Between the Prophet and Paradise:
The Salafi struggle in the Netherlands

Martijn de Koning

The global Islamic Salafi movement has slowly but surely established itself in the Netherlands over the last 30 years. One of the features of Salafi religiosity is the often very strict interpretation of particular Islamic traditions, one which is sometimes regarded by other Muslims, and non-Muslims, as anti-Western and at odds with European secular freedoms. During the last ten years the Salafi movement also has become the main target of the counter-radicalization policies of the Dutch state. In this article I address the following question: How do Dutch Salafi Muslim youth practice a morally strict version of Islam that is rejected and considered suspect by many other Dutch Muslims as well as wider Christian-secular society? I explain how individual Salafis attempt to realize their desire of becoming pious Muslims and embodying the example of the first genera-tions of Muslims, in a society which they experience as unpredictable, crisis-ridden and frequently hostile. I argue that Dutch Salafis combine two related, but sometimes contradictory, styles of moral reasoning: an ethics of duty and an ethics of pragmatism. I will show that this results in a type of religiosity based upon the idea of struggle. The experience of being part of a struggle, and living through that struggle, provides people with strong incentives to continuously reflect upon and improve themselves as part of their moral ambition. This article provides insight into a modern day Islamic movement and its participants and how people's religiosity is shaped by present-day political and societal contexts and religious teachings.

Key terms: Salafism; The Netherlands; Muslims; Radicalization; Ethics.

Introduction

Originating in the Middle East, the global Islamic Salafi movement has slowly but surely established itself in the Netherlands over the last 30 years. One of the stark features of Salafi religiosity is the often very strict interpretation of particular Islamic traditions, one which is sometimes regarded by other Muslims,

and non-Muslims, as anti-Western and at odds with European secular freedoms. Since 2001, following several controversial sermons given by imams (which, for example, attacked US and Dutch policies on Israel and violence against women) and reports of Muslim youth going abroad on 'jihad', the Salafi movement has become more visible in the Netherlands. After the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 the Salafi movement, which was already fragmented, became the main target of the counter-radicalization policies of the Dutch state.[1]

In this article I address the following question: How do Dutch Salafi Muslim youth practice a morally strict version of Islam that is rejected and considered suspect by many other Dutch Muslims as well as wider Christian-secular society? I refer to similar explorations made by Robbins (2004, 2010) of the way in which Christians in Papua New Guinea and the US negotiate between different ethics and Elisha's (2008, 2011) analysis of Evangelical outreach which is often based upon contradictory moral ambitions. I extend these theoretical arguments to the Salafi movement in the Netherlands and, in so doing, I explain how individual Salafis attempt to realize their desire of becoming pious Muslims and embodying the example of the first generations of Muslims, in a society which they experience as unpredictable, crisis-ridden and frequently hostile. I argue that Dutch Salafis combine two related, but sometimes contradictory, styles of moral reasoning: an ethics of duty and an ethics of pragmatism. First I give a brief outline of the utopia and ambitions of the Salafis and the different manifestations of Salafism in the Netherlands. I then explore the fragmentation of Dutch Salafis and the reaction in Dutch media and politics to Islam and Salafism, as both help create the experience of unpredictability that complicates peoples' ambitions to become pious Muslims. After examining the different ethics that Salafis uphold, I illustrate how this unpredictability is absorbed into and becomes entrenched in Salafi convictions and practices. In so doing, I hope to provide insight into a modern day Islamic movement and to describe the different modes of religiosity and secularism which exist in contemporary Dutch society and how they are shaped by their present-day political and societal contexts.

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[1] This article is based upon research in the Netherlands which began in 2007. I have spoken to, and observed (online and offline), 48 men and 15 women since 2007; most of them were between 16 and 25 years old and had a Moroccan-Dutch background, but the interviewees also included several native Dutch converts, and Turkish-Dutch and Somali-Dutch Muslims. Most of the interviews were conducted in informal settings; the interviews with the women were done via email and chat programmes.

Salafism: Utopia and moral ambitions

The Salafi movement is a global Sunni Islamic movement which originated in Saudi Arabia. The name Salafism is taken from the term *al-salaf al-salih* 'pious forefathers'; the term refers to the first three generations of Muslims who are regarded as exemplifying the correct way that all Muslims should live today. The Salafi movement can be viewed as a "utopian movement" (Price, Nonini & Fox-Tree 2008) which aims to revitalize Islam by promoting an idealized vision of the lives of the first Muslims of the seventh century AD, and by persuading Muslims to live according to that vision; an entreaty that its followers find more just and satisfying than the life and circumstances of the present (De Koning 2012a).

