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Muslims Denouncing Violent Extremism

Competing Essentialisms of Islam in Dutch Public Debate

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Abstract

This article explores statements made by Dutch Muslims against violent extremism, and explains these statements in the context of the growing pressure exerted on Muslim minorities in Europe to present themselves as peaceful and loyal citizens. It problematises the often-repeated call on Muslims to denounce terrorism, and reveals that Dutch Muslims have condemned violent extremism more often than is commonly acknowledged. However, essentialist statements about Islam as a violent religion often provoke competing essentialisms of Islam as a 'religion of peace'. In analysing such statements as 'performative performances', the author demonstrates how public debate about violent extremism feeds into Muslim perceptions of what Islam 'really' is.

Keywords

Islam – terrorism – violent extremism – securitisation – Islamophobia – media – Muslim voice – essentialism

1 Introduction

Since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Muslims in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe have repeatedly been urged to denounce terrorism. The pressure on Muslims increased after the Madrid train bombings and the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, the London tube bombings in 2005, and the Danish cartoon crisis that started in 2006. During the past few years, the emergence of the 'Islamic State in Iraq and Syria' (ISIS) together with a series of terrorist attacks in Europe have stirred new debate as to whether Muslims

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should explicitly condemn violent extremism. This debate cannot be seen separately from a much wider debate about whether Islam promotes violence against non-Muslims, and whether Muslims pose a threat to Western society and its values. Although stereotypical representations of Muslims as violent and dangerous have prevailed in Europe for centuries, the terrorist attacks of the last 16 years have significantly contributed to anti-Muslim sentiments.

Perhaps more than any other country in Western Europe, the Netherlands has witnessed a strong backlash of multiculturalism and a rise of right-wing populism since the 9/11 attacks in 2001.¹ The radical right-wing MP Geert Wilders, whose party won 20 out of 150 seats in the 2017 parliamentary elections, openly campaigns for a ‘de-Islamisation’ of the Netherlands. As early as 2007, he called the Qur’an a “fascist” book and argued that “if you take all the violent verses out of the Qur’an, you are left with a booklet as thin as a Donald Duck magazine”.² In March 2018, Wilders broadcast a short movie clip on national television as part of his municipal election campaign, ending with “Islam is violence” written in blood-red letters.³

Obviously, a small minority of Dutch Muslims do support extremist movements, as exemplified by the fact that approximately 300 Dutch ‘Syria travellers’ have joined ISIS.⁴ Whereas much public and scholarly attention is being paid to the radicalisation of young Muslims, this article shifts focus to the vast majority of Dutch Muslims who do not support violent extremism, but who face continuous pressure to “clarify their stance” and to “speak up” against terrorism. How have they responded to the often-repeated call to denounce violent extremism since the 9/11 attacks in 2001, and how can their responses be explained?

This question is important because, although there is a growing body of research that critically addresses the ‘securitisation’ of Islam and Muslim communities in Europe and the US,⁵ comparatively little research has been

1 Vasta, Ellie, “From Ethnic Minorities to Ethnic Majority Policy: Multiculturalism and the Shift to Assimilationism in the Netherlands”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 30 (5) (2007): 713-740; Liere, Lucien van, “Teasing ‘Islam’: ‘Islam’ as the Other Side of ‘Tolerance’ in Contemporary Dutch Politics”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 29 (2) (2014): 187-202.

2 “De geest is uit de fles en niemand krijgt hem erin”, *AD/Algemeen Dagblad*, August 18, 2007, 6.

3 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoBeCQhWFFY>, accessed 18 April 2018.

4 <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/terrorisme/dreiging/uitreizigers-terugkeerders-en-thuis-blijvers>, accessed September 4, 2017.

5 See, for example: Brown, Katherine E., “Contesting the Securitization of British Muslims”, *Interventions*, 12 (2) (2010): 171-182; Cesari, Jocelyn, “Securitization of Islam in Europe”, *Die Welt des Islams* 52 (2012): 430-449; Kundnani, Arun, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2014); Rytter, Mikkel, and

conducted on how Muslims deal with this.⁶ Counter-terrorism policies tend to frame acts of terror committed by Muslims as a theological problem, as if such forms of violence directly result from an extremist interpretation of Islam. Although few people would argue that all Muslims are terrorists, the underlying assumption seems to be that all Muslims are susceptible to radicalisation. As a result, everyone and everything that is somehow related to Islam becomes a matter of security, and needs to be evaluated in terms of whether it poses a threat or not. Muslims are increasingly put under surveillance—not only literally, in the sense of being monitored by intelligence services, but also in the sense that they are continually viewed and talked about in terms of how dangerous they are.⁷ How does the securitisation of Islam and Muslim communities feed into the ways in which Muslims present themselves and their religion in Dutch public debate?

To answer these questions, critical discourse analysis is applied to a selection of newspaper articles about violent extremism (including news reports, interviews and opinion pieces) that have appeared since 11 September 2001. Relevant newspaper articles were found through a keyword search in the online database LexisNexis, resulting in a sample of about 1,000 articles.⁸ These articles contain statements made by Muslims against atrocities committed in the name of Islam, demands on Muslims to condemn terrorist attacks, and/or statements made by people who argue against such demands. Critical discourse analysis is a valuable approach to study discourses in a particular socio-

Marianne Holm Pedersen, "A Decade of Suspicion: Islam and Muslims in Denmark after 9/11", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37 (13) (2014): 2303-2321.

