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Digital Multiculturalism in the Netherlands: Religious, Ethnic and Gender Positioning by Moroccan-Dutch Youth

KOEN LEURS, EVA MIDDEN AND SANDRA PONZANESI

Abstract

This article focuses on digital practices of Moroccan-Dutch adolescents in the Netherlands. The digital sphere is still rather understudied in the Netherlands. However, it offers a unique, entry to intersecting issues of religiosity, ethnicity and gender as well as to their implications for thinking about multiculturalism from new vantage points. What do digital practices such as online discussion board participation tell us about identity and multiculturalism? The three forms of position acquisition under discussion (gender, religion and ethnic positioning) show that neither religion, ethnicity, nor gender cease to exist in the digital realm but are constantly negotiated, reimagined and relocated. Drawing from the work of Modood, Gilroy and other critics of gender, media, multiculturalism and postcoloniality, we argue that online activities of the Moroccan-Dutch youth not only offer an important critique of mainstream media debates on multiculturalism, but also create space for alternative bottom-up interpretations of everyday practices of multiculturalism in the Netherlands.

Keywords

Digital media, online discussion boards, Moroccan-Dutch youth, intersectionality, multiculturalism, conviviality

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Introduction

Figure 1. Photo uploaded to the Hyves online community 'Wij Willen Geen Hoofddoek Verbod!❤'[1]

Over 15,000 people have joined the Hyves online community 'Wij Willen Geen Hoofddoek Verbod!❤'/'We Do Not Want a Ban on Veiling'

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[1]   Trotsemoslima, 'Raad van state schorst verbod [Council of state adjourns ban]'. No date, accessed 9 June 2011, http://hoofddoekjesverbod.hyves.nl/fotos/1085035468/0/A-ug/

(http://hoofddoekjesverbod.hyves.nl). The site was set up after the Dutch right-wing politician, Geert Wilders, Member of Parliament for the PVV (Freedom Party), announced his plans for a 'kopvoddentax' (head-rag tax) on the 16th of September 2009. Singling out Muslim women, this was the pejorative label he coined for his plans to levy taxes on wearing headscarves in the Netherlands to put a halt to the threat of 'Islamization' of the Netherlands. Muslim women would have to obtain a yearly permit, costing one thousand euros per annum. Apart from the criticism voiced by various political parties and both secular and religious pressure groups, people protested in the streets and bottom-up countermovements grew in the digital sphere. An example of the latter is visible on the Dutch social networking site Hyves where people have set up communities such as 'Wij Willen Geen Hoofddoek Verbod!❤'.[2]

Bringing together insights from gender studies, cultural studies and postcolonial studies, we discuss the relevance of counterdiscourses in the wider context of multiculturalism in this article. Analysing digital practices of Moroccan-Dutch youth enables us to unpack the current polarizing socio-political climate in Europe in general and the Netherlands more specifically. The digital sphere is our entry point to discern various intersecting issues of religiosity, ethnicity and gender as well as their implications for thinking about multiculturalism. We zoom in on the dynamics of religious, ethnic and gender position allocation and position acquisition in the everyday digital media practices of Islamic Moroccan-Dutch youth. Taking cues from positioning theory[3] and feminist theories of performativity[4], the dynamics of position acquisition and allocation render

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[2] At the moment of writing, Hyves is the largest online social networking site (SNS) in the Netherlands.

[3] Positioning theorists argue that discourses make available certain positions to people, but they actively can take up and contest positions, therefore 'positions can and do change', R. Harré and L. van Lagenhove, *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Action,* Oxford: Blackwell 1999, 17.

[4] Judith Butler argues that gender identities are constituted through performative acts. She famously deconstructed the category of gender by foregrounding that gender is to be understood as something *we do* rather than something *we are*. For gender to be intelligibile, Butler argues 'there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality.' In terms of positioning, people are allocated masculine and feminine positions. However, Butler remains sensitive to the agency of the individual to acquire her individual gender position: '[G]ender is an act … which is open to splitting, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of "the natural" that, in their exaggeration,

visible empirically the subjective micro-politics of identification. In a continuous process of positioning, people perform their gender, ethnic and religious identities by complying with, subscribing to and subverting allocated particularities.

We intersperse our narrative with examples from various social media, although our primary focus is on one particular communicative space: online discussion boards. The focus on online discussion boards and the specific theme of religious, ethnic and position acquisition is chosen because Moroccan-Dutch youth has been noted to participate in online forum discussions that are mostly about either love, relationships and sexuality, or the situation of the Moroccan community in the Netherlands, world politics in relationship to Muslim communities and Islamic codes of conduct.[5] In the concluding section, we attempt to rethink Dutch multiculturalism by analyzing how these young people acquire their own positions and establish counter discourses through digital definitions and redefinitions of their religious, ethnic and gender identities.

Differential positioning in the Netherlands

The 'kopvoddentax'-initiative by Geert Wilders illustrates how in some cases people with particular religious, ethnic and gendered backgrounds are not seen as belonging to the nation of the Netherlands. Yet they live inside of it.[6] Ponzanesi and Blaagaard argue that immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees across postcolonial Europe are othered through 'physical', 'symbolic' and 'material' default positions and borders: 'The European is what the other is not, therefore unmarked by race, ethnicity and religion but in reality implicitly constructed upon the idea of maleness, whiteness, and Christianity.'[7] 'Islam may be *in* Europe, but it can never be *of* Europe.'[8] The debates about multiculturalism in Western Europe have

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reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.' See J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York, NY: Routledge 1990, 194, 204, 282.

[5] L. Boumans, 'Meertaligheid op Marokkaanse Elektronische Prikborden' [Multilinguality on Moroccan Electronic Forums] in *Levende Talen* 3:1 (2002), 11-21: 12.

[6] H. Ghorashi, 'Culturalist Approach To Women's Emancipation in the Netherlands' in H. Moghissi and H. Ghorashi (eds.), *Muslim Diaspora in the West*, Farnham: Ashgate 2010, 11-23: 18.

[7] S. Ponzanesi and B. Blaagaard, 'In the Name of Europe' in *Social Identities*, 17:1 (2010), 1-10: 3.

