rush of self-doubt and refer to topics raised during our conversations that I thought would be interesting to explore further.

Perhaps it was this automatic reaction that prevented me from thinking more critically about Javed's question. As I was biking home from the *Eid Al-Adha* celebration, his question crept up from the back of my mind and just sat uncomfortably there until I got home.

I realised later that behind the way Javed's question was worded, was the implied assumption that taking part in the *Eid Al-Adha* celebration was irrelevant to my research on Dutch society. This assumption positioned the Sufi community and my experience participating in it as external to Dutch society, even though the location, language, and citizenship or residence of its members placed it within.

The positioning of ethnic minority groups, particularly Muslims, as external to Dutch society is not uncommon. Prime Minister Mark Rutte, leader of the centre-right party, *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) was quoted to say, '… it does matter if you apply for a job as Mohammed or Jan… Newcomers have always had to adapt and always had to deal with prejudice. You have to fight your way in.' (DutchNews.nl. 03/22/2015). Meanwhile, Ahmed Aboutaleb, Mayor of Rotterdam, from the Labour Party, stated after the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, 'And if you do not like it here because humourists you do not like make a newspaper, may I then say you can fuck off… Vanish from the Netherlands if you cannot find your place here' (Nelson. 01/13/2015). Geert Wilders, a prominent politician from Dutch right wing party, *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), has gained increasing popularity for his strong stance against immigration

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[10] The word *Imam* can have different meanings depending on Islamic traditions. In this context, the word Imam refers to the spiritual leader of a Sufi community in The Hague, where Javed is a member.

[11] *Dhikr* is the recitation of short phrases, prayers, or praises to Allah (God) that can be done individually or collectively, loudly or quietly, depending on one's traditions.

and Islam, promising his supporters 'fewer Moroccans', one of the largest groups of Muslim migrants in the Netherlands (The Guardian. 03/20/2014).

Rutte, Aboutaleb, and Wilders come from different political parties, representing different opinions pertaining the integration of religious and ethnic minority groups. However, they reiterate a common narrative, one where Dutch-Muslims are still seen as external to Dutch society. They are expected to work hard to fit in and accept Dutch values. If they cannot or refuse to do so, they must leave.

Therefore, it is not surprising that when I first contacted Javed about my research he hesitated. 'I've never really felt a strong connection with the Netherlands,' he said.

Elaborating on this sentiment, Javed explained that when he was about 12 years old all of his friends had started to idolise celebrities they saw on television. During the same time, his older brother, who was 18 years old, told him, 'The coolest person is the one who can sacrifice his pleasures for his cause and no one is a better example of this than Prophet Muhammad.' His brother's statement left a big impression on him. Javed spent most of his teenage years reading about the life of Prophet Muhammad and could not relate to the interests of most of his peers. This memory fed into how he positioned himself within Dutch society.

When Javed was 14, he joined weekly meditations at his *Imam's* house and participated in monthly spiritual retreats held by his community in Kall, Germany. I joined him during one of these retreats. Breathing in the fresh mountainous air of Kall, Javed had said, 'This is where I truly feel at home.'

'Home', as Gasper (2009: 2) explains, is often equated with 'security', not only defined by space but also constructions of existential homes, often through religion and relationships with identity groups. Among all of my participants, Javed was the only one whose map depicted the Netherlands and western part of Germany, particularly The Hague and Kall.

He would later tell me that he felt at home in Scheveningen, where he grew up and now lives, and the Sufi centre in Kall that '… empowers me and makes me feel closer to that person [Prophet Muhammad]'. These locations are the manifestations of 'home', a concept that, to my research participants, was loaded with ambivalences. Home does not refer to a singular place. Yet, neither is it divided nor compartmentalized simply based on national borders or nationalities.

Experiences of 'home' that are plural and transcend national borders were also expressed by Ilyaas, who moved to the Netherlands when he was nine and was predominantly raised by his Dutch mother in the Netherlands with regular visits to his father in Tanzania:

> 'Every time I go back I'm like, 'yes, I'm home'. And then after five weeks of being there I'm like, 'I miss home'. And then when I land here I'm like, 'yes I'm home again'. And then after five weeks here I'm like, 'I miss home'. So, for me, I cannot say one is home and the other is not. It's both. But I guess it's different. The countries are different, the cultures are different.'