- 6 See, for example: Bayoumi, Moustafa, *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America* (New York: Penguin, 2008); Brown, "Contesting"; Yildiz, Ali Aslan, and Maykel Verkuyten, "'We Are Not Terrorists': Turkish Muslim Organizations and the Construction of a Moral Identity", *Ethnicities*, 13 (3) (2012): 359-381; Saeed, Tania, *Islamophobia and Securitization: Religion, Ethnicity and the Female Voice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Corbett, Rosemary R., *Making Moderate Islam: Sufism, Service, and the "Ground Zero Mosque" Controversy* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).
- 7 Mamdani, Mahmood, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2004); Brown, "Contesting", p. 174; Kundnani, Arun, "Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept", *Race and Class*, 54 (2) (2012): 3-25, pp. 5; Cesari, "Securitization", p. 436.
- 8 The source material was collected as part of a larger research project, in which public initiatives taken by Muslims against violent extremism in the Netherlands are compared with similar initiatives taken by Muslims in Norway. The keywords used are: "(moslims OR moslim OR islam OR islamitisch OR islamitische) AND (afstand nemen OR veroordelen OR afwijzen OR distantiëren OR uitspreken tegen OR afschuw)". Sources included national and regional newspapers, a number of news magazines such as *Vrij Nederland* and *Elsevier*, and press releases from the Dutch news agency ANP.

political and historical context, paying special attention to how unequal power relations are expressed through discourse.⁹ The benefit of studying newspaper articles is that they have been produced with a fixed frequency throughout the period studied, which makes it possible to trace particular developments in mediated debates about violent extremism. A limitation is that this study does not include Muslims who condemn violent extremism in private interactions with non-Muslims, or those who choose not to respond at all.

The first part of this article examines the arguments with which members of the ethnic Dutch and non-Muslim majority ask Muslims to explicitly condemn particular atrocities. It explains that, despite the sometimes benevolent intentions behind such demands, they should be seen as a form of interpellation that does not eliminate mistrust, but instead reinforces a ‘gaze of suspicion’ towards Muslims. The second part focuses on Muslim responses to these demands. It observes that Muslims have spoken up against violent extremism much more often than is commonly acknowledged. However, they have often (but not always) come up with statements about Islam as a “religion of peace” that are as essentialist as the remarks they aim to counter, namely those about Islam as a religion that inherently leads to violence. In analysing these responses as ‘performative performances’, this article demonstrates how public debate about violent extremism affects not only how Muslims represent themselves, but also how they perceive their religion and present it to the outside world. Hence, it sheds new light on the relational aspects of religious beliefs.

2 “Muslims, Speak Up!”

Muslims today face enormous pressure to denounce violent extremism. After every terrorist attack committed by Muslims in Europe or the US, Dutch Muslims are urged to “break the silence”, “condemn the attacks”, and speak “louder” and “clearer”. Short after the 9/11 attacks, imams and leaders of Islamic organisations were asked to clarify their stance.¹⁰ Soon, however, all Muslims were being urged to express their abhorrence of violent extremism,¹¹

9 Wodak, Ruth, and Michael Meyer, “Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology”, in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (Los Angeles: Sage 2009), 1-33, pp. 10.

10 See, for example: Mulder, Rimmer, “Een kwestie van beschaving”, *Leeuwarder Courant*, September 13, 2001; “Waardig antwoord”, *de Volkskrant*, September 15, 2001, 6; Haak, F.T., “Koran en bijbel 1”, *NRC Handelsblad*, October 13, 2001, 8.

11 See, for example: Ephimenco, Sylvain, “Open brief aan de moslims van Nederland”, *Trouw*, September 29, 2001; Vuijsje, Herman, “Osama Bin Laden en het nieuwe kwaad in

preferably through “spectacular protests”.¹² This pressure mainly comes from the dominant majority: those who ask Muslims to “speak up” are almost always white, non-Muslim Dutch people without a recent family history of migration. However, they do so for different reasons.

Short after the 9/11 attacks, an often-heard argument was that Muslims should actively try to counter “unjustified prejudices”. Muslims had to show that they “disavow terrorism and those who express joy about the American casualties” in order to “prevent Muslims from being lumped together with terrorists”.¹³ In these cases, the apparent intention was to encourage Muslims to change the negative image of their minority group and to gain trust from the dominant majority. Other opinion makers and politicians openly expressed mistrust of Muslims in their demands, accusing them of being “too silent” and suggesting that many Muslims secretly supported violent extremism.¹⁴ This suspicion never disappeared. In June 2014, the Liberal Conservative MP Halbe Zijlstra, for example, remarked: “Perhaps it is about time that people who are affiliated to Islam, such as imams and Muslims, explicitly say that ISIS is not Islam. If they don’t, they implicitly indicate that ISIS indeed equals Islam.”¹⁵

After the Madrid train bombings and the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, a new argument was raised, namely that Dutch Muslims should play a positive role in counter-radicalisation. As a result of the sudden concern with ‘home-grown terrorism’, government officials across Europe began to develop counter-radicalisation policies with the aim to build partnerships between Muslim community organisations, police forces and local authorities in order to fight an ideological battle against violent extremism and to identify individuals who were thought to be radicalising.¹⁶ As early as April 2004, the Conservative Liberal Minister of Immigration and Integration Rita Verdonk paid an official visit to the Al Kabir mosque in Amsterdam and

Nederland”, *NRC Handelsblad*, October 20, 2001; Ety, Elsbeth, “Bescherm de afvallige”, *NRC Handelsblad*, February 1, 2003, 27; Scheffer, Paul, “Op zoek naar bouwstenen voor integratie”, *NRC Handelsblad*, April 3, 2004, 13; Sanders, Stephan, “Inspectie”, *Vrij Nederland*, July 30, 2005; Hilterman, Karin, “De moslims spreken hun afkeuring veel te zacht uit”, *Brabants Dagblad*, November 12, 2005; Goossens, Jerry, “Waarom zijn moslims niet anti-IS”, *AD/Algemeen Dagblad*, September 24, 2014, 6.

12 Ephimenco, Sylvain, “Waar blijft het moslimse antwoord?” *Trouw*, March 20, 2004, 37.

13 Mulder, “Een kwestie van beschaving”.

14 See, for example: Vuijsje, “Osama Bin Laden”; Drenth, Greetje, “Begrip”, *Dagblad van het Noorden*, September 21, 2001; Ephimenco, “Open brief”.

15 Emili, Mustafa, “Neemt u afstand van de liberalen?”, *Het Parool*, June 21, 2014, 43. Original source: <https://www.geenstijl.nl/search/?keyword=halbe+zijlstra&page=2>, accessed 5 September 2017.