[8] M. Buitelaar, 'Muslim Women's Narratives on Religious Identification in a Polarising Dutch Society' in G. Marranci (ed.), *Muslim Societies and the Challenge of Secularization: An Interdisciplinary Approach,* Dordrecht: Springer 2010, 165-184: 166.

almost completely transformed into discussions about Islam and Muslims. In this context, and especially in the Netherlands, two developments are important to take into account. Firstly, a transformation in the discourse about migrants: from guest workers they became seen as Moroccans and Turks, subsequently as 'allochthonous' and now primarily as Muslims. And secondly, a (re)new(ed) singular definition of Dutch national identity which is very much related to secularism.[9] When we locate these developments in the context of the Netherlands, we see that discussing cultural difference actually often means discussing Islam. The 'Islamization of migrants' can be connected to many factors, for instance, the rise of political Islam in Muslim countries, the 9/11 attacks in New York, but also the growing visibility of Islam in Europe in general, and in the Netherlands specifically (such as traditional clothing of Muslim women and mosques):

> All these factors contributed not only to the sudden realization of the Dutch that their country now hosted a substantial number of Muslims, but also to the identification of these migrants in religious, rather than ethnic terms. As a result, their culture was also understood and defined as essentially Islamic.[10]

Islam is seen as irreconcilably different from the discursively closed, homogenous Dutch culture and identity. In response to this narrow framing of cultural recognition of difference, Tariq Modood argues that we should found multiculturalism on the basis of 'difference' rather than 'culture' alone.[11] The accommodation and recognition of differences make it possible to take into account that cultural differences and connections are not just constructed 'inside' a minority group, but also outside this group, resulting from its treatment and representation. According to Modood, minority groups have been treated and are still being treated and perceived as different. From that perspective it is important to note that people are collectively targeted and could hence respond as a collective as well. Or to put it differently, Modood replaces the concept of culture (as the main determinant in multiculturalism) with difference, and acknowledges that there are two forms of difference at play in multicultural societies: 'negative difference' (stigmatization of or

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[9] R. Peters, ''A dangerous book': Dutch Public Intellectuals and the Koran' in *RSCAS Working Paper* 39 (2006), European University Institute, accessed 27 October 2011, http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/r.peters/bestanden/Dangerous%20book.pdf

[10] Ibid., 3.

[11] T. Modood, *Multiculturalism. A Civic Idea*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2007.

discrimination against groups) and 'positive difference' (the sense that groups have of themselves).[12] In our view, Modood's concept is useful to grasp the double-faced character of difference experienced on a day-to-day basis by Moroccan-Dutch people. Negative difference can be coupled with seeing them as incompatible Others by, for example, right-wing politicians, while an example of positive difference can be found in practices of self-presentation in the digital realm. Below we consider whether positive difference can be actively foregrounded through the digital practices Moroccan-Dutch youth engage in and consequently counter the negative difference they also experience.

The above mentioned work of Tariq Modood is central to the definition of multiculturalism that we deploy in this article. However, we combine it with the ideas of Paul Gilroy on conviviality. Gilroy distinguishes between institutionalized multiculturalism and everyday multiculture.[13] Beyond political, governmental, scholarly and mainstream media understandings of the failure of multiculturalism, he sees multiculture in action from the bottom up and refers to this as a conviviality of cohabitation. On a conceptual level, multiculture is in action in the (Dutch) digital realm as well. People with a variety of affiliations encounter one another in their everyday lived experiences which are mediated through digital practices. Taking the idea of a culture of conviviality as a starting point gives us the opportunity to think about multiculturalism from the bottom up, and to take various differences and power relations into account.

We bridge these interpretations of difference and multiculturalism with an understanding of agency based on the two-fold dynamic of 'ethno-cultural positioning' as described by Van Heelsum. On the one hand, bottom-up position acquisition – which we understand in parallel with positive difference – refers to 'the extent to which members of a given group look upon themselves primarily as members of a specific group and/or act as such.' On the other hand, top-down position allocation – in tandem with negative difference – refers to 'the extent to which (the bulk of) society considers them primarily as representatives of a specific group and/or treat them as such.'[14] Next to ethnic positioning, we think this dynamic also holds true for, and is intrinsically connected with, gendered,

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[12] Ibid., 41.

[13] P. Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press 2006.

[14] A. J. van Heelsum, *De etnisch-culturele positie van de tweede generatie Surinamers* [The Ethnic-Cultural Position of the Second Generation of Surinamese], Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis 1997, 24.

youth cultural and religious positioning. In every context, a particular set of physical, symbolic and material configurations order the available religious, ethnic and gendered subject positions that are allocated to people. However, we should remain aware of the room left for the stretching, negotiation and subversion of these allocated positions through processes of bottom-up position acquisition. In this article, we focus on digitally mediated processes of position acquisition as a form of positive difference, and subsequently discuss their implications for Dutch multiculturalism.

Mainstream positions of 'Dutchness' are generally constructed according to ideas of whiteness, maleness and Christianity, and migrants are seen as others who do not fit this category. For example the terminology of 'autochthonous' (read white) people versus 'allochthonous' (read black, migrant, refugee) people, steadily maintained by Dutch politicians, government officials and mainstream news outlets, is fraught with meaning as an exclusionary practice. An example of negative difference, the label 'allochthonous' allocates positions to groups of people considered non-Dutch others, and, like a long tail that cannot be shed, the label is not only applied to first-generation migrants but also to the subsequent generations that are born in the Netherlands.

After the 9/11 Twin Tower attacks, various subsequent bombings in Europe and the political murder of controversial Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by the Moroccan-Dutch Mohammed Bouyeri, Islamophobia in the Netherlands especially targets the Moroccan-Dutch community.[15] In a campaign spearheaded by Geert Wilders and his PVV as well as in commercial mainstream media, those labelled as 'Moroccan youth' (yet often born in the Netherlands) are excluded from the Dutch national identity and considered to be a problem. As examples of negative difference in this context, Moroccan-Dutch boys are allocated identities as 'street-terrorists' or fundamentalists, while girls are being constructed as either unemancipated and backwards or oppressed and in need of being saved from their Muslim culture.[16] Before detailing how Moroccan-Dutch youth engage in positive difference online through digital practices of position-acquisition, we first set out our research approach.

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[15]   Theo van Gogh produced the film *Submission* (2004), in which the viewer is presented with shots of a female wearing a see-through chador, her naked body painted with verses from the Quran. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Dutch Member of Parliament of Somalian descent wrote the script of the film. *Submission* is a visual pamphlet against maltreatment of women justified on the basis of Islamic principles.

[16]   See Ghorashi, 'Culturalist Approach.'

Approach

We build our argument on qualitative fieldwork conducted in the context of 'Wired Up', a Utrecht University research project, aimed at exploring digital media as innovative socialization practices for migrant youth in the Netherlands.[17] More specifically, we build on the analysis of in-depth interviews held with 23 Moroccan-Dutch girls and 22 boys (between the ages of 12 and 18) about their experiences with online discussion boards. The semi-structured interviews were carried out by Koen Leurs – a white, young majority Dutch male – assisted by Fayrouz Boulayounne, a young, female Moroccan-Dutch research assistant. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in large cities in the western, central and southern parts of the Netherlands, and two middle-sized cities in the southern part of the Netherlands. Follow-up questions were answered via email and instant messenger. Informants were contacted through secondary schools. In general our interviewees come from above average-sized, low-income families living in small housing, among other ethnic minority groups in mostly social-economically deprived neighbourhoods.

