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**PORTRAYING ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS:
RECONSTRUCTION OF MUSLIM IDENTITY IN MULTICULTURAL
SOCIETY**



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SOCIETY**

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Abstract

The eagerness of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands to have education based on their culture and religion can be understood as an effort to protect their culture and identity as Muslims. Their effort to establish Islamic school in this country, even though guaranteed by the State's Constitution, on practical level however, is very often difficult to materialize. Reaction from outside Muslim community in Dutch society is often negative toward Islamic education. The opposing opinions are critical and consider the Islamic education in the Netherlands is undesirable as it can slow the process of integration into Dutch society. This paper explores Islamic education in the Netherlands from historical perspective, analyzes factors that lead to its realization by Muslim immigrants in this country, and discusses the role that the Islamic education play in the Dutch society.

Keywords:

Islam in the West; Islamic Education; Muslim Identity; Multicultural Society; The Netherlands.

Introduction

The Netherlands is one of the countries in Western Europe with a large number of Muslim populations. Currently The Muslim population of the Netherlands is estimated to be around 900,000 or 5.8 per cent of the approximately 16 millions total population (Buijs 2009: 424). This large number of Muslim population could be an advantage on the one hand, but on the other hand it can also cause problems for both the Dutch government and the Muslim population itself.

The advantages for the Dutch government is that the Muslim population is a great means to add human resources as manpower to fill posts jobs, especially in sectors of menial jobs where, for quite long time in the past the Dutch government has been understaffed to handle the grunt works. The advantage for Muslims living in the Netherlands is that they can contribute to the development in this country and at the same time they can improve their lives for a better level in economic matters.

However, in addition to giving advantage, the Muslim population (either those coming as immigrants of the first generation and or those who has been born in the Netherlands) sometimes is seen as creating problems. One of the problems that emerge quite frequently and becomes serious public debate in the Netherlands related to the Muslim population is the issue of integration.

On one hand, the Dutch societies expect the full integration and participation of Muslim immigrants and to behave like native Dutch citizens. In undergoing the daily life Muslims are expected to live and apply the norms and culture prevalent in the Netherlands. On the other hand, however, the Muslim immigrants feel the need to maintain their existence and their identity as Muslims, which cannot simply be eliminated despite living in the midst of Dutch society and has become a citizen of the Netherlands. In addition, some also feel that not all cultures in Dutch society are in line with the culture of Islam. Therefore, Muslim immigrants tend to maintain a lifestyle with the norms and values of Islam.

Since many Muslims now feel that they live in societies that no longer derive their inspiration and rules from faith their presence in Europe, therefore, calls upon

Muslims to redefine their religion in the new societies. For this goal and in the process of making Europe their home they consider that educating their children with Islamic values is important to help their offspring learning to identify themselves when entering adolescence, because without having a feeling of inner connectedness the Muslim children cannot really participate and give service to society ([Aslan 2013: 10](#)).

Furthermore, Muslims feel the need to drop and pass on cultural values and teachings of Islam to their children. Attempts to transform these religious values and cultures can be done through a process of education, either informal education in the family, non-formal education in mosques, as well as formal education at schools. In terms of formal education, currently, the Muslim population in the Netherlands can choose school for their children that offer Islamic religious education. In some major cities in the Netherlands there are Islamic primary schools that are subsidized by the state just as public schools or other denominational schools ([Merry & Driessen 2005](#); [Wagtendonk 1991:154](#)).

In recent years, Islamic elementary school or Islamic education has become the subject of debate among politicians and academics as well as journalists in the Netherlands. Some are of the opinion that Islamic education as demanded by the Dutch Muslim citizens is not a problem for the country, it will even have a positive effect because Muslim children who are getting education in accordance with their cultural background will follow good education and be able to appreciate the others outside their community ([Shadid & van Koningsveld 1991b: 120](#)). Several recent investigations by the Dutch Inspectorate of Education carried out in 1999, 2002, 2003 have also concluded that “almost all Muslim schools played a positive role in creating conditions favorable for the furthering of social cohesion” ([Shadid & van Koningsveld 2006: 86](#)).

On the contrary, however, there is also opinion that Islamic education that has been demanded by the Muslims do not have a good effect for the state and society in the Netherlands as they will be alienated in the society with their own culture and it can hinder the process of integration into the daily life of Dutch society ([Shadid & van Koningsveld 1991b: 120](#)). The foundation of Islamic schools can be considered as

causing undesirable isolation to young kids (Sunier 2005: 323). Geert Wilder in his political program even demanded that all Islamic schools should be closed (van Liere 2014: 194). Unfortunately, as many have known, integration is often misunderstood to be assimilation. According to Elsas (1991: 176) this misunderstanding should be corrected. In his view, integration must be defined as “the participation of groups or individuals in society while retaining and developing their own identity with its essential parts remaining intact”, because, in his view, that is the meaning of the Latin word “integer” in “integration” (Elsas 1991: 176). Thus, the public in the Netherlands have seen Islamic education from two different perspectives: positive and negative assumption.