16 Kundnani, Arun, “Radicalisation”, pp. 6, 15 and 20.

demanded that “imams, mosques and Muslim parents ... speak up against terrorism”. In denouncing terrorism, Muslims could supposedly take away its religious legitimacy. In addition, she summoned them to hinder recruitment attempts by jihadists in Dutch mosques and to share information with the authorities about the radicalisation of Dutch Muslim youth.¹⁷ During the following years, government officials and opinion makers repeatedly urged Muslims to raise their voices against terrorism—both in the public sphere and “within their own community”.¹⁸

Those who urge Muslims to condemn violent extremism are not necessarily those who have the strongest anti-Muslim sentiments. It is important to note that Geert Wilders and like-minded people never ask Muslims to condemn violent extremism. They argue that Muslims are a danger to society and that Islam inherently promotes violence, and it is not in their interest to let Muslims prove the opposite. Furthermore, it is not only non-Muslims who ask Muslims to make collective statements against atrocities committed in the name of Islam. Since the 9/11 attacks, a number of prominent politicians and opinion makers who are Muslim have also made such calls. They seem to be deeply concerned with the devastating effects of violent extremism, while they also wish to change the dominant, negative image of Muslims and their religion.¹⁹

3 The Problem with a ‘Simple Request’

Regardless of people’s intentions, the pressure exerted on Muslims to explicitly condemn violent extremism reflects the unequal power relations between Muslim minorities and the dominant majority, while simultaneously

17 “Verdonk wil van...”, *Het Parool*, April 14, 2004, 2; “Verdonk: Niet elke moslim is terrorist”, *AD/Algemeen Dagblad*, April 14, 2004, 3; “Verdonk in moskee: samen tegen terrorisme”, *de Volkskrant*, April 14, 2004, 3.

18 See, for example: Scheffer, Paul, “Moslims mogen niet meer zwijgen”, *Het Parool*, November 3, 2004, 15; “Moslims doen te weinig tegen terreur”, *Trouw*, September 2, 2005, 3; “Debat onder moslims over radicalisering essentieel”, *Trouw*, February 4, 2014, 8; Ruiter, Jan Jaap de, and Ibrahim Wijbenga, “Snijd extremisme echt de pas af”, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, April 22, 2016, 16-17.

19 See, for example: “Moslims krijgen na vrijdaggebed speldje voor vrede”, *ANP*, October 17, 2001; “Marokkanen eensgezind in afschuw over aanslag”, *de Volkskrant*, November 3, 2004, 3; Marcouch, Ahmed, “Moslims, wees je ervan bewust dat velen bang zijn voor je religie”, *de Volkskrant*, June 15, 2010, 20; Wijbenga, Ibrahim, “Nederlandse moslims, neem stelling tegen de jihadististen”, *NRC Handelsblad*, February 18, 2014; Dijkgraaf, Jan, “Kudo’s voor Aboutaleb”, *Spits*, October 6, 2014, 6.

reinforcing these unequal power relations. Muslims (as well as non-Muslims) have criticised the often-repeated call on many occasions, asking why Muslims are collectively held accountable for crimes committed by a very small number of Muslims. Many among them also point to the unequal treatment of Muslims, arguing that members of the dominant majority are never asked to denounce violent crimes committed by people with similar beliefs or a similar cultural background.²⁰ Take for example the words of opinion maker Hassnae Bouazza in *de Volkskrant*, short after the Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris in January 2015:

I felt deeply abhorred by the attacks in Paris, but I also thought: “There we go again.” I have nothing to do with these terrorists, nothing. My kinship with these people is forced upon me, because if I don’t join the protests, I am apparently on their side. Because I am a Muslim. This reveals a deep sense of mistrust. [...] It is never enough. Each time there are new hoops that Muslims have to jump through. Do I hold all Norwegians responsible for what Anders Behring Breivik has done? Where were the mass demonstrations against right-wing extremist violence at that time?²¹

Documentary film maker Abdelkarim El Fassi and Rotterdam city councillor Nourdin El Ouali even made a (staged) movie clip titled “Children Apologise for Terrorism”, in which adults force young children to “say sorry” for acts of terror committed by people who “look just like them”. The clip ends with the text: “Guilt by association divides us. #Let’s unite.”²²

Indeed, the call reifies the notion of a global Muslim community, and suggests that violent extremism is directly relevant to all members of that community. It is one thing to ask religious leaders to condemn violence committed by community members—especially when the perpetrator tries to legitimise crimes through a religious discourse. It is quite another to expect ordinary Dutch Muslims to mobilise in large numbers and to make explicit statements in the public sphere whenever any Muslim commits a crime in the name of his or her religion. The Dutch term *afstand nemen* (to take distance) particularly

20 See, for example: “Marokkanen nemen afstand van feestende ‘kinderen’”, *Rotterdams Dagblad*, September 21, 2001, 721; Benzakour, Mohammed, “Het zijn geen normale tijden”, *NRC Handelsblad*, May 1, 2004, 15; “Media doen aan moslim pesten”, *Eindhovens Dagblad*, June 23, 2007, 36; “We moeten ons steeds bewijzen”, *Het Parool*, June 21, 2014.

21 “Aan Aboutaleb is helemaal niets verbroederends”, *de Volkskrant*, January 12, 2015, 14.

22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYyNi15IF8E>, accessed 7 September 2017. The movie was launched on YouTube on 5 February 2015 and received wide media coverage, in part because of its controversial form.

suggests that Muslims have to actively create a distance between themselves and the perpetrators by explicitly denouncing terrorism.

Moreover, Bouazza has a point regarding the attacks by Anders Behring Breivik in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011. The Norwegian terrorist tried to legitimise his killing of 77 people through his Christian beliefs and his right-wing extremist ideology. He also indicated that he had been inspired by the Dutch right-wing populist Geert Wilders, among others. Geert Wilders was asked to denounce the attacks, which he eventually did (he called the perpetrator a “madman” and did not discuss any ideological similarities).²³ However, the events did not result in the equivalent of what happens after so-called Muslim terrorism; namely a situation where all right-wing oriented people with a Christian background, varying from conservative liberals to neo-Nazis, are repeatedly asked to “unambiguously condemn” right-wing extremist violence.