In order to disseminate and practice the Salafi utopia, scholars and preachers translate the rather abstract notions of the first generations of Muslims into particular doctrines, strategies and practices that enable individual Muslims to realize their ideals. These ideals can be analysed as "moral ambitions", a term coined by Elisha (2008) in his research on Evangelical Christians in the US. According to Elisha (2008) Evangelicals work to find virtue in good deeds and to inspire others to internalize the same moral dispositions which they believe are necessary for mobilizing people to do volunteer work (Elisha 2011, 9). Salafis, like these Evangelicals, work not only to fulfil their own moral ambitions, but also to try to convince others (in particular other Muslims) to share, implement and experience these same moral ambitions.

Elisha focuses upon the ideals and complexities of social outreach which are central to the moral ambitions of the Evangelicals. But the moral ambitions of the Salafi movement are different and have a different goal; they aim to establish the "true" Islam of the pious predecessors and to become "true" Muslims – this means that Islam and the current community of Muslims (*ummah*) have to be cleansed of what Salafis regard as non-Islamic accretions such as Sufism, Shi'a Islam, or to local practices and doctrines, which have sullied the "pure" Islam of the first generations of Muslims (cf. Meijer 2009a).

Through fatwas, courses, conferences and websites, this broad perspective is converted into more concrete moral ambitions. In order to realise the Salafi utopia, its adherents try to eradicate all the influences that could dilute their notion of a "true" Islam. For Salafis the only way to lead a pure and authentic life, and consequently inherit paradise, is to return to the period of the prophet Muhammad and his companions as described in the sources of Islam, the Qur'an and the Hadith. According to the Salafis, all human activity should be based upon a strict and literal interpretation of these sources for it to be legitimate or it could be condemned as *bid'a* ('innovation') or worse, *kufr* ('disbelief'). They often reject rulings given by the four different law schools in Sunni

Islam and exhibit profound antagonism towards the teachings of scholars who belong to those schools (except, occasionally, those of the Ibn Hanbal school which is dominant in Saudi Arabia). Salafis propose that an anti-rational approach be adopted which bans all forms of interpretation of Islamic scriptures but, at the same time, they place a strong emphasis on the individual's own duty to gather Islamic knowledge and not to blindly follow Islamic scholars. Several scholars have already noted that this sometimes results in an individual having an eclectic mix of Islamic knowledge taken from different traditions and Western scientific knowledge.[2]

It should be noted that there are many groups of Muslims, other than the Salafis, who regard the Prophet Muhammad and the first three generations of Muslims as exemplary Muslims, and their teachings as an inspiration for current day reform; these range from other Islamic movements, to socialists and feminists. For many individual Muslims, whether they are affiliated with a particular branch or movement or not, the lives and teachings of the first generations and the Prophet Muhammad are appealing ideals, but they have no clear concept of how these translate into modern day practice. The crucial distinction that sets Salafis apart is that for them the Qur'an, Sunna and the practices and statements of the *salaf* are all-encompassing ideals which the individual and others should conform to as closely, literally and strictly as possible (Meijer 2009a).

At this point it is important to note that using Salafi or Salafist as a label is contested among Muslims; some refuse to use it, others use it to denounce other Muslims and yet others (even those who refuse to use it in religious circles) use it in public debates to describe themselves. Furthermore, in public debates, Salafism is often equated with radicalism, and so-called radical Muslims are often called Salafi or Salafists. This research is concentrated on the networks of mosques, preachers, websites and learning institutions which identify themselves as adherents to the Salafi *manhaj* ('method') and/or as Salafi and, in particular, on those Muslims who visited the Salafi circles (online or offline) at least twice a week between 2007 and 2011 for religious purposes, or other reasons such as leisure and sport.

The category of Salafis is not a homogenous one; there are many differences between and controversies about the interpretation of the first generations of Muslims and the ways of implementing Islam in the present day. The different Salafi networks all share the same doctrine of the unity and uniqueness of God (*tawhid*), but their members and branches differ on the strategies for accomplishing them (Meijer 2009a; Wagemakers 2012). For Salafis

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[2] See, for example, Gauvain (2012), who also refers to Muslim critics of the Salafi trend with similar observations (346-347, n. 139).

tawhid is related to the doctrine of loyalty and disavowal (*al-walawa-l-bara*). According to Salafi interpretations, Muslims are called upon to distance themselves from unbelievers and from Muslims who, in their understanding, have gone astray. Muslims are even called upon to express open enmity towards "infidels" as proof of their loyalty to God (Wagemakers 2012).[3] The question, however, is: How does one practice this principle in daily life? Salafis may have to mix with family members who are not considered "pure" Muslims, or with non-Muslims in educational institutions, or at work; this can make achieving these ambitions very difficult.

Many Muslims who try to follow the Salafi teachings experience a tension between their loyalty towards family and friends (who are not always on the Salafi path), their duty to reach out to others for *da'wa* (proselytizing), and the necessity of participating in education and the labour market on the one hand, and the perceived need to remain distant from non-Muslims, and other Muslims, on the other.

