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Country profiles

The Netherlands

Esebian

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Demographics

There are almost one million Muslims in the Netherlands, representing 5.8% of the population. Dutch Muslims come primarily from Turkey and Morocco, but there are substantial minorities from Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Somalia, and former Dutch colony Surinam. Muslims are concentrated in large urban areas, particularly the four largest cities of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht. Below is a table of the ethnic breakdown of the Muslim population in the Netherlands:

Country of origin	Numbers	Share of total Muslims population (%)
Turkey	358,000	40.5
Morocco	315,000	35.6
Surinam	70,000	7.9
Iraq	44,000	5.0
Afghanistan	37,000	4.2
Iran	29,000	3.3
Somalia	22,000	2.5
Dutch converts	10,000	1.1
Total	885,000	100

(Source: Douwes (2005:27); also Phalet and Ter Wal (eds) (2004), qtd. in OSI 11)

Labor Market

Unemployment among Moroccan and Turkish communities in the Netherlands is higher than the national average: Compared to a 9% unemployment rate of native Dutch, 27% of Moroccans and 21% of Turks are unemployed (SCP, 2006 [1]). Unemployment among immigrants has doubled since the Netherlands experienced a recession in 2002 (SCP 2006; qtd. in Open Society Institute 22).

In 2004, lower than one-half of non-Western immigrants had a salaried job, compared to 67% of native Dutch. One-half of Turks are salaried compared to only one-third of Moroccans. Turks are more likely to be self-employed than Moroccans and are generally more successful in the labor market (SCP, 2005; qtd. in OSI 22).

Compared to native Dutch, Turks and Moroccans are overrepresented in elementary or lower level jobs, and underrepresented in medium-, higher-level and scholarly jobs. Moroccans lag slightly behind Turks in professional statistics, although both groups are becoming more active in middle-level jobs and a middle class is beginning to develop (SCP 2005; OSI 22).

Twenty-five percent of non-Western immigrants between 15 and 65 receive social welfare. The elderly are especially economically vulnerable. Compared to 11% of native Dutch elderly who have a low income, 67% of Turkish elderly and 86% of Moroccan elderly have a low income (SCP 2003; OSI 22).

The average annual income for Native Dutch households is €20,000, compared to €13,000 for Moroccan households and €13,600 for Turkish households (SCP 2005; OSI 22).

According to a 2005 report by the Social and Cultural Planning Bureau, there are indications of direct and indirect discrimination against Muslims in the labor market (SCP 2005, OSI 23). Direct discrimination is intention-based, whereas indirect discrimination includes rules, procedures, and reward systems that result in disparate impact on different groups. In hiring especially, employees may discriminate directly based on an applicant's cultural background (Houtzager & Rodriguez, 2002); at a

systemic level, hiring protocols generally leave room for employees to select candidates based on normative qualities in the attitude and personality of the candidate. These normative criteria can be disadvantageous for non-Western immigrants. Also, research conducted by the International Labour Organization (Zegers de Beijl et al, 2000; qtd. in OSI 23) found that the non-Western immigrants experience more discrimination in the Netherlands than in any neighboring country. Non-Western immigrants tend to look for work within networks of friends or family (Houtzager and Rodriguez, 2002; qtd. in OSI 23).

Education

Educational attainment levels are growing at a faster rate among non-Western immigrants than among native Dutch, but with 10% of these immigrants having finished higher education or university education, these numbers are still behind native Dutch (SCP, 2005; OSI 18)

Linguistic achievements of Turkish pupils in the final year of primary school are 2.5 years behind native Dutch peers. Moroccans are two years behind. Moroccans and Turks are underrepresented in advanced types of secondary education. Moroccan and Turkish youth have twice the high school dropout rate of native Dutch (SCP, 2005; OSI 18).

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia's (EUMC) *Analytical Report on Education* found that discrimination within the education system does exist. Complaints concerning dress codes and the hijab constitute of significant problem (Schriemer, 2004; qtd. in OSI 19).

