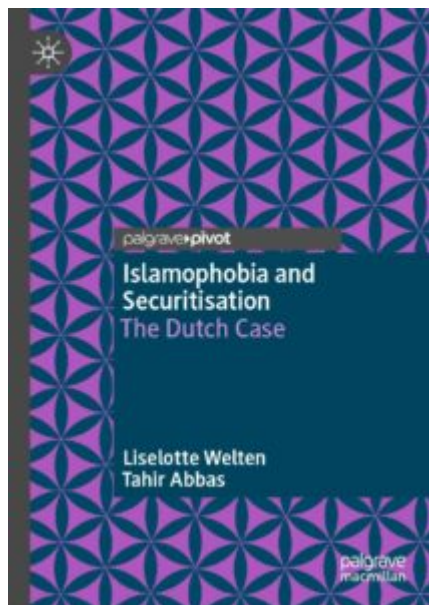


Islamophobia and Securitisation: The Dutch Case by Liselotte Welten and Tahir Abbas

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The Netherlands provides an interesting example of the hyper-securitisation of Islam and Muslims. The Netherlands has a total population of 18 million people, of which some five percent are Muslim (850,000) many, or perhaps even a majority, born or raised in the Netherlands, mostly with a family origin in Morocco or Turkey. This Dutch Muslim population is concentrated in four large cities. Of these, the Hague is 15 percent Muslim, and Rotterdam is 13 percent Muslim.

The Netherlands has long been considered an open and tolerant multiculturalist society, but in recent decades there has been a strong reaction against Islam and

Muslims. One of the earliest leaders of this was the neo-conservative politician Pim Fortuyn, who published a book *Against the Islamisation of our Culture* in 1997. The Netherlands then saw some of the most dramatic events that heralded the general hyper-securitisation of Islam, starting less than a year after 9/11 with the murder of Fortuyn in May 2002, and continuing with the murder of the anti-Islamic film director Theo van Gogh in 2004. Fortuyn was murdered by a non-Muslim environmental activist who saw him as a danger to vulnerable minority groups, but van Gogh was murdered by a Dutch-born Muslim who belonged to a group led by an older Syrian Islamist. In the 2010 national election, 15 percent of votes went to the 'Party for Freedom' of the anti-Islamic politician Geert Wilders, though his share of the vote has since fallen to around 11 percent.

During the 2000s there was much concern in the Netherlands about Salafism, and although the Dutch internal security service (AIVD) declared in a 2009 report that Salafi centres had been successfully persuaded to exclude people linked to extremism or terrorism, 'this does not alter the fact that anti-integration thinking still exists, which can lead to intolerant isolationism, polarization and, in the most serious case, the creation of a parallel society'. Salafism of all varieties, then, not just so-called 'jihadi' Salafism, was seen by important organs of the Dutch state as a threat.

Islamophobia and Securitisation: The Dutch Case, written in English by the young Dutch researcher Liselotte Welten and the senior international researcher Tahir Abbas, is a short study (105 pages) that, over 11 chapters, looks at the background to Islam in the Netherlands and to its securitisation, then at Dutch political and media discourse, and finally at the views and reactions of Dutch Muslims, or at least of the Muslims interviewed for the study, many of whom were active in running mosques and other Islamic institutions.

The book's first section provides a general introduction, including a chapter on radicalisation in which it is argued that while there is much emphasis on ideology as a pull factor, 'issues relating to social exclusion, disadvantage, and discrimination

are often less emphasised. While disadvantage itself is not a causal factor, these are significant contextual issues that are rarely engaged with'. This is an important point.

The second section deals first with the Dutch media and then with political discourse, covering not only Wilders but also the less-well-known Thierry Baudet. One of its most interesting chapters, chapter 6, on 'Helicopter Governance', argues that the official approach to combating Salafism and its actual implementation have often worked very differently. While local police have sometimes managed to establish cooperative relationships of trust with mosque leaderships, often they have not. Muslims interviewed for the book felt this was less the fault of the local police than of the AIVD security services that advised them and was often less well informed than the local police about what was actually happening on the ground. Various problems arose for any mosque that the AIVD labelled as 'Salafist', whether rightly or wrongly. One of the interviewees associated with such a mosque, a Dutch citizen, reported being refused entry to Turkey and detained there after the AIVD had, perhaps accidentally, passed his details to the Turkish authorities. This did not help future cooperation.

The book's third section, 'Muslim Community Resilience', is the most interesting, and looks at three topics: Turkish and Moroccan cultural capital and identities, Quranic education, and mosques' self-policing. It argues that there is a disagreement between leading members of the Turkish Islamic community in the Netherlands, who believe that increasing Turkish identity can combat radicalisation (as the Turkish community is cohesive and keeps people away from dangerous influences) and the AIVD, which mistrusts the Turkish government organisations that, in the Netherlands as in other European countries, provide religious, educational, and cultural services to people of Turkish origin or descent. It sees their impact as potentially anti-democratic and possibly 'lead[ing] to doubts about the loyalty of an entire community to Dutch society'. This disagreement to some extent reflects the poor state of Dutch-Turkish diplomatic relations, very visible in 2017 when the Turkish Minister of Family Affairs visited the Netherlands to canvas Turkish voters

there, and was prevented by the Dutch government from entering Turkish diplomatic premises in the Netherlands to make a speech, and then deported to Germany.

A similar disagreement exists with regard to Quranic education. While interviewees from the milieus where such education is provided see it as a barrier against radicalisation, the Dutch media and some municipalities have often viewed all forms of Quranic education as suspect. Finally, a dilemma arises with regard to mosques' self-policing. While some Muslim interviewees thought that the best course of action would normally be to talk someone out of views that might be problematic, the safer course was to exclude such a person from the mosque to protect its reputation, thus depriving that person of the possibility of guidance that might have helped moderate their views.

The two disagreements and the dilemma discussed in the book's final section show that, according to the evidence that the authors have gathered, the securitisation of Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands, which is driven not only by real threats but also by Islamophobic politics and media discourse, may actually be reducing security, not improving it. Other studies have come to similar conclusions regarding the UK.

Image: People and bikes in Amsterdam, 2013. Credit: Michael Coghlan/Flickr.