Salafi manifestations in the Netherlands

Before turning to an analysis of how Dutch Salafis practice Islam in daily life, we have to explore the different Salafi networks that have established themselves in the Netherlands and the public debates and policies that pertain to Islam and Salafism. Together they shape the, sometimes conflicting, religious, political, social and cultural conditions that influence people's moral ambitions (Elisha 2011, 2). In this section the different networks of Dutch Salafis and their activities are outlined and, in the next, I explore the political context of Salafism in the Netherlands.

The Salafi movement has been able to establish itself as a global movement that has been remarkably successful in adapting to local circumstances, albeit that it remains a minority almost everywhere (Meijer 2009b). The first Dutch branches of Salafism were established by labour migrants and political refugees from the Middle East in the 1980s and since then Salafi networks have been able to create a strong position in the "market" of Islamic knowledge (De Koning 2012a; Roex, Van Stiphout & Tillie 2010). During the 1980s and 1990s, the Salafis established themselves in the Netherlands through transnational networks, mosques, schools and lecture circles. As most Dutch Muslim youth are not fluent Arab speakers (the dominant language used by the global Salafi networks), when several Salafi mosques changed from using Arabic to Dutch in 2000 this opened up a whole new potential group of participants. The other non-

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[3] I deliberately use the term 'Muslim' here instead of 'Salafi' as Salafi is a proselytizing movement and thus has preachers who extend their messages to include all Muslims.

Salafi and Moroccan-Dutch mosques had no Dutch speaking imams or lecturers and were not so easily able to attract young Muslims (Boender 2007).

At the time, however, the Dutch Salafi networks were already fragmented. Global Salafism had split into several distinct, sometimes antagonistic, networks, as a result of local and transnational debates among Salafis focusing, in particular, on the different views held about the presence of US soldiers in Saudi Arabia during and after the first Gulf War and on (violent) opposition against Middle Eastern regimes. Some remained loyal to Muslim regimes, some engaged in political opposition and a few others supported and/or engaged in violent opposition (Wiktorowicz 2006; Hegghammer 2010). In the Netherlands, the first major conflict took place in the *Al Fourqaan* mosque in Eindhoven when imam Ahmad Salam (from Syria) left after being accused by his congregation of being "too political" and "too controlling". Salam founded a new mosque in Tilburg but, in 2001, a few of his students rejected his political teachings and became followers of the Saudi Islamic scholar Rabi' al-Madkhali, who preached absolute loyalty to the Saudi regime. These students established their own circle in Tilburg and called themselves *Selefies* (the Dutch pronun-ciation of Salafis). In 2002 and 2003, these *Selefies* disseminated a black list containing the names of preachers such as Ahmad Salam, Fawaz Jneid (The Hague) and Abdul-Jabbar van de Ven (a prominent Dutch convert) who were accused of being people of innovation (*bid'a*) and excommunication (*takfir*), and of dividing the Muslim community.

Based on these developments, and by using a typology of the relation-ships which exist between and among networks (antagonistic or cooperative, national or transnational), and their ideological similarities and differences, we can identify five main Salafi networks in the Netherlands, each with its own internal divisions (De Koning 2012a). First there are the *Selefies*, a group which follows the teachings of, among others, Shaykh Rabi' al-Madkhali. One of the main preachers from this group is Abu Abdillah Bouchta; other preachers include several native Dutch converts who studied in Saudi Arabia. In 2006 this network split when a controversy erupted between a number of preachers about how (and whether) fellow Selefie preachers should be denounced. In 2012 a new controversy arose between different local Dutch branches of the *Selefies* in Tilburg, Rotterdam and Amsterdam which led to warnings being given to their respective constituencies advising them not to follow the teachings of the other preachers.

The second network consists of mosques in Amsterdam (*Tawheed* mosque, headed by imam Shershaby), The Hague (*As Soennah* mosque, until 2012 headed by imam Fawaz Jneid), and Tilburg (ISOOK Foundation, headed by imam Ahmad Salam). The preachers in this second network, unlike the *Selefies*,

are much more outspoken in their critique of Dutch politicians and Middle Eastern political leaders. In late 2011 a huge conflict occurred in The Hague at the *As Soennah* mosque between its imam, Fawaz Jneid, and the board of the mosque who regarded him as being too polemical towards other Muslim preachers and Dutch politicians, and as severely damaging the board's aspirations of participation in local societal activities. In 2012, this led to the dismissal of the imam by the board which was comprised mainly of his former students.

The third network, the *Al Fourqaan* mosque in the south of the Netherlands, is closely tied to the second. Dutch convert and Salafi leader Abdul-Jabbar van de Ven, who was a follower of some of the opposition shaykhs in Saudi Arabia, broke away from this mosque and went on to establish his own (loose) network that can be seen as a fourth network. In the past Van de Ven was accused of being part of a fifth network of the Dutch Salafi movement involved in recruiting for, and participating in, armed struggle. This fifth network is the so-called Dutch Jihadi network; most people in this network and its subsidiaries were connected to the core of the old Hofstad network (the assassin of Van Gogh, Mohammed Bouyeri, and his friend Samir Azzouz are its most well-known members). Several arrests made after the murder of Van Gogh in 2004 and in 2005 led to the disintegration of the network and it is no longer active.