Methodologically, this is a qualitative undertaking of literary research. Any material containing discussions on the subject be it in the forms of books, articles of journals, and or research findings were utilized to conduct this research. All these documents were considered equal, depending on their relevancy to the topic of the study. As this study focuses on texts containing information on the subject, it employs the technique of content analysis and discourse analysis to grasp its real meaning.

Much research has been done on the Islamic education in the Netherlands. Many researchers have studied Islamic primary school and examined it from different perspectives. They put the discussion on the context of Dutch educational system (Shadid & van Koningsveld 1991, 1996, 2006; Driessen & Bezemer 1999; Driessen & Valkenberg 2000; Merry 2005; Merry & Driessen 2005; Driessen & Merry 2006; Dronkers 2016; Merry & Driessen 2016). These studies provide information concerning the dynamics of Islamic education with reference to Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands.

My paper adds to an existing and growing body of studies on the Islamic education or Islamic school in the Netherlands, analyses of factors leading to its realization and examination of its role or function for the Muslim immigrants in the Dutch society. In order to provide a clear presentation of the subject I will do the following in this paper. *Firstly*, I will sketch the historical background of the coming of

Muslims in the Netherlands and the establishment of Islamic education in this country. The portrait of Islamic education in the Netherlands of the past and present is worthwhile to be elaborated, as it will give us a comprehensive understanding on the condition of the subject under discussion. *Secondly*, I will analyze the factors that may lead to the realization of Islamic education in the Netherlands. The factors that may lead to the realization of Islamic education in the Netherlands are important issues and deserve investigation. In addition to pillarization system prevailing in Dutch society, the Dutch constitution, which guarantees the freedom of education in the country, could be one of the factors to motivate Muslim immigrants struggling to establish Islamic educational institution. The character of Dutch society, which is open and critical, could also motivate Muslim immigrants to provide their offspring with education based on their culture and religion. *Thirdly*, I will discuss the role that Islamic education plays in the daily life in Dutch society. Religious teachings and doctrines are believed to have influence on the Muslim immigrants. Living as minority in a secular state and multicultural society make the Muslims in difficult position. On one hand, they are expected to be good citizens fully integrated into Dutch society, and on the other hand, however, they do not want to lose their identity as Muslims. Religious values transferred through Islamic education are believed to be able to help guiding and protecting Muslim children to participate and live in the Dutch secular society. Those points are elaborated at length in following sections.

A. Arrival Of Muslims In The Netherlands

1. Coming as "Guest Worker"

When discussing about the origin of Islam in the Netherlands we can trace it at the time after the World War II. Muslims came to the Netherlands on a large scale in the period of the 1960s and 1970s. At that time the Dutch government required manual labor to rebuild the country and to promote their economies. Most of the Dutch people were not willing to do the grunt work. Dutch government, therefore, invited workers from abroad (European-Mediterranean area) to come to the Netherlands in order to

conduct the works. In the post-war industrial expansion, they did the jobs that the Dutch themselves did not apply for, such as line work, garbage collecting and spinning and weaving in the textile industries (Ter Avest & Rietveld 2016: 2).

During this period the Dutch Government concluded recruitment agreements with several Southern European countries, and with Turkey and Morocco. The immigrants from Turkey and Morocco were Muslims. This can be considered to be the landmark of the coming of Muslims in the Netherlands (Penninx & Vermeulen 2000; Lucassen & Penninx 1997). Those Muslim immigrants were recruited as cheap (low educated) labor force in these periods (Torrekens & Jacobs 2016: 325). The motivation of Muslim immigrants to come to the Netherlands is for economic reason. At the beginning their purpose of coming to this country is for work, and after they get enough money to build a family house or start a small enterprise they intended to return to their home country, and for that reason they were called “guest workers” (Ter Avest & Rietveld 2016: 2).

Today the largest groups of Muslims living in the Netherlands are immigrants from Turkey and Morocco (and their descendants) who were recruited as laborers during the 1960s and 1970s, a significant number of the migrants from Turkey being ethnic Kurds. In addition to the Turks and Moroccans other large Muslim groups in the Netherlands are immigrants from Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran and Somalia who arrived later, most of them seeking asylum from persecution and or escaping violence in their home countries. The reason a small group of asylum seekers fled to the Netherlands is because of their political-religious activities in countries such as Egypt and Syria (De Koning 2014: 439).

The presence of Muslims in the Netherlands is closely linked to the arrival of Muslims in other part of the continent of Europe. Islam began to be widely recognized in Europe since the second half of the twentieth century. A number of immigrants have come to Western European countries since the World War II. They were immigrants from former colonies, labor immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. Many of those immigrants are Muslims originating from Islamic countries in Asia and Africa.

Concerning the total number, there is no definite information that provides exact figures on the number of Muslim population in Europe. However, some estimation was made available. According to Shebaib, quoted by Driessen and Merry (2006: 201), between 15 and 25 million Muslims reside in the European Union.