The over-representation of Moroccan-Dutch people among lower social-economic classes also implies lower levels of access to information and communications technologies. Illustratively, D'Haenens, Koeman and Saeys argue that a digital divide impacts on the lives of Moroccan-Dutch youth, who are still lagging behind in terms of ownership and access to ICT in comparison with majority Dutch youth.[18] During the interviews, all informants described themselves as religious, but they display a multiplicity of ways of engaging with Islam as part of their religiosity, identification, lifestyles and consumption preferences.

After the recorded interviews were transcribed, the narratives were studied through the lens of religiosity, ethnicity and gender in search for 'discursive formations'. In cultural studies, following Stuart Hall, discursive formations highlight power relations, which may be both restricting and empowering. Sparked by Foucault, Hall understands discourse as 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular moment.'[19] Discursive identification through narrative, as Hall argues, is a

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[17] See http://www.uu.nl/wiredup

[18] L. D'Haenens, J. Koeman and F. Saeys, 'Digital Citizenship Among Ethnic Minority Youth in the Netherlands and Flanders' in *New Media & Society*, 9:2 (2007), 278-299: 286-287.

[19] S. Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: Sage 1997, 44.

process which 'operates across difference, it entails discursive work [the process of making sense of things, making meaning of what is happening], the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries.'[20]

The majority of our interviewees are born in the Netherlands from parents who migrated from Morocco as guest workers from the 1960s onwards. Numbering just under 350,000 people, Moroccan-Dutch people make up some two percent of the total Dutch population of almost 16,6 million. They are the second-largest minority group in the Netherlands, following the Turkish-Dutch group. Of this Moroccan-Dutch group, 47 per cent migrated to the Netherlands from the 1960s onwards, when there was a growing demand for guest workers in northern Europe. The other 53 per cent were born in the Netherlands after their parents had migrated.[21] Four informants were born in Morocco and migrated with their families during their early childhood. Various markers such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, generation and youth culture intersect in the informants' everyday lived experiences.

Online discussion boards

A wide variety of message boards – such as Maroc.nl, Maroc.nu, Maghreb.nl, Maghrebonline.nl, Marokko.nl and Chaima.nl – have been set up and are frequented by second-generation Moroccan-Dutch youth. Discussion boards, also known as Internet forums, are online discussion sites where people can engage in conversations in the form of posted messages. Online discussion boards mostly consist of different rubrics in which conversations take place, while new threads, or discussion topics, can be added. After registration, site members can post reactions to threads and start new threads. Marokko.nl has been recognized as 'the most popular online discussion board among allochthonous young people.'[22] Among our interviewees, Marokko.nl, and to a lesser extent

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[20] S. Hall, 'Who needs "identity"?' in S. Hall and P. Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* London: Sage 1996, 1-17: 3.

[21] 'Population; sex, age, origin and generation' CBS, Statistics Netherlands, accessed 20 December 2011, http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?DM=SLEN&PA=37325ENG&D1=1-2&D2=0-4,136,151,214,231&D3=0&D4=0&D5=139&D6=a,!0-8&LA=EN&VW=T.

[22] C. Knijff, 'Marokko.nl: Nuttige Kijk op de Onderbuik' [Marokko.nl: insightful glance at gut feelings] in *de Volkskrant*, 6 November 2009, accessed 7 June 2011, http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2694/Media/article/detail/364713/2009/11/06/Marokko-nl-Nuttige-kijk-op-de-onderbuik.dhtml.

Chaima.nl, are most popular. More than 213,000 accounts have been registered on Marokko.nl,[23] but the amount of 'lurkers' (people who read messages but do not post to the site themselves) is expected to be much higher. Therefore, Marokko.nl is estimated to reach a remarkable 70 to 75 percent of Moroccan-Dutch youth in the age category of 15 to 35.[24] Abdel Amraoui, founder of the message board Maghreb.nl (a predecessor of Marokko.nl which is now frequented by Moroccan-Dutch adults), notes that discussion boards were created by Moroccan-Dutch young people in response to a demand: forums, he says, give the opportunity to present 'the other side of the argument.' In these digital spaces 'negative images' of the Moroccan-Dutch youth can be brought into dialogue with 'positive images'.[25] Seizing the opportunity to speak for themselves on message boards, migrants narrate their own position instead of having to witness being spoken for again and again.

Online Border Crossings

One reason that online discussion boards are important for our interviewees is that they provide an opportunity for them to discuss things that they might not (so easily) talk about away from the internet. Another reason is that the forums enable them to explicitly show who they are and highlight aspects of their identity they find important in a certain context. Sixteen-year-old Nevra reports: *'You can see it from appearances, often photos, when someone is Muslim, you can see photos of Mecca for instance, pictures of it. Yes you can see it, whether someone is Moroccan, some have pictures of Morocco for instance.'*

Religion gets combined with an expression of ethnicity and other markers of differentiation, says 13-year-old Tariq: *'You can also have a look at the photos, then you can see they are in another country, or you see flags of other countries. Turkish, Moroccan or Surinamese, they want to say, where they are from, that they are proud of their descent.'*

Also underlining ethnic proudness and indicating the headscarf as an important identity-marker, 13-year-old Inas describes her self-positioning as follows: *'Like, I'm wearing a headscarf. When I post a photo*

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[23] On 6 October 2011, 213,891 members have joined the Marokko.nl community. On Marokko.nl 1039,949 discussion topics have been started, while 28831,263 comments have been published.

[24] C. Knijf, 'Marokko.nl: Nuttige kijk.'

[25] Ibid.

with a picture of me wearing a headscarf, you can so to say see that I have an Islamic background.'

Furthermore, interviewees report that they highlight their attachment to, for instance, the Islam by showing on their online profile page on Hyves that they are a member of different groups pertaining to Islam. Displaying headscarves, joining groups and publishing photos of important religious locations are important identification markers to perform one's religious identity, signal one's ethnic proudness and to receive recognition from peers.