This overemphasising of ‘community’ with regard to Muslims, while taking for granted the individuality of members of the dominant majority, is a typical aspect of the unequal power relations between majority and minority groups.²⁴ Furthermore, the often-repeated call to denounce violent extremism puts a heavy burden on the shoulders of Muslims. It makes a minority responsible for eliminating the prejudices and suspicions of the dominant majority, while apparently it is the dominant majority that defines whether Muslims have ‘sufficiently’ condemned violent extremism. This is a difficult task, because ‘bad’ members of a minority group are easily taken as representative for the group as a whole, while ‘good’ members of a minority group are often seen as ‘positive exceptions’.²⁵ Moreover, the suspicion that many Muslims secretly support violent extremism can never be disproven. As will be elaborated, Dutch Muslims have spoken up against violent extremism on numerous occasions during the last 15 years. Nevertheless, there is little acknowledgement in Dutch public debate for the statements that Muslims have already made, and it seems that the bar is raised time and again. For example, the sociologist Ruud Koopmans remarked in an interview in January 2017, “It bothers me that there is never any massive mobilisation of Muslims after a terrorist attack.”²⁶

23 “Breivik lijkt Wilders te bewonderen”, *NRC Handelsblad*, July 25, 2011.

24 Elias, Norbert, and John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems* (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1965), pp. 8-20; Hall, Stuart, “Introduction”, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall (London: Sage, 1997) 1-11, pp. 10

25 *Ibidem*.

26 “Het Westen moet zich beter weren tegen de islam”, *AD/Algemeen Dagblad*, January 4, 2017, 8-9.

The burden becomes perhaps even heavier when ordinary Muslims are asked to “raise their voice” against terrorists and to de-legitimise violence committed in the name of religion. Although it may seem as if Muslims are positively included in a collective effort against terrorism, such demands suggest that Muslims have a special responsibility to protect Dutch society against other Muslims, instead of their being recognised as citizens who are entitled to protection against terrorism by the state. In any case, it is questionable whether those who commit acts of terror in the name of Islam really care what other Muslims think of them, especially since most victims of Al Qaeda and ISIS are themselves Muslims.

Rather than being a means to counter prejudices against Muslims, or a viable way to counter violent extremism, demands on Muslims to denounce violent extremism can better be seen as a citizenship test, where people who already hold formal citizenship have to keep proving their loyalty in order to become accepted in society. In the Netherlands and elsewhere in Western Europe, concerns about Muslims as a potential security threat are usually conflated with concerns about the ‘failed’ integration of Muslim immigrants. Muslims’ willingness to denounce acts of terror is directly connected with their loyalty to the Dutch nation-state and to Western society in general.²⁷ It is striking that Muslims are seldom asked to condemn attacks that take place outside Europe or the US, and that many of those who urge Muslims to denounce violent extremism explicitly connect this with the inclusion of Muslims in Dutch society.²⁸ Thus, the call is also part and parcel of a wider discourse in which Muslims are construed as ‘includable outsiders’ who are ‘not yet’ fully accepted in society.²⁹ In order to become accepted as ‘normal’, they continually have to present themselves as peaceful and loyal citizens. Paradoxically, in order to do so they have to speak as Muslims, which is precisely the part of their identity that supposedly sets them apart from the norm.

4 Securitisation and Interpellation

All in all, the often-repeated call on Muslims to denounce violent extremism can perhaps best be explained through the Althusserian concept of

27 A similar observation has been made for the UK in: Brown, “Contesting”, p. 176.

28 See, for example: Scheffer, “Moslims mogen niet meer zwijgen”; Zon, Hans van, “10 Jaar na ‘Van Gogh’ gaan ook moslims mee de straat op”, *AD/Algemeen Dagblad*, January 10, 2015, 12-13.

29 Schinkel, Willem, “The Virtualization of Citizenship”, *Critical Sociology* 36 (2) (2010): 265-283, pp. 271-272.

‘interpellation’. Didier Fassin explains interpellation as a particular situation in which people are addressed by an authority, for example when they are hailed by a police officer. Through the specific way in which people are addressed, they are informed about how they are seen by those in charge, and they are assigned a particular place in the social order. In his ethnography of urban policing in the *banlieues* of Paris, Fassin notes how the repeated harassment of ethnic minority youth by the police reinforces a general sense of mistrust of these youth among the French population, which then again legitimises the behaviour of the police officers. The young people in his study, for whom police questioning has become a regular part of daily life, either silently endure these procedures because they feel powerless in the face of the police, or run away as soon as the police approach them. Either way, they implicitly confirm the social order.³⁰

Somewhat similarly, the call on Muslims to denounce violent extremism does not eliminate mistrust, but rather reinforces a ‘gaze of suspicion’ towards Muslims—on the part not only of the state, but also of ordinary members of the dominant majority. This suspicion is not only directed at pious believers, but also at virtually everyone who ‘looks’ Muslim on the basis of their name or outward appearance.³¹ The very fact that Muslims are asked to demonstrate their peacefulness already reveals that they are seen as a specific group of people who cannot fully be trusted. This often-repeated demand reinforces the common association made between Muslims and acts of terror, which then again legitimises the demand that Muslims make explicit statements against violent extremism.

This has far-reaching consequences for Dutch people with a Muslim background. Many of them—including teenagers—experience being interrogated by colleagues, neighbours, classmates and even teachers. Umar Mirza recounts in an interview in *Spits* in 2008 how the 9/11 attacks were a turning point in his life. Being the only Muslim in his high school class, he was asked to explain how Muslims could commit such a crime:

As a Muslim, already from a very young age you have to have an opinion about everything. You are being asked about it. If there is an attack, or a

30 Fassin, Didier, *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), pp. xvii-xxi.

31 This is one of the reasons why some scholars speak of a ‘racialisation’ of Muslims: Meer, Nasar, “Racialization of Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36 (3) (2013): 385-398; Koning, Martijn de, “‘You Need to Present a Counter-Message’: The Racialization of Dutch Muslims and Anti-Islamophobia Initiatives”, *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, 5 (2016): 170-189.

disaster strikes somewhere, people want to know what you think of it. [...] Also my economy teacher tried to debate with me all the time. At that time it was disturbing sometimes, but in hindsight it was useful to me. I also wanted to know why the attacks had happened. I started looking for answers. [...] People should realise that Muslims were also really shocked at that time. Most of them do not want to have anything to do with terrorism. [...] Why do I have to account for the behaviour of people who happen to share the same faith?³²