With regard to the number of Muslims residing in the Netherlands at present, there is no reliable statistics. A study conducted in 1991 estimated that 360,000 Muslims living in this country (Shadid & van Koningsveld 1991a: 3). Another study estimated that the population of Muslims in the Netherlands is 920,000, which is some 6 % of the total Dutch population. In major cities like Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht more than 10% of the inhabitants are Muslim. The majority of Dutch Muslims are of Turkish and Moroccan origin, their numbers totaling 320,000 and 285,000 respectively (Driessen & Merry 2006: 201-202). However, another study (2005) revealed that the number of Muslims in the Netherlands was estimated at more than one million (Merry & Driessen 2005: 415). It is predicted that Islam has become the second largest non-Christian religion in this country. Now, Islam and Muslim are massively studied in the West. The discussion not only limited to Muslims in the Muslim countries but also to Muslims living in diaspora communities, whose amount is now predicted to reach the amount of more than 300 million (Esposito 2016: ix).

One characteristic of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands had in common was their low level of education, including, in many cases, illiteracy. At present, the second and third generation of Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands still manage poorly in school and the labor market (Driessen & Merry 2006: 202). Generally speaking, Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands are at a disadvantage position economically, their background is the workers who are recruited to do manual labor in the Netherlands in the 1960s and 1970s. Besides having a weak economic position, they also occupy a weak political position as well. Muslim identity they have often considered illegitimate by political actors. This is different from those of other religious groups (Torrekens & Jacobs 2016: 325). It is quite strange, however, even though Muslims are considered weaker economically and politically but there raise fears of the Dutch public that Islam will have a larger role in their communities (Torrekens & Jacobs 2016: 325).

2. Need for Islamic education

In 1970s the Dutch government launched a program of reunification with family (wives and children) for the “guest worker”. Following this program many immigrants then decided to stay permanently and become the citizen of this country. From this time onward, Islam then became more visible in the Dutch society, and especially in schools (Ter Avest & Rietveld 2016: 3). Afterwards, the Muslim immigrants became more concerned and start thinking about establishing Islamic educational agency that serves to accommodate and educate their children in the Islamic tradition. A study reveals the reason why Muslim parents in the a western country seek an Islamic school for their children is for the sake of children’s welfare and to protect them from harm, and it concerns more about Islamic values (McCreery *et al.* 2007: 210). Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands need to set up Islamic school to give and bequeath Islamic values to their children.

The term “Islamic Education” has been invested with a variety of usage and meanings. Susan L. Douglas and Munir A. Shaikh, as quoted by Jenny Berglund, states that it can mean, “...education of Muslims in their Islamic faith; education for Muslims which includes the religious and secular disciplines; education about Islam for those who are not Muslim; and education in an Islamic spirit and tradition” (Berglund 2013:172). In this paper I use the first of these understanding, namely “education of Muslims in their Islamic faiths”. By employing this definition it includes a broad and large activities, including but not limited to education in Islamic schools only.

Concerning the form of Islamic education in the Netherlands, it took place in three different forms: (1) mosque education (mosque school), (2) Islamic Religious Education (IRE) at public schools, and (3) private Islamic school (Shadid & Koningsveld 1991b: 115-120). After struggling for quite long time, eventually Muslims in the Netherlands succeeded in obtaining permission from the relevant authorities to establish Islamic schools to meet the needs of the Muslims for an Islamic education for their children. According to Merry and Driessen (2005: 416) preparation to establish

Islamic school in the Netherlands took place in 1980. However, it was not until 1988 that the first Islamic schools were founded. It took long time to establish the school because Muslim actors who wish to found the school had no experience and were not familiar with complexity of bureaucracy as well as they did not speak the Dutch language. In addition to that, the people who took the initiative generally did not receive a great deal of cooperation from the central or local authorities. In many cases they even felt the authorities had a policy of discouraging the founding of Islamic schools. However, after waiting for years the struggle of Muslims to found Islamic school finally succeeded. Indeed, Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands have been making efforts to realize the establishment of Islamic schools.

It is worth noting that Islamic schools in the Netherlands are not homogeneous. In general, these schools are administered by ethnic group, and they give the Islamic religious education in accordance with the flow line or school of thought they followed. In their investigation Shadid & van Koningsveld find out that Islamic schools in the Netherlands are far from being homogeneous ([Shadid & van Koningsveld 1991, 1996](#)) though commonly schools are organized along ethnic and ideological lines. A relatively high number of the schools are considered “liberal” inasmuch as they reflect similar orientations to Dutch society as non-Muslim schools. Other schools could be categorized as “conservative” owing to the contents of religious instruction and the observation of the Islamic rules of behavior by staff and students. The main difference from the “liberal” schools has to do with the orientation to the Islamic world and not to Dutch society ([Merry & Driessen 2005: 417](#)).