The OECD collects data on education from various statistical agencies within the country, the majority of which comes from census data from the year 2000. The OECD classifies educational achievement using the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED): ISCED 0/1/2: Less than upper secondary; ISCED 3/4: Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary; ISCED 5A: "Academic" tertiary; ISCED 5B: "Vocational" tertiary; ISCED 6: Advanced research programs. 0-2 are considered low, 3-4 as medium, and 5 and above are considered high. This data is not reported by religion, but does have country of origin as reported by the respondent. It is thus possible to construct an approximate picture of the educational achievement of the population in the country with ancestry from predominately Muslim countries. One significant problem is that some countries, such as India and Nigeria, have large Muslim populations but the immigrant population cannot be readily classified as predominately Muslim or non-Muslim. As such, the educational data is split by predominately Muslim origin, predominately non-Muslim origin, and a separate category for those whom classification would not seem justified. Proportions are for all reported data, individuals with no reported ancestry or education are excluded (OECD, 2003).

	High	Medium	Low
Muslim	31%	19%	50%
Non-Muslim	20%	40%	41%
Indeterminate	33%	27%	41%

State and Church

In 1983, the formal ties between the state and religious groups were severed and a law governing these ties was abolished. Since then, relations have been based on the constitutional principles of freedom of religion, non-discrimination, and equal treatment. No formal recognition of a religious community is required for such protection. In the Netherlands, the state does recognize certain groups and provide them with state resources for education, broadcasting, and spiritual care in prisons and in the army. There is generally no difficulty in qualifying for this status, and Islam has been granted these

privileges (US State Dept., 2004). Existing regulations and laws have been applied to Muslims and, if necessary, adapted to their needs.

Muslims in the Legislature

The most recent national elections were held on January 22, 2003 and November 22, 2006. The 2006 election was held at this early date because Prime Minister Balkenende's previous coalition (his third) fell apart after the Democraten '66 Party pulled out after controversy surrounding one of their members, Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

After the 2003 elections, the lower house (the only directly-elected and most powerful national Parliamentary body; it has 150 members) had at least ten members from Muslim backgrounds. [Nebahat Albayrak](#) (PvdA), [Coskun Çörüz](#) (CDA), Fatma Koser Kaya (D66) and Fadime Örgü are of Turkish background. [Khadija Arib](#) (PvdA), [Naima Azough](#) and Ali Lazrak (GL) are of Moroccan ancestry. Also in the legislature were Farah Karimi (GL), Nirmala Rambocus (CDA), and Ayaan Hirsi-Ali (D66).

Ayaan Hirsi Ali's political life is of particular significance to Muslims in the Netherlands because of a political scandal regarding her immigration to the Netherlands. Hirsi Ali was elected to Parliament as a VVD candidate in 2002. In May 2006, the television program Zembra [\[2\]](#) reported that Hirsi Ali had presented false information on her application for asylum. On May 16, 2006, she resigned from Parliament under the assumption that her citizenship would be revoked by Immigration Minister Rita Verdonk (The Minister later announced that Hirsi Ali could keep her citizenship). Hirsi Ali's party, D66, demanded Hirsi Ali's resignation and threatened to walk out. When Minister Verdonk survived a no-confidence vote by Parliament and showed no indication of resigning, D66 pulled out of the three-party coalition, causing the government under Prime Minister Balkenende to collapse. [\[3\]](#)

After the 2006 elections, there were at least five members of Muslim backgrounds in the lower house. [Coskun Çörüz](#), [Khadija Arib](#), and [Naima Azough](#) were incumbents and two new members from Turkish backgrounds entered the lower house: [Tofik Dibi](#) (GL) and [Sadet Karabulut](#) (SP).

Two individuals with Muslim backgrounds were given cabinet appointments on February 22, 2007 by the new government formed under Prime Minister Balkenende's fourth coalition. There are 13 ministers total in the Dutch Cabinet. Nebahat Albayrak became State Secretary of Justice and Ahmed Aboutaleb was appointed to State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment. Albayrak was born in Turkey in 1968. She studied international and European law at the University of Leiden and served as a member of Parliament from 2002 to 2007. More biographical information is available [here](#). Ahmed Aboutaleb was born in Morocco and moved to the Netherlands in 1976. He was the director of the *Forum* organization, which deals with multi-culturalism in the Netherlands. He also served as civil servant in Amsterdam. For more information about Aboutaleb, see the [Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment](#) website.