Furthermore, questions such as “What do you think of terrorism?” often come up in interviews with Muslims—regardless of whether the interviewee leads a controversial youth organisation,³³ or whether he is a Turkish-Dutch sportsman who has just received an award for his long-term volunteer work at a local sports club.³⁴ This leads to absurd situations, such as when the Moroccan-Dutch actor Fahd Larhzaoui is being interviewed about his new theatre production, which is about his coming out as a homosexual. After a while, the interviewer asks Larhzaoui about an incident that happened during one of his performances. Shortly after the Charlie Hebdo shootings, a man in the audience suddenly stood up during the show and asked Larhzaoui whether he condemned the recent events in Paris. Larhzaoui tells the interviewer: “I thought, is he really saying this? Do I hear this right? I was flabbergasted.” The interviewer asks: “Were you surprised that he asked this in the theatre, or that he asked it in the first place?” Upon which the actor says:

The very fact that someone asks me such a question, as if I have anything to do with it. How can I denounce something that I cannot identify with at all? Of course it is terrible what has happened, but how stupid can you be to ask me to denounce that? The beautiful thing is that another man stood up and said: “If *Feyenoord* football hooligans break down the city, will you also denounce that?” I thought that was so great. The whole audience began to applaud. I thought: “Oh man, I am not alone here.”³⁵

32 “Wijblijvenhier.nl geeft ‘gastarbeiders’ een stem”, *Spits*, January 15, 2008, 2.

33 “Het interview: Mohammed Cheppih”, *Het Parool*, April 26, 2003, 14-19.

34 “Ik ben heel graag een voorbeeld voor anderen”, *De Twentsche Courant/Tubantia*, December 6, 2014.

35 “Ik dacht: ik ben de enige”, *Vrij Nederland*, February 14, 2015, 14.

The interviewer then asks: “How did you answer that guy?” and keeps insisting until the actor feels forced to spell out his stance: “I think ISIS is horrible. [...] What ISIS does is not my Islam. It is not my religion.”³⁶

This exemplifies the fact that the call on Muslims to condemn violent extremism leaves no neutral position for those being addressed. If they keep quiet, their silence is easily taken as a sign of support for violent extremism. But in order to answer the call, they have to emphasise their Muslim identity and make that identity relevant to violent extremism, thereby reinforcing the idea that this is a ‘Muslim’ problem. The more they try to speak ‘as human beings’ rather than as Muslims,³⁷ the more difficult it becomes to make their voices heard. Ironically, to some extent this is even the case when they openly criticise the call on Muslims to condemn violent extremism: again, they have to step up as Muslims and relate to a debate about violence. This is a typical aspect of interpellation: when Muslims decide to ‘talk back’, their constituency and agency is already informed by the terms in which they are addressed.³⁸ The following sections provide an analysis of statements made by Muslims against violent extremism, and the responses of the non-Muslim majority to these statements.

5 Muslims Condemning Violent Extremism

Since the 9/11 attacks, Dutch Muslims have made countless statements against terrorism and other forms of brutal violence committed in the name of Islam. Despite the fact that many Muslims feel stigmatised by the often-repeated call, newspaper archives are full of reports in which Muslims condemn violent extremism, and these are probably still only the tip of the iceberg: many statements made by Muslims have not received any press coverage at all. Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, representatives of all large mosque organisations in the Netherlands condemned the attacks through formal statements in the press, officially representing hundreds of thousands of mosque visitors.³⁹

36 Ibid.

37 See, for example: “Woorden bestrijd je niet met kogels”, *AD/Rotterdams Dagblad*, January 9, 2015.

38 Bracke, Sarah, “Subjects of Debate: Secular and Sexual Exceptionalism, and Muslim Women in the Netherlands”, *Feminist Review*, 98 (2011): 28-46, pp. 29; Fassin, *Enforcing Order*, pp. xvii-xxi.

39 “Nederlandse moslimorganisaties wijzen terrorisme af”, *ANP*, September 13, 2001; “Europa herdenkt slachtoffers WTC en Pentagon”, *de Volkskrant*, September 14, 2001, 3; “Nederland massaal drie minuten stil”, *Het Parool*, September 14, 2001, 5.

Since then, they have kept doing so after every terrorist attack in Europe.⁴⁰ In October 2001, the Islamic women's organisation *Al Nisa* distributed 5,000 badges bearing the text "Peace and Dialogue" to various mosques throughout the Netherlands, so that Muslims could wear them after the Friday prayers.⁴¹

After the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004, numerous Muslims took to the streets in a number of cities. Some of them joined demonstrations that were organised by others, such as the 'Noise Protest' on Dam Square in Amsterdam.⁴² Other groups of Muslims organised their own protests across various cities.⁴³ A Moroccan-Dutch youth association in Amsterdam started a poster campaign and an online petition, protesting against the murder under the heading *Extremisme—Dit Pikken Wij Niet* (Extremism—We Do Not Tolerate This).⁴⁴ Even small and unknown mosque associations in Dutch villages wrote letters to newspapers to make it clear that they abhorred the murder and that it could not be based on Islam.⁴⁵ During the following years, many Islamic organisations actively cooperated with the authorities against radicalisation.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, outside the Netherlands, influential Islamic scholars issued fatwas against suicide bombings and other forms of violence against civilians.⁴⁷

When ISIS emerged and a number of Dutch Muslims began to join the so-called 'jihad' in Syria, many Dutch Muslims once again raised their voices. They did so especially after large terrorist attacks such as the Charlie Hebdo shootings, the Bataclan massacre in Paris on 13 November 2015, and the attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016. Some organised peace manifestations,⁴⁸ while young Muslims mostly turned to social media to send out their message. As early as September 2014, two female Muslim law students started a Dutch version of the British Twitter campaign *#NotInMyName*, in which they directly

40 See, for example: "Moskeeën veroordelen aanslag Parijs", *ANP*, January 7, 2015; "Verslagenheid groot onder moslims", *ANP*, November 14, 2015.

41 "Moslims krijgen na vrijdaggebed speldje voor vrede", *ANP*, October 17, 2001.

42 "Alle kleuren en stromingen vullen de Dam in protest", *de Volkskrant*, November 3, 2004, 2.

43 Huysing, Renske, and Wouter Smilde, "Moslims spreken massaal hun afschuw uit", *Trouw*, November 4, 2004, 3; Roggeveen, Leo, "Marokkanen uiten afschuw over moord", *Haagsche Courant*, 8 November 2004.