All of the major Salafi networks in the Netherlands try to provide Muslim youth with incentives to acquire the right kind of knowledge and behaviour (De Koning 2012a). They strive to teach insiders what it means to belong to a particular kind of community, how to recognize that community and how to recognize themselves as members of it. Through these activities, the different Salafi networks try to establish and present themselves as moral guardians of a Muslim community that, according to Salafi authorities, is characterized by moral crisis. According to Salafi preachers this moral crisis has arisen because Muslims adopt Dutch customs and values and leave the path of Islam. The preachers try to persuade their constituency to reorganize their daily routines and to focus on "returning" to Islam according to Salafi interpretation (De Koning 2012a). In doing so they challenge the discourse of integration propagated by the Dutch state which is increasingly focused on compliance with Dutch (secular) standards and democracy (instead of God's law), and undivided loyalty (instead of the transnational loyalties of the Salafi movement) under the label of active citizenship (instead of "true" Muslims worshipping only God) (cf. Geelhoed 2011; Moors & Jacobs 2009).

The Dutch socio-political context: Secularism, Citizenship and Security

The political context of Salafism in the Netherlands provides a glimpse into how the utopian Islam of Salafism is received within the Dutch context of the management of Islam. I concentrate, in particular, on how a growing debate about Islam in the Netherlands has contributed to making the Salafis more visible (in turn fuelling the Islam debate). This entanglement has exerted a heavy influence on the way in which the Salafi movement has been branded as the main target for the counter-radicalization policies of the Dutch state.

During the 1980s and 90s Salafis shied away from any public visibility, let alone from participating in public debates. This changed after the events of 9/11, when Muslims in general became a huge topic of debate and the *Al Fourqaan* mosque in Eindhoven was accused of having welcomed a number of the 9/11 attackers in the past; something they vehemently denied. From 2002 onwards, Salafi visibility increased in the public's image of Islam and Muslims because of a number of incidents. A few Muslim young men who frequented the main Salafi centers tried to go abroad to participate in the violent struggles in Chechnya, Kashmir and Pakistan. Undercover documentaries of Salafi mosques revealed imams' sermons harshly denouncing Dutch political leaders and Dutch foreign policy towards Iraq and Afghanistan, with its allegiance to the US and Israel (De Koning 2012b). One imam was revealed to have said that, if necessary, women should be corrected with force if they did something wrong (De Koning 2009). The controversy surrounding the Salafis increased even more in 2004 when film-director and writer, Theo van Gogh, known for his polemical views on Islam, was killed by Mohammed Bouyeri, a member of the so-called Hofstad network (De Koning & Meijer 2011). Particular practices often associated with Salafis, such as the refusal to shake hands with people of the opposite sex (Fadil 2009) and the practice of face-veil wearing also became increasingly controversial (Moors 2009).

These controversies show that Salafis go beyond the space traditionally designated for religion in the Dutch public domain. Within the current model of citizenship policies, Muslims are part of society and have the same citizenship rights as others, but, as migrants, they are regarded as a group that needs to be integrated. In the 1990s, in particular, the need for immigrants to accept and internalise "Dutch norms and values" became a benchmark of integration and formed the basis for integration policies; immigrants were required to adopt the same ideas about virtuous citizenship as the ones supposedly held in high regard among native Dutch citizens (Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens 2010; Bracke 2012). The policies pertaining to Muslims were designed to steer the development of a Dutch Muslim community in a more "liberal Dutch" direction,

organized in an "acceptable and efficient" manner according to "Dutch stan-dards" and steering away from "orthodoxy" (Rath et al. 1999, 61; cf. Maussen 2009).

The events of 9/11, the murder of the Theo van Gogh in 2004, and the rise of anti-Islam politicians such as Wilders, resulted in the growing securitization of Islam; a process whereby the focus in media, politics and inte-gration was placed almost entirely on Muslims and Islam and their alleged threat to democracy and social cohesion (De Graaf 2011). Salafis, in particular, became entangled in a nexus of secularisation, securitization and Islamophobia as the main target of counter-radicalization policies (Buijs 2009; De Koning 2012b).

Anxiety among policymakers, politicians and opinion leaders about the Salafis is based on their alleged proneness to violence, while their efforts to participate in society are dismissed as attempts to infiltrate Dutch society to undermine it (De Koning 2012b). This fear is not only based on the possibility of political violence being perpetrated by Muslims (which in Dutch society is rare anyway, with the notable exception of the killing of Van Gogh), but also on the idea that Salafi Muslims are a threat to social cohesion, to the integration of Muslims and, in particular, to democratic and secular freedoms (Buijs 2009).