Regarding the number of Islamic schools in the Netherlands, the figure varied. In her study Berglund mentioned there are currently forty-three Islamic primary schools and one Islamic secondary school in the Netherlands that are fully funded by the state ([Berglund 2015: 21](#)). However, other sources have different figure. Shadid and van Koningsveld noted that in 1994, there were 29 primary schools, and, in 2012, there were 44 Islamic primary schools out of a total of 8139 primary schools in The Netherlands ([Shadid & van Koningsveld 2006: 77](#)). In addition to that, there is one Islamic secondary school. The first school built by Muslims was the Al Ghazali primary

school in Rotterdam in 1987 (Ter Avest & Rietveld 2016: 6).

With regard to the number of Muslim children attending Islamic schools in the Netherlands the exact figure may be hard to find. Estimation of the number, however, is available. Since the arrival of the first immigrant waves in the 1960s the number of especially Turkish and Moroccan, and thus Muslim, pupils has grown considerably. According to report by Merry and Driessen, in 2010 there were 40,000 Turkish and 43,000 Moroccan pupils in primary education, or 2.6 and 2.8% of the total number of pupils. Over time, some Muslim parents became dissatisfied with the schools their children attended. Basically there were two reasons for this dissatisfaction, namely the absence of Islamic instruction in schools, and the poor academic performance of their children (Merry & Driessen 2016: 859).

The debate about Islamic schools in the Netherlands is undoubtedly connected with the broader scope of debate on Islam and Muslims in Dutch society. People who support the Islamic school consider that a friendly environment where students learn can make students gradually socialized with the wider society by strengthening its identity. On the contrary, those who reject Islamic schools assume that the schools fall short of normal standards and tend to marginalize (or, in the worst case, radicalize) Muslim youths. An accusation like this, however, is not entirely true. According to a Dutch scholar Johan Meuleman the fear of radicalization has proved to be false (Berglund 2015: 22). Advocates of Islamic schools argued that Muslim children's identity is under threat in non-faith state schools. By attending an Islamic school, Muslim children are supposedly protected from three key dangers, namely (a) assimilation, (b) anti-Muslim prejudice, and (c) Islamic extremism (Tinker 2009: 547). It is worth mentioning that the public opinion about the desirability of Islamic schools was and is still strongly divided. In 1992, for instance, 57% of the Dutch population was in favor of such schools, but this percentage then dropped due to an increased fear of radical Islam (Ter Avest & Rietveld 2016: 6).

B. Factors Leading To The Realization Of Islamic Education

1. Dutch pillarization system

Muslims in the Netherlands now have Islamic schools that they need to provide religious education for their children. This condition is not likely to happen unless there are factors that support it. One of the factors supporting the establishment of an Islamic education in a secular country like the Netherlands, in my view, is the pillarization system existed in the Dutch society. As soon as Muslims became more familiar with the Dutch pillarized society, they set up their own organizations, like Islamic broadcasting stations, social work centers and schools. These local and even national initiatives made Islam and its adherents visible in the Dutch society (Ter Avest & Rietveld 2016: 6).

The Netherlands is a secular country and one of the most secular nations in the world (van Tubergen 2007: 749). It does not have an established church and is neutral to all religions (van Genugten 2013: 78). This is clearly stated in the article 1 of the Constitution that grants the right to equal treatment and outlaws discrimination on grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race, sex or any other ground. Freedom to practice religious teachings is also guaranteed by the article 6 of the Constitution as long as these practices fall within the limits of the law (van Genugten 2013: 78). Although it does not have any official religion the relationship between state and religion is always colored with extensive state's involvement toward religious expression in public life (De Koning 2014: 441). This situation can be seen with the pillarization system prevailing in society. In this system the society was “deeply divided into distinct and mutually antagonistic religious and ideological groups, but the overarching cooperation of ‘pillarisation’ at the elite level and the maximum autonomy allowed for each group made stable democracy possible” (De Koning 2014: 441).

In the Netherlands pillarization system is long overdue and reached its peak in the first half of the twentieth century. In the period 1880-1960, each of the major ideological communities had their pillar (*zuil*) with its own social institutions, like political parties, schools, newspapers, labor unions, broadcasting stations, hospitals, universities and recreational facilities, supporting separate Protestant, Catholic, socialist and liberal ethos and lifestyles (Boender 2013: 238). The two processes occur simultaneously in this system, namely the emergence of the distinctive identity of each

religious group or social boundaries of social, cultural, economic and moral. Meanwhile, Minister and clergy played an important role in marking the boundaries of Protestant and Catholic communities (Boender 2013: 238). In this system every “pillar” had equal rights to government subsidies, especially to establish their own schools and universities. The government gave itself the responsibility to provide for the prerequisites necessary for equal treatment, concentrating in education (Boender 2013: 239). Pillarization can be understood as a model of neutrality in which all collective identities have an equal right to manifest themselves in public. That is why in Dutch public life religion is highly visible (Saharso 2007: 518).

As time goes by and the process of secularization in the Netherlands grows the importance of the traditional pillars in Dutch society has declined sharply. This has happened since the 1960s. However, in the education sector it has to a certain extent remained unbroken (Merry & Driessen 2016: 860). This meant that the existing legal organizational structure could facilitate the institutionalization process of setting up Islamic schools, halal slaughter facilities and Muslim broadcasting (Boender 2013: 239). Thus, Muslim could take advantage of the situation relic from the days of pillarization.