44 "Dit pikken wij ...", *Het Parool*, November 9, 2004; "Marokkanen protesteren op de fiets tegen extremisme", *Trouw*, November 10, 2004, 3.

45 See, for example: Es-Sabri, Abdel, "Theo van Gogh", *Haagsche Courant*, November 13, 2004.

46 See, for example: "Imam geeft extremist aan", *NRC Handelsblad*, September 5, 2005, 6.

47 See, for example: "Terrorisme en islam niet te verenigen", *Het Parool*, March 15, 2008, 11; "Nederlandse moslims: fatwa tegen terreur", *Trouw*, March 15, 2010.

48 "Wat zien onze jongeren toch in IS?", *Trouw*, October 8, 2014, 3; "Rotterdam herdenkt in al zijn diversiteit", *Trouw*, November 17, 2015, 3; Zon, Hans van, "Ook moslims laten luid hun stem horen", *AD/Algemeen Dagblad*, March 24, 2016, 2.

stood against ISIS.⁴⁹ The night after the Charlie Hebdo shootings on 7 January 2015, two Muslim men and one woman started the campaign #*NietMijnIslam* (Not My Islam). They invited everyone to use the Facebook page or the Twitter hashtag to leave a message against ISIS.⁵⁰ In most cases, the motivations for these initiatives seem to have been mixed. From the newspaper articles, it appears that the initiative-takers wanted to express their emotions regarding the atrocities, confront the perpetrators with their disapproval, and at the same time counter negative images of Muslims and Islam in Dutch society.

Interestingly, Muslims did not only express themselves directly after a terrorist attack or when they were asked for their opinion by a journalist. Many Muslims also made unsolicited statements when there was no immediate reason. For example, in October 2007, funeral prayers were offered in a mosque in Amsterdam for a 16-year old Moroccan-Dutch boy who had been stabbed to death by a 14-year old schoolmate. A few journalists were present during the ceremony. In his speech, the imam reportedly said to the people present there:

Violence is never a solution. Islam condemns every form of violence and that does not only apply to a bombing or a terrorist attack, but also to this form of violence. The lesson we can draw here is: we cannot deal with each other in this way.⁵¹

The fact that the imam took the opportunity to make a statement against violent extremism shows the far-reaching effects of the interpellation described in the previous section. The fact that terrorism had to be mentioned in the sermon for the funeral of a crime victim who happened to be Muslim is indicative of the pressure exerted on Muslims to clarify their stance. At the same time, it may also reveal a fear on the side of the imam that peaceful Muslim voices are not sufficiently heard in public debate.

6 Islam as a Religion of Peace

When taking a closer look at the statements made by Muslims who condemn violent extremism—whether in public speeches, opinion pieces or interviews—it is noteworthy that Islam is almost always presented as a religion that is inherently peaceful. It is not surprising that many Muslims explicitly say

49 “#Notinmyname”, *NRC Handelsblad*, September 2014, 6.

50 “Nederlandse moslims in actie: #nietmijnislam”, *de Volkskrant*, January 9, 2015, 7.

51 “Moskee vol bij gebed Youssef”, *Het Parool*, October 15, 2007, 14.

that “terrorism cannot be justified in Islam”, or that “Islam does not allow violence against innocent people”.⁵² Such statements do not only reflect a widely shared opinion among Muslims across the world;⁵³ they also serve an obvious purpose, namely to delegitimise terrorism and to counter accusations from non-Muslims that Islam promotes terrorism. However, many Muslims go a step further, arguing that “terrorism has nothing to do with Islam”, or that “terrorism has no religion”.⁵⁴ Thus, in response to the dominant framing of terrorism as a theological problem, these Muslims claim that terrorism is anything but a religious problem and deny the possibility of religion playing any role in violent crimes committed by extremist Muslims.⁵⁵ In other cases, terrorists are discursively expelled from the imagined Muslim community, such as when Muslims argue that “a real Muslim cannot be a terrorist”, or that “someone who commits such a crime cannot call himself a Muslim”.⁵⁶ These sorts of statements entail highly essentialist representations of Islam. The religion is presented as a clearly delineated, historically stable monolith. Specific people, beliefs or practices are then either ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ of Islam.

Some Muslims even argue that there is no place for violence in Islam at all. They state that “Islam condemns violence and aggression” and that it “preaches peace, compassion, and justice”.⁵⁷ Some of them explain that “Islam means

52 See, for example: “Nederland is drie minuten stil voor slachtoffers aanslagen”, *ANP*, September 14, 2001; “Bekeerd tot de islam”, *Het Parool*, September 22, 2001, 9; “Moslimorganisaties spreken afschuw uit”, *De Telegraaf*, November 3, 2004, 8; “De imam legt de soera’s heel anders uit”, *Reformatorisch Dagblad*, February 18, 2015, 2.

53 <http://www.gallup.com/poll/157067/views-violence.aspx>, accessed August 16, 2017; <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/09/10/muslim-publics-share-concerns-about-extremist-groups/>, accessed August 16, 2017.; <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/17/in-nations-with-significant-muslim-populations-much-disdain-for-isis/>, accessed August 16, 2017.

54 See, for example: “Nederlandse moslims bang aangekeken te worden op aanslag”, *De Telegraaf*, September 14, 2001. “Zondaar doden is een zonde”, *NRC Handelsblad*, November 3, 2004, 1; “Moskee keurt geweld af”, *AD/Utrechts Nieuwsblad*, January 10, 2015, 31.

55 It may very well be true that terrorism cannot be legitimised by reference to Islam in the way it is believed and practised by the vast majority of Muslims. However, if a terrorist bases his violent acts fully or partially on his religious convictions and when he or she is convinced that this is Islam, it seems odd to take religion completely out of the picture.

56 See, for example: “Kleine terreur”, *NRC Handelsblad*, September 22, 2001, 30; “Nogmaals: we zijn tegen terrorisme”, *de Volkskrant*, March 16, 2004, 3; “Zondaar doden is een zonde”, 1; Siddiqui, Safeer, “Terroristen zijn geen moslims”, *NRC Handelsblad*, July 2, 2014, 9; “Moslims boos en bang na aanslagen”, *De Stentor*, March 23, 2016, 9.