Salafism in daily life: duty, pragmatism and struggle

The internal contradictions and fragmentation of Salafism as well as the negative reactions to Salafism in wider society lead to inconsistencies, tensions and ambiguities arising in the daily lives of Salafis as they complicate Salafis' ambitions to become "true" Muslims. Elisha (2008) refers to Robbins (2004) who explores how the Urapmin Christians in Papua New Guinea engage with two competing and co-existing ethical frameworks: an "ethic of conviction" (based upon "the Christian moral system and the traditional conception of social action") and an "ethic of responsibility" (Robbins 2004, 248-249). Robbins' analysis of the competing and coexisting frameworks allows us to explore how people attempt to realize the moral ambitions that emanate from, but are also sometimes in conflict with, many different cultural repertoires, discourses and motives.

Among Dutch Salafis we can find two ethical frameworks, the ethics of duty and the ethics of social pragmatism. Maintaining a Salafi ethics of duty means that an individual has to acquire the "correct" knowledge and conviction and convert this knowledge into correct practice; there is a strong inclination to view one's religiosity as based upon fulfilling obligations and duties before God in all spheres of life without compromise (Haykel 2009). The Salafi ethics of duty is strongly related to the claim that Salafis are members of the saved sect (*al-firqa al-najiya*) or the victorious group (*al-ta'ifa al-mansura*) that will enter

Paradise. According to Salafis, they are the only "true" Muslims: uniting the correct knowledge, intention and practice in fulfilling their duty to demonstrate the correct level of dedication to, and worship of, the unique and one God.

The second frame of moral reasoning that Salafis uphold is an ethics of social pragmatism which they use to try to live up to the responsibilities and loyalties they have towards other Muslims and non-Muslims in different spheres of their lives: family, friends, school, work and leisure. At first sight one might expect the Salafi quest for a "pure" Islam to produce a sharp division between themselves and other Muslims, and the rest of society. In particular because Salafi preachers frame Dutch society as one in which Muslims are in moral crisis: they have strayed from the path of the true Islam and succumbed to the freedoms of "infidels". Many Salafis in this research, however, realize that an uncompromising position is not always attainable in Dutch society because of every day responsibilities towards family and friends, the duty to proselytize (in practice mostly among Muslims) and because Paradise can only be reached when they are "true" Muslims in the here and now of Dutch secular society. For example, Abdullah states: "If a mother goes out to pick up her child at school and she has to take off her face-veil because some minister does not allow that, that would be very sad." Others regret the fact that they cannot wear a headscarf at school, that school has no halal food and that boys and girls are not segregated at school.

A Salafi ethics of duty

One of the conditions of living according to the "true" Islam is acquiring the "correct" knowledge. Here Salafis immediately encounter a problem. Given the antagonisms among different Salafi networks all claiming to be disseminating the "true" Islam and the contradictions inherent in Salafi thought, how do they know what "correct" knowledge is? Participating in the Salafi networks only partially fulfils the desire for knowledge; as they grow more aware of the differences in opinion and the denouncements of other (Salafi) Muslims, the necessity to firmly ground their convictions in the "correct" knowledge increases.

Not only should one acquire the correct knowledge, but people's convictions and behaviour have to concur with this knowledge too. We find this most strongly in the concepts of *tazkiyyah* (purification of the soul) and *ikhlaas* (sincerity). Removing all the impurities from one's intentions is necessary if one wishes to come closer to God and to ensure that all the intentions underpinning one's practices of worship of, and obedience to, God are intended solely for the sake of satisfying God. This means that people have to continuously reflect upon their thoughts, attitudes and behaviour to check whether they are in accordance with the Islamic teachings.

The way participants of Salafi courses and conferences absorb these teachings is interesting. Take, for example, Yasin who visited a Salafi conference in Belgium which was attended, not only by Salafi preachers, but by other (more mainstream preachers) too. After the four day conference Yasin published the following summary on his Facebook account:

> Golden advice during the 'Hidden Treasure' conference
> 1) Self-reflection: Check yourself regularly, meaning look into the mirror and weigh your statements and actions.
> 2) Know who you are and where you stand: Purify your intentions, look at your character and test it on a regular basis. Do not fool yourself, do not deny but acknowledge that you make mistakes.
> 3) Purify your heart: Keep in touch with Allah (swt) by means of dhikr [remembrance of God]. Always is always, and not only during prayers. Going to school, to the mosque, during sport and during breaks.
> 4) Hope and fear: Are you being tested? Extinguish this with taqwa [fear or awe of God], meaning leave sinful matters for the sake of Him and perform good deeds for the sake of Him, with hope for His enlightenment.
> 5) Islam: Is more than just following a set of rules. Translate your meaning of Islam into concrete actions that can be useful for the society in which you live. Do not stop at words, ideas, making plans, but execute them. In other words: no words, but actions!