We recognize a distinct generational specificity to the experience of 'second generation migrant youth', a problematic but dominant notion used to describe descendants of migrants in the Dutch context.[26] Generational specificity is also gendered, as Moroccan-Dutch girls, for instance, have to engage differently with various motivations of continuity and change than boys. Generally, Moroccan-Dutch boys are often 'allowed a wider radius of action outside the house', while girls are sometimes seen as gatekeepers 'to maintaining the family honour', while 'they still face the most restrictions, and they spend much of their leisure time with female family members and friends in domestic settings.'[27] Similarly, Nabben, Yeşilgöz and Korf state that in puberty especially Moroccan-Dutch and Turkish-Dutch girls, more than boys, hang out mostly with girls who also share their own ethnic background. Additionally, they remark that Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch girls often spend a small amount of their spare time in public space, whereas especially Moroccan-Dutch boys spend a lot of their time outside.[28] Perhaps because they spend more time indoors, Moroccan-Dutch girls use the Internet more than boys.[29] Our informants, however, report a variety of experiences in their personal autonomy and radius of action. Fourteen-year-old Loubna reflects: *'In terms of culture, my background is Moroccan, but I do go out and visit the cinema. I go to the city and buy clothes. Those are things I also love.'* Loubna illustrates that sweeping remarks should be treated with ambivalence, everyday practices bring more nuance.

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[26]   As the sociologist Andersson suggests, it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of 'first generation nationals'. See M. Andersson, 'The Social Imaginary of First Generation Europeans' in *Social Identities* 16:1 (2010), 3-21.

[27]   T. Pels and M. J. de Haan, *Continuity and Change in Moroccan Socialization. A Review of the Literature on Moroccan Socialization in Morocco and Among Moroccan Families in the Netherlands*, Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht and Verwey Jonker Instituut 2003, 61.

[28]   T. Nabben, B. Yeşilgöz and D. Korf, *Van Allah tot Prada* [*From Allah to Prada*], Utrecht: Forum 2006, 27.

[29]   Ibid., 46.

On a day-to-day basis, Moroccan-Dutch youths seem to turn to the digital realm also to explore their divergent personal trajectories. This way, offline encounters infuse the online world with meaning and vice versa – they are 'mutually constitutive.'[30] This is a significant acknowledgement, as techno-enthusiasts' utopian views on the Internet have proliferated until the beginning of the 21st century. In their progress narratives, both representatives of corporations and academics hailed new technologies as harbingers of social justice, claiming that users could leave behind their bodies in their exploration of cyberspace. However, as Jaishree Odin argues, advocates of '[t]echnology might claim to have made possible a clean virtual space in which categories of race, gender, and class are said to be irrelevant and in which humans can experience the freedom of total disembodiment. We know better.'[31] It is especially problematic, Odin writes, that techno-capitalist renderings of the Internet as disembodied have rendered 'the need or, for that matter, the desire for a politics of social change superfluous.'[32]

Offline power relations get perpetuated online. Fifteen-year-old Osman describes that he often encounters racism and stigmatization, both online and offline. For instance in the supermarket, he witnesses how people when encountering him anxiously keep a firm grip on their purses. Online similar confrontations take place, he says, for instance while playing video games. In the shooter game *Counter Strike*, players have the opportunity to talk to each other through their microphones and headsets. Sometimes, when asked to introduce himself, after saying 'I am a Moroccan, I am a Muslim' he finds opponents yelling at him and calling him 'terrorist'. However, there is still room for subversion, also online. Brouwer has argued that the internet makes it possible to 'follow "the unheard" stories of Muslims' online and stresses that Moroccan-Dutch girls have turned to online discussion boards to express their voices.[33] In sum, we would like to emphasize that the Internet is not a utopian space where the power relations in the offline society do not play a role. On the contrary, similar to the offline world it proves to be a place of continuation and contestation of ongoing power relations.

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[30] J. Wajcman, *Technofeminism*, Cambridge: Polity Press 2004, 38.
[31] J. Odin, *Hypertext and the Female Imaginary*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press 2010, 55.
[32] Ibid., 112.
[33] L. Brouwer, 'Giving Voice to Dutch Moroccan girls on the Internet' in *Global Media Journal* 5:9 (2006), accessed 27 October 2011,
http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/fa06/gmj_fa06_brouwer.htm

Performative Islam: Religious Position Acquisition

Many informants used the Internet for collecting information about faith and religious practices. Often they combined this information with knowledge from elsewhere, from the mosque, their families, and so on. During one interview, 15-year-old Meryam spoke about the *Handboek voor moslimvrouwen* (Handbook for muslim women), which she had in her handbag. She explained that she liked to keep a book like that with her at all times: *'I read this, because it gives you a lot of rules and how you can do your best to become a good Muslim woman.'*

These books give her something to hold on to. She turns to Marokko.nl to read personal stories that people have shared, which she uses together with her books that guide her in making everyday decisions. About the book she notes:'I just buy it at the mosque and it gives you rules to abide by.' On *Marokko.nl*, on the other hand: *'I type "Islam" and many different pages appear. And I look at those. Some rules are not in the book, but they might be available on the Internet.'* Meryam adds how she 'noses around' in forums on Islam. The tension believers experience between being provided with meanings by authorities and their texts and taking the opportunity to articulate personal religious interpretations themselves lies at the heart of this section on performative Islam.

Scholar of religion Gary Bunt argues that collaborative, bottom-up and peer-to-peer networking through social media 'has led to a complex reconfiguration of religious authority models.'[34] Such practices can bring about a subversion of the top-down authority on interpreting Islamic principles and practices. Jon Anderson recognized that 'Islam on the internet is performative'. A diversity of performative Islamic practices are made visible to other users, revealing the multiplicity of ways in which 'Muslims connect their lives with Islam and extend those connections beyond the parameters of previous networks.'[35] Online 'voices, connections, identities and performances represent a "missing middle" between the Islam of intellectuals subject to textual analysis (of thought) and Islam of the folk or masses more likely to be examined in terms of social forces.'[36] Carmen Becker acknowledges 'a broader decentralizing

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[34] G. R. Bunt, *iMuslims. Rewiring the House of Islam*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press 2009, 17.

[35] J. W. Anderson, 'Muslim Networks, Muslim Selves in Cyberspace: Islam in the Post-Modern Public Sphere' in *NMIT. Working papers on new media & Information Technology in the Middle East* (2001), accessed 27 October 2011, http://www.mafhoum.com/press3/102S22.htm.

[36] Ibid.

tendency within Islam.' She saw how *Salafi* Muslim activists in German and Dutch online spaces were engaged in 'meaning-making activities that tell people how to behave and how to "be in the world".'[37] Online voices as the missing middle are assessed in various ways by our informants.