For my research participants Dutch society was not an isolated space separated from other sites of belonging. Rather, it was connected by networks of communities and families. As Harcourt and Escobar (2002, 8) write: 'In today's world, places are no longer isolated, nor are they pure, static or just traditional; places are clearly made and affected by their encounters with global processes'. The Netherlands and Dutch society are no exceptions.

Although experiences of 'home' transcend national borders, they are also based in specific localities; based in the houses where my participants grew up, their neighbourhoods and their playgrounds, schools, mosques; and constructed through the everyday experiences and social interactions that gave meaning to these places. These places represent 'sites of unequal, even, oppressive, power relations… identifying 'one's place' is a politically and personally complex task, full of painful ambivalences but potentially progressive possibilities' (Harcourt and Escobar 2002: 12). These ambivalences were evident in my conversations with participants.

During our walk around his neighbourhood, Mohammed talked about the benefits of traveling with a Dutch passport compared to a Moroccan passport. However, the greater mobility that Dutch passports offered were also followed by experiences of being profiled in airports for additional security checks, either due to coloured skin or Arabic names; experiences I, too, had grown familiar with during my own international travels.

Akber echoed experiences of 'painful ambivalences' and 'progressive possibilities' during our last meeting in October 2015. He acknowledged that growing up in the Netherlands allowed him access to an education that he likely would not have received if his parents had stayed in Morocco. However, at the same time, this was followed by the realisation that '… things are changing and it might be difficult for me to find employment'.

Reflecting back on the question this paper attends to address, for my participants, Dutch society represents a space of local familiarities, global connections, opportunities, exclusions, and limitations. The liminality of my participants' youthfulness intersects with racial, religious, ethnic, and class relations that shape their everyday experiences and aspirations as Dutch-Muslims. These speak to both my participants' self-identities and the meaning they insert into Dutch society; indeed the two co-constitute one another.

Javed's question on the relevance of my experiences to larger questions about Dutch society, also invites us to consider what personal narratives can and cannot do. By asking my participants to revisit places they felt were essential to their experiences growing up in the Netherlands, we were able to explore personal narratives that gave insight to how participants '…negotiate and understand social structures, expectations, and shifts in relation to the circumstances of their own lives, needs, and desires' (Hörschelmann 2011: 381). By focusing on these narratives, we were able to see how the particular gave meaning to the general.

The relationships between Western natives and non-Western immigrants, in this case *Allochtoon-autochtoon,* Islam and the West, are manifestations of racial power relations, remnants of colonial history, imaginary and knowledge (Grosfoguel et.al 2014: 7). The burden to integrate into Dutch society resonates

with what Said (2005: 76) identifies as ideas of superior European identities embedded in colonial history. Through participants' narratives, my research speaks to the need to challenge these binaries, question the standards imposed on religious and ethnic minority youth, and channel the voices of young people that are often left on the margins of elite discourses (Nieuwenhuys 2013: 4-7). Personal narratives offer nuances necessary to challenge these elite discourses that are at risk of making generalisations and misrepresentations.

At the end of October 2015, I sat down with my research participants separately to ask for feedback on what I had written based on our interactions together. These meetings were important to me. I wanted to ensure my participants felt that their voices were represented and they had a chance to influence the final output of my research.

When I sat down to discuss my findings with Javed, I presented a story I had written about the night when I celebrated *Eid Al-Adha* at his *Imam's* house. The narrative started with me arriving before Javed, who instructed me to go in and introduce myself as his friend.

I pressed the apartment number Javed had given me. 'Hello?' said a woman's voice through the speaker.

I hesitated. Part of me just wanted to go quietly away – what was I doing celebrating *Eid Al-Adha* at a stranger's home? Instead, I answered, 'Hi, *Assalamu Alaikum*, I'm a friend of Javed's.'