Points one, two and five of Yasin's Facebook status are derived from a lecture given by a young preacher at the above-mentioned 'Hidden Treasure' conference. He is not part of the Salafi circles and often teaches Islam as if it were a management course. The third and fourth points are from two young Salafi preachers at that same conference. Yasin's list shows how Salafi Muslims focus on disciplining their inner faith, moral discipline and practices based upon the scripture. The unity between knowledge, conviction and behaviour constitutes the ethics of duty which means that Islamic requirements have to be fully and strictly met in daily life. The logic behind this is that Salafis think life in the here and now is a test for the life hereafter. To be able to enter Paradise, it is not only the worldly consequences of one's behaviour that matters, but also the consequences of one's behaviour for the "last day", when one appears before God to account for one's actions. In this ethics of duty, as explained by Robbins (2010), people focus more on knowing and following the rules and less on the consequences that these actions might bring in the near future (cf. Elisha 2008, 183).

This means, for example, that while working in a health care setting is something that is valued, especially for (preferably unmarried) women, if this means that the strict separation between men and women is violated, it

becomes problematic (especially for women). If a woman decides to refuse such a job, this has negative consequences in the short term, but the long term goal (of entering Paradise) remains intact because she has not violated the obligation to maintain a strict separation between the sexes that is held in high regard by many Salafis.

As Robbins (2010), following Guyer (2007), explains, an ethics of duty is particularly useful when people cannot easily predict the consequences of their own actions. Following an ethics of duty makes sense then because people at least "know" they have behaved correctly. This unpredictability is experienced very strongly among Salafis in my research. The Dutch Islam debate has created a situation in which it is not easy for many to be Muslims in the way they would like to be, and many Salafis and other Muslims have experienced the negative connotations of being held responsible for the actions of other Muslims. The impression of hostility and estrangement, and the problems with Moroccan-Dutch youth in society, are taken as signs that the Muslim community is facing a deep crisis and that their lifestyle, acceptance and presence in the Netherlands is at stake. Many Salafis told me, after the murder on Van Gogh, that they (or their parents) feared for their safety in the Netherlands and wondered whether they would be forced to leave, a feeling that returned after the major victory in the elections of 2009 of the anti-Islam *Partij Voor de Vrijheid* (PVV; 'Freedom Party') of Geert Wilders. In a situation such as this, when it is difficult to foresee the near future, an ethics of duty makes sense because every action has its own intrinsic value as it forms part of the worship of God. For example Umm Muwahida, who stated on the eve of the elections in 2010: "But people will save their own skin when he (Geert Wilders, leader of the Freedom Party) becomes prime minister. But I wouldn't stay in the Netherlands for long."

A Salafi ethics of pragmatism

In their ambition to uphold an ethics of duty, many Salafis compare themselves to "strangers" which is similar to what some Dutch protestant Christians say about "being in the world, but not of the world". To be able to achieve this state of mind and turn it into practice, preachers emphasize the necessity of keeping a certain distance from worldly matters (nothing more than a "passing shadow" as a Salafi magazine noted; *El Tawheed Magazine* 2010). This does not mean total isolation from the outside world. Having a good education and (for men) having a job are highly valued. Many teachings and articles in journals, therefore, contain "tools and tricks" to help improve one's behaviour as both Salafis and as members of Dutch society; for example, how to succeed at exams (*El Tawheed Magazine* 2010: 24-40), stop smoking (*WijMoslims* 2008: 18-21) and manage anger (*Ontdekislam* 2012). An additional reason for not isolating oneself is that

by participating in society people can work to improve the tainted image of Islam, something that is often seen as part of an individual's *da'wa* efforts. Furthermore, the need to go to school and/or have a job and interact with non-Salafi and non-Muslim family and friends renders a complete withdrawal from society impossible (cf. Dumbe & Tayob 2011), with the exception of those who migrate to an "Islamic" country. To be able to function in society, Salafis engage with an ethics of social pragmatism. When we look at people's day to day practices we find a lot of pragmatic compromises taking place. Many men and women adjust their attire by wearing only a headscarf or not wearing the *djellaba* when they go to school or work. Many women do not wear a face-veil when they are in public with their parents as they often dislike their daughters wearing it. When Salafis go to the mosque for prayer, lectures, conferences and courses, however, they adjust their attire again in such a way they feel is more "Islamic".

The ethics of pragmatism remain firmly rooted in the ethics of duty that emanate from the Salafi understanding of the ambition to become a pious Muslim, but also involve an intimate knowledge of the sensibilities of one's family and friends as well as wider society. A good example pertains to shaking hands with the opposite sex. Underpinning some of the gender segregation among Salafis is the idea that they should refrain from shaking hands to protect themselves from temptations and desires. As, for example, Fadil (2009) also shows, women who would prefer to refuse to shake hands with men tend to avoid confrontation and conflict, as they know and understand many people can be offended by this practice. Such an attitude requires these women to be very aware of the Dutch secular sensitivities about Islam and Salafism as well as being perceptive to the opposition among Muslims against Salafism. In many cases the need to be pragmatic does not immediately lead to the conclusion that one is not Islamic enough or that one's freedom to practice Islam is being limited.