Sixteen-year-old Ilana states that in *'the rubric Islam & I many things about Islam are discussed and also the rules of Islam.'* Sahar, a 14-year old girl, also participates in this rubric and adds that people exchange ideas, *'about things you should and you shouldn't do.'* Negotiating, sometimes strictly, Muslim demands with Dutch liberal youth culture, informants told us that many people discuss whether certain things are *halal*, allowed in Islam, or *haram*, forbidden in Islam.[38] Not everyone appreciates bottom-up interpretations of what is *haram* or *halal*. Some see disadvantages in online performances of religion, as Nevra (16) argues: *'You now see that people who are engaged with their faith, actually make a personal version of their faith. They do things that they aren't allowed to do, because many people do it [and share their actions online], they say, they can also do it.'*

Inas, a 13-year-old informant, also voiced her scepticism about online discussions about Islam: *'I do not try to find too many things about it.'* She chooses to uphold her own conceptions about Islam: *'Those are my own opinion. And someone else should not change my opinion,'* Nonetheless, Inzaf (15) notes that converts might find on Marokko.nl a space of support. Those who have converted to Islam ask about what they should do, where they have to go. The people on the site help them and say what they can do best.

These processes of knowledge production and consumption have been described as a form of 'cut-and-paste Islam', highlighting its eclectic character where people shop around for their religious preferences.[39]

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[37] C. Becker, 'Gaining Knowledge: Salafi Activism in German and Dutch Online Forums' in *Masaryk University Journal of Law and Technology*, 3:1 (2009), 79-98: 79.

[38] Kemper sets out the dynamics of interpreting what is considered *halal* and *haram*: 'Islam subdivides ethical behavior into five categories: obligatory (*fard*), recommendable (*moestahabb*), permitted (*halal*), condemnable (*makroeb*) and forbidden (*haram*) practices. The consumption of alcohol, for example, is *haram* and eating ritually slaughtered beef is *halal*' in C. van Summeren, 'Religion Online: The Shaping of Multidimensional Interpretations of Muslimhood' on Maroc.nl in *The European Journal of Communication Research* 32:2 (2007), 273-295: 292-293.

[39] M. Buitelaar, 'De Islamisering van identiteit onder jongeren van Marokkaanse afkomst' [The Islamization of Identity Among Youth of Moroccan Descent] in M. ter Borg (ed.), *Handboek Religie in Nederland: Perspectief, Overzicht, Debat [Handbook Religion in the*

Bringing together different views on Islam in one space, a collaborative *habitus* is developed at the crossroads of top-down and bottom-up performances of Islam. We would like to argue that we recognize such a development in the religious experiences of our interviewees, but at the same time singling out religious position acquisition does not offer a complete view of on-going processes of positioning. The Internet also appeared to be a ground for contesting other facets of life, such as practices of ethnic and gender position acquisition. Moreover, in most cases, the ethnic, religious and gender aspects of the identities of our interviewees intersect and cannot be investigated separately. Especially the categories of 'Moroccanness' and 'Muslimness' are closely intertwined.

Ethnic position acquisition in hush harbours

Next to talking about Islamic codes of conduct and religious affiliations, we would like to elaborate on another theme: ethnic position acquisition. A great deal of discussion on message boards is about the stereotypes and counter-positioning of Moroccan-Dutch youth in the Netherlands. Here we also see how the terms 'Muslim' and 'Moroccan' are constantly intertwined in public discourse, and hence often also in its counter-discourse.

'We are here to stay, so get used to it!' Lenie Brouwer quotes this statement left by a Moroccan-Dutch contributor on the discussion board Marokko.nl. The statement is a response to the debate that was unleashed in the Netherlands after filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in 2004.[40] As we explained in the introduction, in the Netherlands, like elsewhere in Europe, secularity and Islam are being reinforced as 'irreconcilable discursive categories'. Thijl Sunier observes in this context a clear-cut opposition between secular 'good people' and Muslim 'bad people'. These are hermetic discursive categories, which 'not only demands an almost absolute loyalty to either side, it precludes, and even delegitimizes, any hybridization and creativity of cultural production.'[41] Buitelaar and Stock learned from Moroccan-Dutch Muslims that they feel

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Netherlands: Perspective, Overview, Debate], Zoetermeer: Meinema 2008, 239-252: 248-249.

[40] L. Brouwer, 'Jokes, raps and transnational orientations. Protests of Dutch-Moroccan youths in the Debate on Islam' in M. de Theije and T. Salman, *The Global Means and Stakes of Local Conflict*, Amsterdam: VU University Press (forthcoming).

[41] T. Sunier, 'Styles of religious practice: muslim youth cultures in Europe' in H. Moghissi and H. Ghorashi (eds.), *Muslim diaspora in the West. Negotiating gender, home and belonging*, Farnham: Ashgate 2010, 125-138: 125.

external pressure 'to take sides', they feel 'caught between a Muslim and a non-Muslim 'camp' that both claim definitional power.' The spatial metaphor 'to take sides' occurs frequently in the narrations of our interlocutors as well.[42]

Figure 2. Rafje[43]

Rafje, an artist whose provocative statements are published on Marokko.nl regularly, aims to capture the tendencies and ambivalences in Dutch multicultural society. Noteworthy is his reworking of a traditional Dutch children's song and play in which toll has to be paid to a skipper who will take people across one of the Dutch rivers.[44] Rafje renders clearly visible the hermetic division – instigated by 'skipper' Wilders and his followers – between 'good' (read secular) people and 'bad' (read Muslim) people[45] in this statement: 'Wilders, will you let me sail across? Yes or no? If so, should I hate Islam? Yes or No?'

In our interviews, Bibi laid bare the painful overexposure in Dutch mainstream press of Moroccan-Dutch individuals who break the law, sharing that she feels as if the whole Moroccan community in the Netherlands gets framed as one homogeneous criminal group. Bibi and

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[42] M. Buitelaar and F. Stock, 'Making homes in turbulent times: Moroccan Dutch Muslims contesting dominant discourses of belonging' in Moghissi and Ghorashi, *Muslim diaspora in the West*, 163-180: 170.

[43] Rafje.nl, '349. Overvaren [sailing across].' 2011. accessed 9 June 2011, http://www.flickr.com/photos/rafje/5502536250/.

[44] 'Skipper, will you let me sail across, yes or no? Do I have to pay toll, yes or no?', as originally in Dutch: 'Schipper, mag ik overvaren, ja of nee? Moet ik dan ook tol betalen, ja of nee?' The children's play centers around one child, the skipper, who sets the terms for other children in the play to cross a path she or he chooses.