The main property of the Dutch multicultural model is institutionalizing cultural pluralism with the conviction that the cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities is the key to their integration into Dutch society. This view has been deeply rooted since the time of pillarization system in the Netherlands (Bertossi *et al.* 2015: 64). Furthermore, pillarization could push for an emancipated society groups by providing them with equal opportunity through religious institutions to which they are affiliated. The final goal of this emancipation is the integration of the immigrants in this hosting country. Because religion is an important factor in the emancipation of minorities, as noted by the 1983 state report of the formal minority policy (Boender 2013: 240), the government efforts to encourage them to participate through their religious institutions is the right move.

As new comers in the existing Dutch society, Muslims had to be provided with

institutional structures to integrate “while preserving their own identity”, as a corollary from the pillarized times. This was the motto in integration policy until the mid-1990s (Boender 2013: 240). “As in the times of pillarization, this encouraged form of emancipation stimulated a simultaneous identity of being ‘Muslim’ and ‘Dutch,’ as in the early 20th century the Catholic pillar emancipated the Catholics by making it possible to be both ‘Catholic’ and Dutch -- two identities which previously excluded each other” (Boender 2013: 240). Being aware of the growing agitation in the West against militant Islam, and as materialism struck the second generation, the Muslim parents have been more eager to cultivate Islamic identity consistent with western citizenship (Merry & Driessen 2005: 423). I agree with the notion that today the Dutch authorities have a heavy homework. It is not easy to convince and persuade Muslims apply tolerance and embrace the liberal Dutch values while their rights to assemble is monitored continuously.

With the development of Islamic schools, mosques and Islamic centers, one might think that an Islamic pillar is being established in the Netherlands. However, opponents will view that it is something that might not happen. For instance, Spieker and Steutel, as quoted by Merry and Driessen, argued that “creating a separate Islamic pillar was both undesirable and unfeasible”. The reason, according to them, is that secularization that occurred in the Dutch society does not support the new religious pillars. In addition to that, the classical Dutch pillars are able to attain far-reaching political power because they covered relatively large and ideologically homogeneous groups. Meanwhile, in the case of Muslim community in the Netherlands their number is too small and too diverse in terms of ethnicity, country of origin, language spoken, political affiliation and interpretation of Islam (Merry & Driessen 2016: 862). Naturally, things like this will make it difficult for the government, in terms of who to talk to, and who is the most qualified to represent Islam and Muslims.

It is worth mentioning that there has been a change in perceptions about Islamic schools in the Netherlands after exposure the activities of radicalism in some parts of the world. In his study Verbeek explained that discussion of Islamic education in the Netherlands has changed, especially after 9/11. Before this events happened the Islamic

education has never been an issue. People assume that Muslims in the Netherlands are only exercising their constitutional right to establish Islamic schools, such as Catholic in the twentieth century. This is just a form of their participation in society. But the views of people in the Netherlands have changed after the 9/11. The Prime Minister Ruud Lubber (1982-1994, a Christian Democrat), for example, has ever encouraged Muslims in the Netherlands to set up their own Islamic pillar. But ten years later, in 2003, Prime Minister Jan-Peter Balkenende (2002-2010, also a Christian Democrat) warned that Islamic schools should not become “prison of disadvantage” (Verbeek *et al.* 2015: 223). It is unfortunate that significant change of perception has happened only within a relatively short time. Indeed, the European image of what Islam represents is more persistent than what Muslims actually do, and statistics and historical narratives will feed it again and again (Berger 2013: 135).

2. Regulation by the state

One of the factors that led to the establishment of Islamic education in the Netherlands is, in my view, the character of the Dutch constitution. Muslims can establish Islamic schools in the Netherlands because of the nature of the Dutch constitution. Article 23 of the Dutch constitution guarantees freedom of education and ‘statutory equality’ of governmental or public and non-governmental or denominational schools. Both are funded according to identical and equivalent criteria (Maussen & Vermeulen 2015: 90). Based on the guarantee of the Constitution, the facilities given to Christians should also be offered to Muslims. This is so after some requirements determined by the government have been met (Driessen & Merry 2006: 203-204). “Religious freedom, freedom of speech and the equality of all individuals, irrespective of their ethnicity, religion or gender, are after all the foundation on which the Dutch Constitution is based” (Shadid & van Koningsveld 1996:109).

Legal requirements that must be met in order to establish Islamic schools is as follows: the school must be attended by a minimum number of students (at least 200,

depending on the level of urbanization), the language of instruction should be the Dutch language, teachers must meet the requirement of adequate, and the curriculum must comply the conditions set by Primary Education Act. The Constitution is specific and explicit so that the local governments could not prevent the establishment of Islamic schools, but in practice the founding of an Islamic school is not always easy (Driessen & Merry 2006: 203-204).