In other cases, for example, when women temporarily wear a headscarf and experiment with it, this is taken by others as "playing with Islam" discrediting the sincerity and authenticity of women's religiosity. In their relationships with family, friends and colleagues, however, the Salafis in my research resorted to all kinds of legitimizations such as: "We are in the Netherlands; that is the way things go here. It is not an Islamic country." "My *iman* [inner faith] is just not that strong yet." "I also have to respect the wishes of my parents who oppose the face-veil." "Work and education are important as well in Islam." "Islam is a religion of the middle way."

Such legitimizations are part of an ethics of pragmatism and, at the same time, refer to the ethics of duty. With the ethics of pragmatism, social responsibilities and daily ambiguities enter into one's concept of what being a

"true" Muslim is; for example, when an individual's aspirations pertaining to work, education or their relationship with family outweigh the desire to follow particular rules. In other cases Muslims may try to prevent "giving Islam a bad name" by adopting socially pragmatic positions instead of maintaining a strict ethics of duty. In all these cases, however, one relies on (the Salafi interpretation of) Islamic do's and don'ts to determine what is "correct" behaviour.

Life and faith as a personal struggle

Salafis feel that they are part of something good (the righteous path of Islam), something that transcends their individuality (the world community of Muslims) and something beautiful (the approval, love and benevolence of God). What follows from this exploration of the ethics of pragmatism is that the issue of predictability, so important in regard to the ethics of duty, is somewhat more complicated than explained thus far. The Salafi understanding of Islam is that it is an all-encompassing ritual and moral discipline which removes all the ambiguities, and unpredictability of daily life. But it is certainly the case that many of the Salafi respondents do experience life in the Netherlands as vulnerable and unpredictable. At the same time the ethics of pragmatism requires people to have an intimate knowledge of the do's and don'ts in (a particular section of) society. This suggests that the ethics of pragmatism is created by the need to reduce unpredictability and the search for certainty. There are strong arguments for that, but what complicates such arguments is that the vision of society is heavily influenced by Salafi teaching. Whereas Robbins (2010) and Elisha (2008, 2011) take the experience of tensions, contradictions and ambiguities as a given, or as predominantly the result of external conditions and their complex relationship with a particular mode of Christianity, I would suggest taking this one step further in the case of Salafism. Salafis' ideas of how difficult it is to be a "true" Muslim in Dutch society and their perception of unpredictability emanate from the predicaments they face and from the Salafi teachings which, with all their internal contradictions and tensions, create a picture of a hostile and distracting environment which is opposed to the blessed and righteous teachings of Islam.

Salafi preachers try to instil the idea of a crisis-ridden world in the mind of their constituency. Challenges, hostility, temptations are, therefore, not separated from Salafism but are a part of it. As one of my interlocutors stated on his Twitter account: "*Iman* is strengthened through difficulties and temptations, *iman* weakens in case of (enduring) success". Strengthening one's *iman* is part of the personal transformation which is crucial for realizing one's moral ambitions and should not be seen as something which hinders one's moral ambition but as a vital part of it. Sometimes people call this struggle *jihad al nafs* ['the struggle or

effort to control one's worldly desires'], an effort which can be achieved by the purification of the soul.

The experience of being part of a struggle, and living through that struggle, provides people with strong incentives to continuously reflect and improve themselves as part of their moral ambition. Although the pressure caused by this struggle may lead to disaffiliation from the Salafi movement by some, for many others, however, experiences like this are part of a test of faith and steadfastness. Finding "correct" solutions and overcoming setbacks then become temporary victories over Evil, or signs of God putting them to the test, and a confirmation that one is on the correct path and part of a community of "true" believers. The idea of a test or struggle that arises in daily life is, therefore, central in the convictions and practices of Salafi Muslims.

Conclusion: the struggle of Salafism

In popular accounts, Salafism and life in Dutch secular society are often viewed as being incompatible with one other; both within Salafi circles and among secular and other opponents. But acquiring and maintaining an ethics of duty is part of the Salafi moral ambition of becoming a "true" Muslim. This moral ambition is partly a product of living in Dutch society with its concomitant tension, unpredictability and personal dilemmas. These ambiguities, in turn, are incorporated into Salafi thought and practices through an ethics of pragmatism which transforms the ambiguities of daily life into personal struggles. Maintaining an ethics of duty means that people have to continuously reflect upon their knowledge, attitudes and behaviour in order to construct a coherent subject who is able to resist the temptations of everyday life and balance different motives, loyalties and practicalities. The ambivalences and ambiguities of daily life in a secular society, therefore, shape and give meaning to people's moral ambitions and act as challenges on a path of personal development towards achieving a state of piety.