[45] As discussed in for instance Sunier, 'Style of religious practice.'

other informants have the feeling that only this extreme side of the story, focusing on the small minority within the minority, gets told. They report that Marokko.nl is better suited to match their interest in voicing other narratives. Media scholar Eugenia Siapera observes that 'the existence of minority media reflects the exclusion of minorities from the mainstream media, and to some extent it reflects the need for minorities to have their own mediated space.'[46]

Discussion sites such as Marokko.nl are appreciated by their users because of the alternative voices that can be found and articulated there. This corner of the Internet is for instance used by Moroccan-Dutch youth to discuss and reframe dominant images circulating in news media. Thirteen-year-old Salima reports about mainstream news media: *'They speak about Moroccans very often. If it would be a Turk or someone else, than it is not immediately news or so, but when there are Moroccans involved, it is immediately like: all right, these are Moroccans, instantly on the news.'*

Ideally, national news media mirror society, including its multicultural dimension. Yet ethnic minorities often feel that news coverage had been negatively skewed.[47] As 14-year-old Senna remarks: *'On Marokko.nl you also get news, news is discussed, but it is more about Moroccan news and so on. News that you do not find in de* Telegraaf.*'*[48]

Away from the cultural hegemony of mainstream media, Marokko.nl is a space allowing for the proliferation of new voices in the public domain. Dara Byrne has compared 'dedicated sites' – online discussion forums that are frequented by ethnic minorities – with 'hush harbours'. 'Historically, the term *hush harbor* refers to the places where slaves gathered to participate in various aspects of public life, hidden, unnoticed, and especially inaudible to their white masters.'[49] Updating the concept to make it relevant to an analysis of contemporary digitally

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[46] E. Siapera, *Cultural Diversity and Global Media. The Mediation of Difference*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2010, 94.

[47] Illustratively, ethnic minority youth in the Netherlands, including Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch, do not feel addressed by the Dutch public broadcast channels. They spend thrice more time watching commercial television instead of public TV. L. D'Haenens, L., J. Koeman, and F. Saeys, 'Digital citizenship among ethnic minority youth in the Netherlands and Flanders' in *New Media & Society*, 9:2 (2007), 278-299.

[48] De *Telegraaf* is the largest daily newspaper in the Netherlands, especially known for its populist and sensationalist reporting.

[49] D. N. Byrne, 'The Future of (the) 'Race': Identity, Discourse, and the Rise of Computer-mediated Public Spheres', in A. Everrett (ed.), *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press 2008, 15-38: 16.

mediated subaltern and oppositional public spheres, she argues that in the United States dedicated sites for Asians, African-Americans and Latinos, such as AsianAvenue.com, BlackPlanet.com and MiGente.com respectively, are popular with a view to the maintenance of 'a sense of group cohesion'. Visitors to these sites are able to articulate 'rhetorical practices that members perceive as being very valuable to their online lives because they are relatively free of *mass* participation by ethnic outsiders.'[50] Connecting this to Tariq Modood's interpretation of difference in a multicultural society, one could argue that these discussion sites help migrant youth to define and redefine positive difference (how a group perceives itself) and to counter negative difference (stigmatization of a group from the outside) at the same time.

Our interviewees stress the importance of being able to voice themselves without restraint. Interestingly, they assert that they cannot imagine that the 'white master' is present on the site. As Osman (15) phrases it: *'I don't see Wilders having a look at the site, I cannot imagine that.'* In this way online forums seem to be considered as safe 'hush harbours.' In her early work on online discussion board usage among Moroccan-Dutch youth, Virginie Mamadouh found that 'young Dutch Moroccans are more likely to discuss and dispute Moroccan and Dutch traditions in the safe encounter of quasi-anonymous forums than in face-to-face contacts with relatives, peers or teachers.'[51]

The hushed nature of the discussion boards gets accentuated as informants report that a site like Marokko.nl, in their view, operates off the radar. Senna (14) states: *'I don't know, I think that half of the [Dutch] people do not even know that it exists.'* The hush harbour, however, where users thought they could voice their views inaudibly to the white master, is being increasingly surveilled by people with right-wing orientations as well as by the mainstream press. Public news media link discussion sites frequented by Moroccan-Dutch individuals such as Marokko.nl to extremism and radicalism, with newspaper items such as 'Cut-and-paste Islam: how young Muslims in the Netherlands compose their radical worldview.'[52] Additionally, these sites are dismissed as the underbelly of the unknown, segregated ghettos, grimy spaces disconnected from the

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[50] Ibid., 17.

[51] V. Mamadouh, 'Constructing a Dutch Moroccan identity through the world wide web' in *The Arab World Geographer* 4:4 (2001), 258-274: 271.

[52] M. Oostveen, 'De knip- en-plak Islam; Hoe jonge moslims in Nederland hun radicale wereldbeeld samenstellen' in *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 November 2004, 38.

mainstream: 'Ghettos on the web: On the internet, every group creates its own truth'[53]; 'Forums where verbal abuse is allowed.'[54]

Nonetheless, besides the possibility of ethnic re-positioning, online discussion boards also function as a comfort zone to negotiate ethnic identities and to say what cannot be said in the mainstream public sphere. Whereas in mainstream media minorities are often expected to 'take sides', or to take responsibility for the actions of others from their group (for example, apologize for the murder of Theo van Gogh), these online hush harbours give them the opportunity to speak freely and at the same time mix and match Dutch and Moroccan or Muslim identifications. In the following section we will elaborate on the gendered aspect of position acquisition in online hush harbours as safe zones.

Negotiating *hchouma* topics as gendered position acquisition

Earlier we discussed how Moroccan-Dutch girls hang out with female friends and, as researchers have noted, spend a smaller amount of their spare time in public space, in comparison with Moroccan-Dutch boys. In voicing themselves online on discussion boards, Moroccan-Dutch girls seek to create a space for themselves. Brouwer stresses that Moroccan-Dutch girls have turned to online discussion boards to express their voice: 'Dutch-Moroccan girls are more restricted in their freedom of movement than boys, and thus, the Internet widens their horizons.'[55] Countering stereotypes, persistent in Dutch society, of Muslim girls as passive and oppressed, and negotiating their individual gendered positionality in the context of Islam, their peers and their families, 'girls demonstrate counterviews towards the dominant western image of Muslim women as well as to their own communities.'[56] As our informants tell us, a large number of Moroccan-Dutch girls connect to the Internet from their bedrooms. In this way they enjoy a significant level of privacy while engaging in discussion forums which offer them an opportunity to express themselves.

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[53] B. Hulsman, 'Getto's op het web. Op internet heeft elke groep zijn eigen waarheid' in *NRC Handelsblad,* 8 January 2005, 33.

[54] R. Pietersen, 'Forum waar beledigen mag' in *Trouw*, 21 January 2008. Retrieved from http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1260775/2008/01/21/internetfora-Forum-waar-beledigen-mag.dhtml, accessed 30 September 2011.