'OK', she said and buzzed me in. I walked in the door, thinking how easy that was.

However, once I was inside the building I wasn't sure what to do. What and who would I find behind that door? Should I just wait for Javed on the stairway? But wouldn't the woman who buzzed me in find it weird if I didn't show up? She was probably already wondering why it was taking me so long to climb up the stairs. I felt like I was crashing someone's party – someone I didn't know, whose party was actually a religious gathering during a holy day.

I took a deep breath and scolded myself, 'Dhika, you are here as a researcher. Pull yourself together and trust that your research participant knew what he was talking about when he told you to go in without him.'

So, I did.

I knocked on the door and a young woman with a wide smile welcomed me in. I wasn't sure what to say other than, '*Eid Mubarak*.' She returned my greetings and embraced me in a warm hug, invited me in, and introduced me to her mother, the hostess of the house.

For me, this fragment of my experience marked the first time I internalised my role as a researcher, instead of a student doing a research project. As Behar (1996: 3) wrote about doing field research, 'Loss, mourning, the longing for memory, the desire to enter into the world around you and having no idea how to do it, the fear of observing too coldly or too distractedly or too raggedly, the rage of cowardice, the insight that is always arriving late... are the stopping places along the way.' I feel Behar's honesty about the process in which ethnographies are often developed and written validates my own vulnerabilities.

For Javed, this particular story represented the situation many Muslim minorities faced in the West. While he acknowledged a need for Muslims to be self-critical, he also took issue with prevailing prejudices that they often face. Elite discourse on integration has reproduced racial, cultural, and class relations that are rooted in the colonial histories of the West and 'the Others'. Javed says, referring to native Dutch as the ethnic majority group, 'They never want to walk up the stairs and know the smile behind the door'. This therefore ends my research with a yearning for more nuanced narratives of being in and belonging to Dutch society.

Epilogue

Dear Reader,

We have come to the end of this journey. Thank you for coming along with me. Writing this final section of my research paper marks the end of what has been a transformative chapter of my life. Therefore, I am overcome with the bittersweet emotions that accompany endings and accomplishments.

I started this journey with the metaphor of reversing my gaze to look upon Dutch society; thinking perhaps, that by studying the society whose ancestors colonised mine, I would be able to learn something about myself. Like Behar (1996: 33), I too wanted to 'know others by knowing herself and who has come to know herself by knowing others'. In many ways I feel this objective has been achieved.

My interactions with research participants were based on methodological decisions that represent what I believe to be ethical in doing research. Through multiple interactions with each participant, I attempted to draw out nuances that are important in understanding their perceptions and positioning within Dutch society. Ensuring room for questions, comfort, and feedback was crucial to this process. Their participation and representation were essential from design to finish. By doing research I have found where I firmly stand.

Writing vulnerably and honestly about my research processes has allowed me to accept that doubt is a strength rather than a weakness; dismissing any illusions of certainty that is often fabricated by the firm, cool voice of academia. I have borrowed from and been inspired by existing literature, but I hide my truths behind no one. By writing I have found my own voice.

And finally, by thinking ethnographically I have explored dimensions of whiteness, narratives of neighbourhoods, and religious identities that contribute to shaping Dutch society. My participants' narratives about places that are integral to their experiences growing up in the Netherlands offer insight into the everyday intersections of race, culture, class, and religion, as told through the perspectives of youth. These stories soften the rigidity that is produced by elite discourses on integration. They also problematize the power structures that reproduce racial, ethnical, and ideological hierarchies and make visible the remnants of colonial histories that divide Western populations and non-Western immigrants/ minorities inside metropolitan centres (Grosfoguel et al. 2014: 6). By interweaving these stories with mine, I have been able to reclaim my own narratives of being a Muslim woman of colour.

Now that this journey has ended, I take these findings along with me. I wonder whether you, dear Reader, have found this journey as fruitful as it has been for me. Whatever is the case, as we part ways I hope some of the contemplations in this paper manage to leave a mark, at least somewhere at the back of your mind.

Assalamu Alaikum

May peace be upon you,

M. S. Sadjad

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