57 See, for example: “Dienst probeert ‘geloofskloof’ na ramp Amerika te dichten”, *Rotterdams Dagblad*, September 24, 2001, 721; “Imams prediken vrede en liefde”, *De Telegraaf*, November 6, 2004; “Imams: geen kogels, maar woorden”, *de Volkskrant*, November 6, 2004, 3; “We moeten ons nu uitspreken tegen djihadisme”, *Trouw*, August 23, 2014.

peace”.⁵⁸ Others paraphrase the Qur’anic verse 5:32 and say: “If you kill one man, it is as if you have killed all mankind, and if you save one man, it is as if you have saved all mankind.”⁵⁹ There has always been much debate about the rules regarding violence in Islam, both among clergy and among secular scholars of Islamic studies. However, as far as something like a classical opinion can be discerned, it is that violence is allowed in the context of a ‘justified war’, and that warfare is subject to a set of ethical guidelines that include a prohibition on the killing of civilians.⁶⁰ This is not to say that the statements of Dutch Muslims about Islam as a religion of peace are ‘incorrect’. However, it does mean that, in their attempts to counter representations of Islam as a violent religion, some Dutch Muslims go to great lengths to emphasise peace and nonviolence in their interpretations of sacred texts.

Only a minority of those who condemn violent extremism in the newspaper articles studied express themselves in a more nuanced and less essentialist way, but this minority is growing. More and more Muslims argue that Islam does not promote terrorism, while simultaneously acknowledging that a particular, “distorted” interpretation of the Qur’an can be used to legitimise violent extremism, especially if certain verses are “taken out of context”.⁶¹ A different example of a more nuanced response is the social media campaign *#NotMyIslam*. In using this hashtag, Muslims do not claim that terrorism has nothing to do with Islam. What they say is that the so-called ‘Islamic State’ does not represent the Islam that they stand for.

58 See, for example: “Mini-interview: ‘Dit heeft niets met het geloof te maken’”, *Brabants Dagblad*, November 5, 2004.

59 “Moslims tonen medeleven na vrijdagmiddaggebed”, *Dagblad van het Noorden*, September 15, 2001; “Mini-interview”; “In de moskee radicaliseer je niet”, *Het Parool*, November 10, 2014; “Geweld hoort niet bij islam”, *de Gelderlander*, January 12, 2015, 3; “De nasleep van ‘Brussel’”, *Nederlands Dagblad*, March 24, 2016, 22-23. The verse Q 5:32 paraphrased here actually reads: “We decreed for the Children of Israel that whoever kills a human being, unless for manslaughter or for causing corruption on earth, it is as if he has killed all mankind, and whoever saves the life of one, it is as if he has saved all mankind”, apparently allowing lethal violence in very specific circumstances.

60 Asad, Talal, *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. 11-12 and 112-113.

61 See, for example: “Nu samen een vuist maken”, *de Gelderlander*, October 1, 2014, 3; “Het kalifaat als droom”, *De Gooi- en Eemlander*, December 20, 2014; “Charlie Hebdo: een legitiem doelwit?”, *NRC Handelsblad*, January 9, 2015, 6.

7 Competing Essentialisms of Islam

As mentioned above, statements made by Muslims against violent extremism seldom receive broad media coverage. Even if such statements do appear in the news, they rarely make it to the front page, and they are only sporadically acknowledged by politicians and opinion makers. However, as far as any attention is being paid, essentialist representations of Islam as a religion of peace are increasingly criticised. A typical example is that of opinion maker Sander van Walsum, who remarked short after the emergence of ISIS:

So far, there has not been any credible rejection of Muslim terrorism from within the faith community. [...] All the time there is this ritual assurance that Muslim terrorism has nothing to do with Islam. However, this can no longer suffice. As long as terrorists claim to rely on a pure Islam, their terror has everything to do with Islam—whether the moderates like it or not. Those who really want to denounce Islamic terrorism should wonder why Islam and terrorism have become so much interwoven.⁶²

Van Walsum thus accuses Muslims of taking the easy way out: they neither engage in self-criticism nor make serious efforts to speak up against violent extremism. However, this is a very ungenerous interpretation, and the essentialist statements made by Muslims should be understood within the context in which they are expressed. In their study of two Turkish Muslim organisations in the Netherlands and their written statements about terrorism, the social psychologists Ali Aslan Yildiz and Maykel Verkuyten observe that both organisations draw a boundary between Muslims and terrorists, defining terrorism as outside of Islam. They analyse this boundary-drawing as an attempt by a stigmatised minority group to maintain a positive collective self-image and to define an identity that is morally acceptable in Dutch society.⁶³ They show that positive essentialisms of Islam are a common response to the negative essentialisms of Islam that circulate in Dutch public debate.⁶⁴ The fact that essentialisms provoke competing essentialisms can also be observed among Muslim women in the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe, who often

62 Walsum, Sander van, "Islam en terrorisme", *de Volkskrant*, August 21, 2014, 29.

63 Yildiz and Verkuyten, "We Are Not Terrorists". The authors also observe that some Muslims within these organisations resort to conspiracy theories about false flag attacks in order to deny that the perpetrators are Muslims. However, in the newspaper articles studied for this research project, such responses were virtually absent.

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 362, 374-375.

present Islam as inherently woman-friendly in response to stereotypical representations of Islam as a religion that oppresses women.⁶⁵

But there is more to it. Muslims who claim that “there is no place for terrorism in Islam” or that “a terrorist cannot be a real Muslim” do precisely what they are often asked to do. In public debate, “peaceful” or “moderate” Muslims are repeatedly urged to “reconquer their faith from those who pervert it,”⁶⁶ to “kick terrorists out of Islam”⁶⁷ and to “excommunicate them from the *ummah*.”⁶⁸ Such encouragements are problematic in themselves: declaring another Muslim to be a nonbeliever and even an enemy of Islam (*takfir*) is a practice that is commonly associated with extremist movements, and is one that most Muslims would normally abstain from. Nevertheless, drawing a boundary between terrorists and ‘real’ Muslims can be seen as a drastic way to oppose terrorism and take away its purported religious legitimacy. It is not simply a form of dis-identification.