Although the Dutch Constitution guarantees freedom of religion and education, but in practice however, among the Dutch society itself still a lot of people are opposing to the establishment of Islamic education by Muslims in the Netherlands. Concerning this matter, Shadid & van Koningsveld explained:

Generally speaking, two main objections have been raised against the foundation of Islamic schools. These objections can be characterized as paternalistic and figurative and are easy to refute. First of all it has been argued that such schools would constrain the integration of the groups concerned, because contacts between children from different ethnic backgrounds would be minimalized. This argument does not carry much weight as one can observe that the phenomenon of the so-called 'black' and 'white' schools has become a reality within the sector of public schools over the past decades. In fact, one fifth of the primary schools in the four major cities in the Netherlands include more than 70% of pupils from minority groups. These figures clearly indicate that ethnically separated education has been a fact for a long time. The second objection concerns the assumption that this type of school is outdated because the Netherlands is already depillarized. But it is also a fact that at present 60% of the primary school in the country (5,000 school) belong to the confessional type and that the thirty Islamic schools make up only a fraction of this total. The aforementioned clearly indicates that the juridical integration of Muslim in the Netherlands, i.e. the opportunities laid down in the constitution, develops at a greater pace than the social acceptance of the pluralistic aspects of that constitution (Shadid & van Koningsveld 1996:110).

There were also inspections conducted by the government toward Islamic schools in the Netherlands. In the wake of the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 by a radicalized Muslim, Islamic schools came under fire (Merry & Driessen 2016: 856). Nowadays, Islamic education, in particular the future of Islamic schools faces a dilemma. In addition to ordinary people, some political parties in the Netherlands also gave their reaction to the existence of Islamic schools. The Liberal

party even wants to stop the expansion of Islamic school in the future. Liberal party in the political debate openly wants the expansion of Islamic schools be stopped. The liberals assume that an Islamic school will be a place to indoctrinate students to become anti-Western, anti-democratic and against integration. Therefore, the Liberal party pushed the need for a mixed school, because they think this is a school model that will make children of Muslims become integrated into Dutch society (Driessen & Merry 2006: 215).

Driven by a sense of high suspicion on the role of Islamic schools in the formation of mental and character of the students the Dutch Education Inspectorate carried out its own research in 2002 to determine whether Islamic schools were doing their part to help their pupils integrate into Dutch society. The result was that quite positive, as “more than 90% of the schools were satisfactorily doing their part to assist in the integration process. For example, attitudes towards Dutch society were found to be generally favourable” (Merry & Driessen 2016: 863). In addition, there is the fact that in a relatively short period of time, the Islamic schools were examined intensively by the Dutch government for more than once. Actually, such a kind of action is uncommon for a similar investigation was not conducted against other schools of different denomination. In 2002, for instance, the Dutch Secret Service carried out an investigation of Islamic education to determine whether it was potentially threatening to democratic norms, and also to see whether there was evidence of foreign infiltration in the planning and ideas behind Dutch Islamic education. The conclusion of this investigation was that “roughly 20% of the schools received some financial support, or had regular contact with, foreign Islamic organisations such as al-Waqf al-Islami” (Merry & Driessen 2016: 863). These findings made the government unhappy and could cause the government to increase its control over Islamic schools in the country.

The freedom to found schools, to organize them and to determine the principles they are based upon serves as the grounds for the wide variety of schools in the Netherlands. There are two categories, namely state and denominational (e.g. Roman Catholic, Protestant) school. Under the terms of the Constitution, all the schools are

funded on an equal basis. Thus, the consequence of this is that the facilities provided for Christians cannot be denied to Muslims. As long as a number of conditions have been met with, every school is entitled to full government funding (Driessen & Bezemer 1999: 238). According to Driessen and Bezemer (1999: 238) it is difficult for the local authorities to prevent the founding of Islamic school because the legislation is fairly specific and explicit. Compared with other countries in Western Europe, The Netherlands currently has the biggest number of funded Islamic schools. It is a logical consequence of the establishment of good and clear regulation of founding school. Because Islamic religious instruction is almost totally absent from regular school, and because many Muslim students receive courses on Christianity, there is a big need to Islamic schools in the Netherlands as the number of Muslim students that requires Islamic religious instruction is also big (Driessen & Bezemer 1999: 240).

Findings of an investigation undertaken by the Dutch Inspectorate in 1999, 2002 and 2003 said in its conclusion that “almost all of the Islamic schools have an open attitude towards Dutch society and play a positive role in creating conditions for social cohesion” (Merry & Driessen 2005: 422). On the contrary, however, the Internal Security Service (ISS) in its report in 1998 claimed that there was interference of foreign power (e.g. Saudi Arabia) and political-Islamic organizations with the content of Islamic education. The report said that some schools had received donation from the Al-Waqf al-Islami organization “which propagates a very orthodox politic-religious worldview and is intolerant towards liberal Muslims, Jews and Christians” (Merry & Driessen 2005: 423). This problem seems to be pushing the less pleasant consequences in the Dutch society. The opinion of Dutch public was, then, strongly against Islamic schools. They were typically of the opinion that the Islamic school were “socially divisive, nationalistic, or encourage intolerance and separatism from ‘liberal’ Dutch values” (Merry & Driessen 2005: 423).