[55] L. Brouwer, 'Giving voice to Dutch Moroccan girls on the internet' in *Global Media Journal* 5:9 (2006). Available online, accessed 1 November 2011, http://lass.calumet.purdue.edu/cca/gmj/fa06/gmj_fa06_brouwer.htm

[56] Ibid.

Some girls report that they sometimes find it easier to discuss *hchouma* topics that transgress dominant Moroccan cultural orders on discussion boards. As Loubna Skalli explains,

> Hchouma is a label applied to virtually everything considered transgressive, taboo, unconventional, provocative, or progressive by the cultural order in Morocco. Slightly more charged than the concept of 'shame', hchouma is the master socio-cultural code into which the Moroccan individual, and women in particular have been and still are socialized.[57]

Hchouma refers to the moral order and sets the limits 'to what may or may not be said, done, looked at, or even hoped for – as well as *when* and *how* the individual should conform or not to a set of expected behavior.'[58] Illustratively, 13-year-old Ilham feels that *'it is a good thing to have all those girls together.'* From the relative safety of their own homes, they report that they experience a greater sense of freedom to discuss topics such as relationships and sexuality and to meet new friends. Amina, a 13-year-old girl, summarizes the relevance of online message boards in the lives of Moroccan-Dutch girls as follows:

> You perhaps dare to say more on the internet. You know, you do more, usually you are anonymous, if you want to at least, and then you recount your experiences. At home you can usually not talk about these things, otherwise you would have done that long ago. Than you can tell it online. And then you see what people on the internet have to say about it. And that might help you.

Having a place to discuss these issues is of the utmost importance, as Moroccan-Dutch teenagers do not feel addressed by sex education websites available in the Netherlands. In their work on digital sex education, Pauline Borghuis, Christa de Graaf and Joke Hermes found that these young people 'feel their voice is not heard; they cannot identify with the [existing] sites but rather feel repulsion and rejection.[59] As 15-year-old

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[57] L. H. Skalli, *Through a Local Prism: Gender, Globalization, and Identity in Moroccan Women's Magazines*, Oxford: Lexington Books 2006, 96.

[58] Ibid.

[59] P. Borghuis, C. de Graaf and J. Hermes, 'Digital storytelling in sex education. Avoiding the pitfalls of building a "haram" website' in *Seminar.net* 6:2 (2010), 234-247: 235. Available online, accessed 1 November 2011: http://seminar.net/images/stories/vol6-issue2/Borghuis_prcent_2CdeGraaf_prcent_26Hermes-DigitalStorytellinginsexeducation.pdf.

Sousou describes, *'You have a special rubric about sexuality and those kinds of things* (laughs) *… Yes these things you normally don't talk about them.'*

Message boards are employed among the informants to discuss and share their views on intimacy and sexuality in relation to their ethnic and religious backgrounds. Sousou further describes that, *'Especially when something has happened or so, yes you can talk about it, just as an anonymous person, you get all kinds of reactions and so on, that is fun.'*

Issues that are difficult to discuss in face-to-face contexts are opened up for discussion in the digital realm. This goes for both offline conversations with peers and with parents, says 13-year-old Inas: *'I think it is easier than like [talking] with my girlfriend, because people usually give a different name… [online] they talk about these things more casually.'* Bibi (16) reports that she turned to Marokko.nl to discuss issues of intercourse and sexuality in the context of marriage, because she would rather turn to the online community instead of bringing the issue up with her parents – *'you dare not to go to your parents, because you find it really embarrassing.'*

Daily lived sexual practices and experiences are discussed from the bottom up. Online discussion boards make it possible for young Moroccan-Dutch girls to discuss and ask questions not just about sexuality in general, but also in connection to Islam. Message boards provide participants with a supportive vehicle to re-negotiate their relationship with their sexualities and with Islam. Khalid Mahdauoi, the founder of Marokko.nl, states that the majority (60 per cent) of visitors to Marokko.nl is female.[60] Girls feel comfortable enough to bring up very serious issues. Loubna (14) spoke about how another forum participant asked support from the community as to whether she had dealt with domestic violence in the right way:

> For real a girl revealed much about herself on Marokko.nl and said something like 'Yes, my husband beats me', and so on. And 'I am divorced', and everyone says 'Yes that is good', and so on. Then one girl said something like 'No, if your man was good and handsome, than you had to just stay with him', I don't know… Yes I did not really like that. Yes I really found that … (silence) … that was really stupid.

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[60] R. van der Zee, 'Waarom Moslimmeisjes graag een man zoeken via Internet' [Why Muslim Girls Like to Search for a Man using the Internet] in *NRC Handelsblad,* 25 March 2006, 53.

Fellow discussion board participants offer advice, support and information, all from the relative safety of their computer screens. They encouraged several of our informants to decide upon action. According to Loubna, the forum is a good way 'to get something of your chest, *'and everyone reacts and they can give you advice.'* A comfort zone atmosphere established by anonymity and moderation contributes to the experienced pleasure. Ilham (13) states, *'It is fun to know what people have to say when I have put something online.'* Learning from others is also of great importance, especially to receive peer group affirmation, which is central during adolescence. Ilham explains that she just wants to know what *'the real deal is, so to say, but for instance when I have put something on Marokko.nl I want to know what people think of it.'*

These reflections indicate that girls negotiate their positionality both against Western stereotypes and against notions about gender relations upheld by their parents or fellow community members. In this context, we would like to argue that the online discussion boards give Moroccan-Dutch girls a chance to discuss *hchouma* issues like sexuality, not only because of anonymity, but also because these media give them an opportunity to speak from their specific cultural location: young girls who live and grow up in Western Europe, as members of minority group with a Muslim faith.

Multicultural society gets redefined?

Religious, ethnic and gender position acquisition exposes three purposes of online discussion board participation: gender performativity, safe zones and voicing in-betweenness, which explain why there is such great demand for a safe space for expressing oneself against the grain. What do these digital practices tell us about digital media and multiculturalism? The three forms of position acquisition we discussed show that neither religion, ethnicity, nor gender cease to exist in the digital realm. The sharing of mundane, intimate and politicized religious, ethnic and gender experiences fosters feelings of belonging to a community of Moroccan-Dutch adolescents. Identities are constructed in and by their relations to dominant and subordinate socio-cultural configurations. These processes indicate persisting asymmetrical relations of power, and the need for social change thus remains pressing. Because the voices of these young people are often dismissed as foreign and other, the fabric of their everyday life is woven from a dynamics of exclusion and inclusion. Our informants' experiences with discussion boards document how their voices are now proliferating, at least in a digital corner of the public domain.

Acknowledging online minority voices – muted elsewhere – may foster a wider recognition of difference, which, subsequently, may invite majority members of Dutch society to begin unlearning dominant discourses.