Besides, Muslims who condemn violent extremism and who want their voices to be heard have to deal with ‘media affordances’: the potential for action that is enabled and at the same time constrained by media while being used by specific groups or individuals.⁶⁹ It is common knowledge that there is little room for nuances in mainstream news media, let alone for lengthy theological discussions about the role of violence in Islam. The shorter and clearer the message, the better.⁷⁰ For those who want to counter the popular idea that terrorism directly results from Islam, it is hard to move beyond the sound-bite that “Islam is a religion of peace”.

65 Es, Margaretha A. van, *Stereotypes and Self-Representations of Women with a Muslim Background* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Es, Margaretha A. van, “Norwegian Muslim Women, Diffused Islamic Feminism and the Politics of Belonging”, *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 29 (2) (2016): 117-133.

66 Krabbe, Theo, “De gijzeling van de islam”, *Dagblad Tubantia/Twentsche Courant*, November 7, 2004, 5; “Terreurbestrijding”, *Trouw*, September 13, 2005, 10.

67 Ephimenco, “Waar blijft het moslimse antwoord?”, 37.

68 Vuijsje, “Osama Bin Laden”; Rubing, H., “Fatwa”, *Het Parool*, October 27, 2001, 21; Joosten, Pierre, “Bezorgde moslim”, *Trouw*, July 11, 2005, 6; Loonstra, Bert, “Kom met fatwa tegen IS”, *Nederlands Dagblad*, October 27, 2014.

69 Siapera, Eugenia, and Mariangela Veikou, “Social Media Affordances and Migrant Political Practices”, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 12 (4) (2013): 100-119, p. 101.

70 Dijkman, Annebregt, and Zoë Papaikonomou, *Heb je een boze moslim voor mij? [Do You Have an Angry Muslim for Me?]* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018), pp. 61-78.

8 Muslim Self-Representations as a Performative Performance

When Dutch Muslims present their religion as peaceful and nonviolent in order to oppose terrorism and/or to find acceptance in Dutch society, this does not mean that these self-representations are 'false' or merely 'strategic'. Instead, such self-representations should be seen as a 'performative performance', where the self is produced through a process of repetitive representation while producing those representations.⁷¹ It seems that Dutch Muslims reject the idea that Islam promotes violence first and foremost because it does not correspond with their own beliefs. They then emphasise the importance of nonviolence and peaceful coexistence in Islam in order to prove the dominant image wrong, which in turn entails a reinforcement of those aspects of their religion. The self can thus not be separated from the way it is represented, and the 'real' cannot be distinguished from the 'strategic'.

Yildiz and Verkuyten note that the two Turkish Muslim organisations they studied did not only write that 'true' Islam is about peaceful coexistence, but also expressed this through their activities. These organisations wanted to demonstrate the 'real face of Islam' in organising activities that encouraged intercultural dialogue and civic participation in Dutch society.⁷² Similar examples can be found in the newspaper articles studied. When Geert Wilders announced his anti-Islam movie *Fitna*, Dutch Muslims did not start violent riots against the movie. Instead, many Muslim organisations defended freedom of speech and invited Wilders to enter into debate with them.⁷³ The Dutch Muslim Broadcasting Service (NMO) even offered Wilders their facilities to premiere his movie, which he refused.⁷⁴

The fact that Dutch Muslims are continually asked to condemn violent extremism means that they are constantly urged to reflect upon how 'violent' or 'peaceful' their religion is, and what it means to be a good Muslim and a good Dutch citizen at the same time. Whereas a small but radical minority of Dutch Muslims uses brutal violence to obtain its goals, it seems that a much larger group of Muslims increasingly emphasises peaceful coexistence and nonviolence in Islam. This is not to say that public debate about violent extremism solely determines how Dutch Muslims think about violence in Islam, or to

71 Butler, Judith, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Theatre Journal*, 40 (4) (1988): 519-531, p. 528.

72 Yildiz and Verkuyten, "We Are Not Terrorists", p. 375.

73 "Film Wilders", *NRC Handelsblad*, March 28, 2008, 1; "Haat of desinteresse", *de Volkskrant*, April 1, 2008, 11.

74 "Wilders ziet niets in uitzenden 'Fitna' door moslimomroep", *Provinciale Zeeuwse Courant*, March 25, 2008, 4.

suggest that Islamic theologies of nonviolence are a ‘new’ and ‘Western’ phenomenon.⁷⁵ However, it does mean that the interpellation of Muslims entails a process where not only the self-perceptions of Muslims, but also their religious beliefs are continuously being negotiated and reconstructed.

9 Conclusion

This article has shown how the securitisation of Islam and Muslim communities has put growing pressure on Muslim minorities in Europe to present themselves as peaceful and loyal citizens. The often-repeated call on Muslims to denounce violent extremism can be seen as a form of interpellation—by the state as well as by the dominant majority—that does not eliminate mistrust, but rather legitimises a gaze of suspicion towards Muslims. This clearly feeds into Muslim perceptions of what Islam ‘really’ is.

Since the 9/11 attacks, Dutch Muslims have responded to this call in different ways. Many of them have chosen not to respond at all. Some may have denounced violent extremism in private interactions with non-Muslims. Others have openly criticised the call, for example in interviews and opinion pieces in mainstream news media, or through a YouTube video. Some of them even refuse to condemn terrorism as a matter of principle, because they do not want to be held accountable for crimes they have not committed. Others have expressed their grief about acts of terror, but deliberately did so *as human beings*, not as Muslims.

But the research results show above all that Muslims have spoken up against violent extremism much more often than is commonly acknowledged. Often, but not always, this resulted in essentialist statements about Islam as a “religion of peace” in which there is “no place for violence”. Such statements were provoked by at least equally essentialist representations of Islam in Dutch public debate as a violent religion, and were further encouraged by the need for short and clear statements in mainstream news media and the often-repeated call on Muslims to “excommunicate” terrorists from Islam. In short, Muslim interventions in public debate about violent extremism do not only result from, but also contribute to the continuous reconstruction of religious beliefs.

75 Hermansen, Marcia, “Muslim Theologians of Nonviolence”, in *Religion and Violence: Muslim and Christian Theological and Pedagogical Reflections*, edited by Ednan Aslan and Marcia Hermansen (Wiesbaden: Springer 2017), 147–162.

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