This exploration of the moral ambitions of Dutch Salafis allows us to grasp the dilemmas, ambiguities and nuances that inform people's religiosity and that are used by preachers to mobilize their constituency. The securitization of Islam and fragmentation of the Salafis does complicate people's moral ambitions but as they also reinforce narratives of crisis, the fight against Islam and personal struggle, they constitute a potential that can be used by preachers in their moral activities based upon a utopian vision of Islam. What Salafi Muslims therefore do, and don't do, in the Netherlands is not merely the result of global Salafi doctrines and the end result of a Salafi moral development, but is the product and expression of the ambition of Dutch Salafis to become pious Muslims in what they perceive to be a crisis-ridden secular Dutch society.

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About the author

Martijn de Koning is an anthropologist at the Radboud University Nijmegen. He has published on identity construction of Moroccan-Dutch youth, Salafi Muslims in the Netherlands, radicalization of Muslim youth and the Dutch Islam debate. He teaches about the Middle East and about Islam in Europe at the Faculty of Religious Studies in Nijmegen and at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Amsterdam.

Entre le Prophète et le Paradis: la lutte salafiste aux Pays-Bas

Le salafisme, mouvement islamique mondial, s'est lentement établi aux Pays-Bas au cours des 30 dernières années. Un des traits de la religiosité salafiste est l'interprétation souvent très stricte de certaines traditions islamiques, position parfois regardée par d'autres musulmans et par les non-musulmans comme anti-Occident et contraire aux libertés séculières européennes. Pendant les dix années dernières, ce mouvement est devenu la cible principale de la politique anti-radicalisation de l'État néerlandais. Dans cet article, j'aborde la question de savoir comment les jeunes salafistes néerlandais pratiquent une version moralement stricte de l'islam que beaucoup d'autres musulmans néerlandais, de même que la

société chrétienne-séculière, rejettent et considèrent comme suspecte. J'explique comment des salafistes individuels tentent de réaliser leur désir de devenir des musulmans pieux et de suivre l'exemple des premières générations de musulmans, dans une société qu'ils éprouvent comme imprévisible, secouée par des crises et souvent hostile. Je prétends que les salafistes néerlandais combinent deux styles apparentés mais parfois contradictoires de raisonnement moral : une éthique du devoir et une éthique du pragmatisme. Je démontre qu'il en résulte un type de religiosité basée sur l'idée de la lutte. L'expérience de prendre part à une lutte et de la vivre leur fournit une forte motivation pour réfléchir et s'améliorer de façon continue comme partie de leur ambition morale. Le présent article offre un aperçu d'un mouvement islamique contemporain et de ses participants, et de la manière dont la religiosité des gens est formée de nos jours par des contextes politiques et sociaux et des enseignements religieux.

Tussen de Profeet en het Paradijs: Salafisme in Nederland

De wereldwijde Islamitische Salafistische beweging heeft zich in de afgelopen dertig jaar langzaam maar zeker een plaats veroverd in Nederland. Een van de kenmerken van de Salafistische geloofsbeleving is de vaak zeer strenge interpretatie van bepaalde Islmitische tradities, die door andere Moslims en niet-Moslims soms gezien wordt als anti-westers en in tegenspraak met Europese seculiere vrijheden. In de afgelopen tien jaar is de Salafistische beweging het voornaamste doelwit geworden van het antiradicalisatiebeleid van de Nederlandse regering. In dit artikel behandel ik de volgende vraag: Hoe beoefenen Nederlandse Salafistische jongeren een moreel strenge versie van de Islam die door veel andere Nederlandse Moslims en de bredere Christelijk-seculiere maatschappij wordt gewantrouwd? Ik behandel de vraag hoe individuele Salafi's proberen hun ideaal uit te voeren om een vrome Moslim te worden en het voorbeeld van de eerste generaties Moslims te volgen in een samenleving die zij ervaren als onvoorspelbaar, in crisis, en vaak vijandig. Ik beargumenteer dat Nederlandse Salafi's twee verwante, maar soms tegenstrijdige, stijlen van moreel redeneren combineren: een ethiek van plicht en een ethiek van pragmatisme. Ik laat zien dat dit resulteert in een soort van geloofsbeleving gebaseerd op het idee van strijd. De ervaring deel uit te maken van een strijd, die strijd mee te maken en te overleven, geeft mensen een krachtige impuls om voortdurend op zichzelf te reflecteren en zichzelf te verbeteren als onderdeel van hun morele ambitie. Dit artikel geeft inzicht in een moderne Islamitische beweging en zijn aanhangers en in hoe hun geloofsbeleving wordt gevormd door de moderne politieke en sociale context en godsdienstig onderwijs.