Many investigations have been carried out to find faults and weaknesses of Islamic schools, and many weaknesses and shortcomings are found on the records of Islamic schools. There is one thing that is encouraging because evidence from one investigation states that there are Islamic schools that do well. Merry & Driessen in their

more recent study notes “evidence has emerged showing significant academic improvements at a number of Islamic primary schools and by early 2013 two Islamic primary schools were awarded the title of ‘Excellent School’ by the Ministry of Education. What was not very long ago a rather precarious situation facing Islamic schools in the Netherlands now looks more promising” (Merry & Driessen 2016: 857). Surely, this fact is encouraging to the Muslims in the Netherlands and will inspire other Islamic primary schools to achieve their best.

C. The Role Of Islamic Education For Muslim Immigrants

1. Transferring religious values

Majority of Muslims in the Netherlands see the importance of Islamic education for their children. In other words, Islamic education or in particular the existence of Islamic school among them is crucial for helping prepare the offspring to be a good member of society. For them Islamic education or in particular Islamic school can function as the best means to transfer religious values to the children.

In general, Islamic schools in the Netherlands have two aims. They are to improve the school performance of their students and to bring them up in the spirit of Islam. However, for many Muslim parents the latter aims is much more important than the first one. This is so because bringing children in the way ordered by Islamic religion is crucial to instill Islamic values and norms as well as to confirm their identity as Muslims (Driessen & Merry 2006). Merry (2005: 377-378) explains that Muslim parents in the Netherlands who chose for Islamic schools for their children have three motivations, they are (1) religious, (2) academic, and (3) cultural. First, for Muslim parents interested in Islamic schools the religious orientation in one’s academic formation counts for a great deal. Second, Muslim parents are seeking to secure for their children the highest academic formation that they can afford. Third, Muslim parents—particularly recent immigrants—are very interested to have their children learn about their cultural heritage. This may include gender-sensitive issues (e.g., modest dress codes, sex-segregated lessons), as well as respect shown toward authority.

However, from those motivations the religious orientation is the most important, as stated by Merry (2005: 377), “With the specter of secularism and permissiveness looming large, many Muslim parents are eager to shield their children from certain materialist and secular influences by placing them in a comprehensive religious environment in order to foster a highly specific moral orientation.” She notes that Muslim children were to be found in schools with high concentrations of minorities, which, in the case of Netherland, is called “black schools”. These schools had a bad reputation among the general population, academic achievement were low compared to less urban school, teacher morale was poor, safety was a concern, and many parents felt that moral permissiveness reigned (Merry 2005: 377). Because of those reasons religious school appeared to be desirable to Muslims.

Besides some motivations mentioned above, apparently the desire of Muslim parents to send their children to Islamic schools was also caused by other concerns. Those concerns are the persistence of racism in Europe, particularly at the local school, there is still perception that one’s culture and religion (Islam) is not only addressed inadequately and inaccurate in the school curriculum, but in fact it is not addressed totally. In addition, many parents have higher expectations that must be fulfilled by the school on their children. The rest, a lot of parents want that schools must uphold the more discipline and morality in schools, especially for girls. Above all, all Muslim parents want to keep their children “not to be broken” by the secular culture of the society. Therefore, considering those concerns they felt that the best and the only option for them is an Islamic education to prepare their children growing up in a non-Muslim milieu (Merry 2005: 379). Muslim parents, who opted Islamic school as an option, believed that these Islamic schools would help preserving their culture and identity.

Two goals for Islamic schools derive from these motives, namely to strengthen the pupils’ sense of identity, i.e. cultural and religious personality development in the spirit of Islam, and to improve the quality of education, i.e. the pupils’ academic achievement. For the majority of the Muslim parents the first goal is the most important one (Merry & Driessen 2016: 860). Many parents put a religious orientation at the higher hierarchy level and above academic purposes.

2. Preserving Islamic identity

Another role or function of Islamic education given to the children of Muslims in the Netherlands, in my opinion is, to preserve Islamic identity in order to be able to participate amongst the Dutch society. The issue of identity is very often challenged by other groups of society in the Netherlands. Some parts of people in Dutch society see that Islamic values that the Muslim try to practice or implement in their life contradict with the prevalent Dutch or European values.

In the west, collective Muslim actors have frequently established Islamic schools as a response to perceived inadequacies in the state system of schooling. One of its goals is to contribute to the safeguarding of Muslim identity and help children to take pride in their religion (Halstead 2004: 520). Authorities of some countries in Western Europe including The Netherlands were still doubtful on the sincerity of Muslim immigrants to integrate into Dutch society. However, according to Shadid and van Koningsveld “these questions and doubts are considered as reflecting the unpreparedness of society at large to offer opportunities to Muslim to participate in socio-economic, cultural and ideological cross-section society while at the same time preserving their Islamic identity” (Shadid & Koningsveld 1996: 110). The opposition displayed in society and political arena toward the wishes of Muslims to, for instance, wear head-scarves, found Islamic school as well as mosques, in Shadid and van Koningsveld’s view, “suggested that opportunity for Muslim minority to take part in society is not given optimally. With regard to Islamic education, even though the freedom of religion and education is guaranteed by the Dutch Constitution, in fact the foundation of Islamic schools in the Netherlands did not proceed smoothly and raised a lot of debate” (Shadid & Koningsveld 1996: 110). Furthermore, there continues to be an urgent call for a policy of assimilation instead of a policy of integration with maintenance of the own culture (Penninx & Vermeulen 2000).