This is highly relevant, especially in relation to the discourse of the so-called crisis of multiculturalism in the Netherlands as well as in other former colonial centres in the First World. Both in popular media and in academic texts, multiculturalism is considered to be outdated, failed and problematic. This development marks the end of the Netherlands' leftist policy of political correctness and the beginning of a conservative discourse of 'new realism', which persists now.[61] A new realist discourse characterizes right-wing politicians who were considered to finally have 'said what we were not allowed to say': a formula that referred to (white autochthonous) people's fear of foreigners 'invading' the country and their anger at the ruling elite for not taking their concerns seriously.[62] The subsequent framing of Islam as irreconcilable with 'liberal' Dutch society found wider resonance, as Islam grew to be equated with terrorism, intolerance, backwardness and lack of freedom of speech.[63] Rudolph Peters argues that the islamization of migration in the Netherlands (and elsewhere in Europe) made it possible to express xenophobia in a socially more acceptable way: as a criticism of the influence of religion.[64] In this context, Dutch culture is often described as liberal, tolerant and secular, and threatened by a backward and intolerant (for instance towards women or gays) religion. Both of these developments suggest that an analysis of multiculturalism in the Netherlands should not only focus on cultural issues in general, but also (and maybe especially) on religion, and Islam in particular.

We would like to argue that the online activities of Moroccan-Dutch adolescents not only offer an important criticism of the debates about multiculturalism in the mainstream media, but also create space for alternative bottom-up interpretations of multiculturalism in the Netherlands. In this paper, we have shown that these young people are allocated positions but also acquire positions themselves at the intersection of 'Dutchness', 'Moroccanness' and 'Muslimness'. Going against many voices in mainstream media , they do not want to be pressed

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[61] B. Prins, 'The Nerve to Break Taboos: New Realism in the Dutch Discourse on Multiculturalism' in *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 3:3-4 (2002), 363-379.
[62] Ibid., 364.
[63] Brouwer, 'Jokes, raps and transnational orientations.'
[64] Peters, 'A dangerous book.'

to choose between these aspects of their identity, but recreate them into new combinations instead. Elsewhere, we have noted other invocations of how a multiplicity of intersecting affiliations gets performed in instant messenger (IM) and social networking sites. Using IM, Moroccan-Dutch young people use display names combining diasporic, gendered, and internet culture and religious affiliations,[65] whereas on social networking sites they join groups that signal feminist interest, Dutch nationalism, ethnic affiliations and youth culture.[66] These differential digital practices resonate our informants' narrating of self outside the Internet. At the beginning of our interviews, we asked informants to introduce their backgrounds. Sixteen-year-old Ilana said, *'I introduce myself as a Dutchwoman, but just of Moroccan descent.'* Inzaf (15) said *'I am born here, but my parents are from Morocco. I would not say that I am Moroccan because I was born here'*, while Ilham (13) laughed noting her differential positioning: *'I am Moroccan, Berber and Muslim, but as you see I do have the Dutch nationality as well.'*

Across digital and physical contexts, they fight racism, ill-fitting ethnic labels and islamophobia in Dutch society and counter conservative interpretations of gender relations within their own communities. Gender, national identities and religious affiliations are the most important aspects of their new position acquisition, from where alternative perspectives of Moroccanness, Dutchness and Muslimness are proposed and performed. Hence, by making their religious beliefs and practices more public, their religious affiliations become part of the Dutch public sphere. Moreover, as they debate certain Islamic traditions and customs from their own perspective as (children of) migrants in the Netherlands, they also create an interpretation of Islam that connects to this specific position. Gender is a central concept in this process as boys and girls relate differently to both Dutch identity and to Islam, for example, because the racism they experience is not the same (boys are depicted as criminals, girls as oppressed). But also because their position in the public debates in the Netherlands about the Islam differs, as female Islamic dress is much more discussed than are most male traditions.

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[65] K. Leurs and S. Ponzanesi, 'Communicative spaces of their own. Migrant girls performing selves using Instant Messaging software' in *Feminist Review* 99 (2011), 55-78: 74.

[66] K. Leurs and S. Ponzanesi, 'Mediated crossroads. Youthful digital diasporas' in *M/C Journal* 14:2 (2011), n.p., accessed 20 December 2011, http://journal.media culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/viewArticle/324.

When we connect these practices to current critical theory on multiculturalism, it becomes possible to envision a Dutch multicultural society that affirms difference without turning to relativism. One might argue that the inclusion of the demands of religious groups is difficult to achieve in the current political climate, considering the fact that these demands could be taken as an attack on Western liberal values and secularism. However, as Modood rightly demonstrates, secularism as a clear-cut ideology does not exist in practice. If we look at the application of secularism in different Western countries, we see a broad range of interpretations of this concept, especially when it comes to the public/private divide in relation to religion.[67] If we let go of the strict version of secularism, according to which religion and faith should be kept outside the public sphere, and think through a more pragmatic understanding (as it is already applied in the Netherlands), we should be able to combine multicultural politics and secularism.[68] We believe that such a critical perspective on dominant discourses in society is essential in regard to the accommodation of migrants in the Netherlands. However, as became clear to us in our fieldwork, we also imagine a multiculturalism that starts from bottom-up experiences.

As we explained in the beginning of this paper, Gilroy sees everyday multiculture in action in the lived experience of, for instance, music, food and consumption.[69] On a conceptual level, multiculture is in action in the (Dutch) digital realm as well. People with a variety of affiliations meet each other during their everyday lived experiences mediated through digital practices. For Gilroy, the key to such a culture of conviviality lies in the recognition that European culture is not the same as a monolithic, homogeneous white culture. Similar to Modood, Gilroy emphasizes the importance of critical perspectives, though his focus is not on secularism, but on histories that counter racist perspectives on European societies. These counter-histories can, according to Gilroy, not only help to produce a new understanding of multicultural Europe, but also to discover the emancipatory possibilities of convivial culture. The importance of Gilroy's perspective on everyday multiculture is confirmed by our analysis. The boys and girls we interviewed are constantly confronted with various aspects of Dutch multicultural society: while they are often seen and treated as the Other, they nevertheless are also trying to find connections between their Dutch, Moroccan and Muslim identities. In this context, we

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[67] Modood, *Multiculturalism.*
[68] Ibid.
[69] Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia*.

understand hush harbours as places where differences between and within groups can flourish and form a starting point for a convivial culture in which those differences are not only recognized, but also approached in an affirmative way. Therefore, we would like to argue that the multiple and dynamic identities that we described can become part of a multicultural Dutch identity, provided that 'multiculturalism' is reconsidered as a bottom-up and difference-based term.