Issue of integration of Muslim immigrants into the host country has become main concern of authorities in Europa. Therefore, in the early 1990s most governments

in Western Europe were becoming increasingly concerned about how to “integrate” Muslims into their societies, of course, each according to their own political frameworks (Sunier 2012: 192). Some authorities even still see Islam as an outside intruder that has to be domesticated. This can be seen from the way they frame their project on integration (Sunier 2012: 196). Unfortunately, even though Islam has already been an integral part of Europe for centuries, ironically Islam and Europe are currently still depicted as two opposing entities (Sunier 2012: 196). Being a Muslim in Europe often makes someone in disadvantage position. In the political arena for instance, political actors often consider Muslim identity illegitimate, which is different from other religious identities (Torrekens & Jacobs 2016: 325). According to Sunier, identity movements among Muslims in the Netherlands occurred just in the 1990s. Before that period being Muslim was linked up with being migrant and being outsider. It was not until 1990s that Muslim identities were increasingly articulated in relation to society (Sunier 2005: 322). Muslims are in many cases marginalized either in political discourse as well as in real life in Dutch society.

Preserving Islamic identity in the Western countries including the Netherlands is not an easy task for Muslims. This is so because a number of problems have arisen between the two variables. The problems, as explained by Statham (2016), are as follows. Firstly, although European societies consider themselves broadly secular, Christian religions play influential institutional social and political roles, regardless of the actual number of practicing worshippers. These institutional arrangements of church-state relations have defined pre-existing conditions and the political environment into which immigrant religions have to negotiate a space for their community. Secondly, religious identification is a belief system that can shape an individual’s core identity, opinions and political behavior. A religious migrant may consider practicing religion as a sacred duty that cannot be compromised. Thirdly, the nature of the immigrant religion is likely to influence the degree to which migrants adapt or resist when faced by the dominant culture. In this respect, the public duties of worship that are associated with Islam can be more obtrusive and visible, and less easy to accommodate within the public life of a western society, than those of immigrant religions where worship takes

place mostly in private (Statham 2016: 219).

In order to promote and reinforce the process of integrating Muslims into the Dutch society some strategic steps have already been taken by the authorities. This can be seen from the action the government had implemented. In the beginning of 2007, for instance, the Dutch government introduced what is called “civic integration examination” that included a language element and a series of questions about Dutch history and society (Nielsen 2015: 59). People will agree that that citizenship education must obviously be a major factor in solving a number of tensions. When a sense of national cohesion and collective solidarity is breaking down, schools must be one of the main locations for creating that solidarity and cohesion (Nielsen 2015: 64).

Concluding remarks

In this paper I have investigated the establishment of Islamic education from historical perspective. I have also examined the factors leading to the realization of Islamic education in the Dutch secular society. In addition I have analyzed the role or function of Islamic education for Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands. From the previous observation and investigation I can summarize the conclusion in the following points.

Islamic education in the Netherlands came into existence obviously in public sphere in the form of the establishment of Islamic primary school fully subsidized by the state in the late 1980s, in which first Islamic primary schools were founded in some big cities such as Rotterdam. According to the Dutch Constitution there is a freedom for education for the Dutch citizen, and all citizens are guaranteed by the Law to have education regardless of one’s religious or non-religious affiliation. Based on this legal status the Muslims are entitled to have Islamic religious education, and the Muslim parents can apply for the Islamic religious education for their children.

Factors that led the existence of Islamic education in the Netherlands can be categorized as the extern factors (coming from outside the Muslim community) and the

intern ones (coming from within the Muslim community). Belong to the first is the character of the state's constitution that guarantee all citizens to have freedom of education, while regarding the latter is the initiatives coming from figures of Muslim community who concerned themselves with religious education to transform religious values to their offspring.

With regard to the importance of giving religious education to their offspring in a multicultural society such as the Dutch, from the examination to the available literature during the research course, I have found that many Muslim parents have been eager to shield their children from certain materialist and secular influence by sending them in a comprehensive religious environment, namely Islamic school, to foster highly moral orientation. Some parents in the Netherlands wish to keep their children “uncorrupted” from the secular society, and for that purpose they consider the only option available to them is an Islamic education. Through Islamic education (i.e. Islamic school) the Muslim parents want to transmit and preserve Islamic religion and culture within the context of the Dutch secular state, besides improving the educational level of Muslim children by paying special attention to their specific problem. It seems that the religious orientation counts for a great deal for Muslim parents.

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