Political Participation

Statistical data from Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, Utrecht and Arnhem (1994 and 1998), and from Amsterdam and Rotterdam (2002) reveal that the Turkish turnout in local elections is higher than that of Moroccans and equal to or greater than that of native Dutch (Martinez et al, 2002; OSI 33). Sixty percent of Turks have more confidence in political institutions, compared with 40% of the Moroccan population (Fennema and Tillie 2000; OSI 33). [\[4\]](#) Turks vote overwhelming (90%) for candidates of Turkish backgrounds. This is much less true for Moroccans who only vote for Moroccan

candidates half the time (Martinez et al, 2002; OSI 33). Otherwise, the overwhelming majority of Turks and Moroccans vote Labour (OSI 33).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Muslims in the Netherlands led a "concealed" existence, due largely to the fact that most Muslims were guest workers. Political participation was undertaken to establish institutions that would enable them to practice their faith, but contact with the government was limited to practical problems. In the 1980s, mosque organizations proved effective mobilizers of political support and became influential advocates of immigrant populations (OSI 34-35). Now, Muslims interact via Islamic umbrella organizations. The Dutch model for relations with religious bodies was forged during encounters with mostly Christian and other religious groups. These religious groups have had representative organizations with amenable spokesmen. This model requires that Muslims in the Netherlands form a coherent community, which presents the diverse and fractured Muslim community with the challenge of presenting a unified position in negotiations with the government to make their actions politically legitimate (OSI 36). This model, in which mosques and umbrella organizations which are effectively coalitions of mosques, does not provide many opportunities for political leverage for Muslim-identified Dutch who are not affiliated with a mosque.

Muslim Organizations

The Moroccan and Turkish governments exercise substantial control over religious matters in the Netherlands through an official Turkish organization and a network of Moroccan social organizations (US State Dept., 2004). Since the November 2, 2004 murder of controversial filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, there has been an attempt to remedy this with the creation of a union of Dutch imams to negotiate important issues with the state.

Two organizations have been officially recognized by the state according the European Parliament's (EP) study on "Islam in the European Union: What's at Stake in the Future": CMO (Contactorgaan Moslems en de Overheid) was officially recognized as a consultation partner by the government on November 1, 2004 and CGI (Contact Groep Islam) was recognized on January 13, 2005 (Netherlands Justice Ministry; EP143). CMO has a following of over 500,000 mainly Sunni members, including the four main Turkish organizations (Milli Gorus, Diyanet), the Union of Moroccan mosques and the Surinam World Islamic Mission. [5] When the CMO was established, it served as an umbrella organization for these six national mosque federations; it aims to present a common standpoint on issues related to integration. Shiite's, however, were excluded from the set-up phase, as were other non-Sunni groups who established the CGI (ter Waal 2005; qtd. in INVOLVE). CGI has a following of 115,000 members (Netherlands Justice Ministry; EP143) with Alevite, Lahore Ahmadiya, Sunni, and Shia backgrounds (Dittrich, 2006). Both receive public funding and hold meetings regularly with government officials on concerning the integration of Muslims in Dutch society. (EP 143) They do not always agree on issues of policy.

In May 2007, Dutch ex-Muslim united under a new organization in Amsterdam, called the Central Committee for Ex-Muslims. City council member Ehsan Jami (PvdA) and Afshin Ellian, a well-known professor in international law and philosophy are involved. The committee is committed to helping other so-called Muslim "apostates," and will address issues like domestic violence and women's rights. [6]

Islamic Education

There are 37 Islamic primary schools and one secondary school in Rotterdam that started in August 2000, which are recognized and financed by the state. The courses offered must follow a national

curriculum that fills most of the available time, while a few hours per week are allotted to week religious lessons and ceremonies. Under the 1984 Dutch Education Act, parents have the right to obtain religious education for their children in public schools, but they must find and pay the teacher. . Muslim parents use this legal opportunity only in exceptional cases. Some municipalities (like Rotterdam), however, subsidize this activity. School authorities retain the authority to choose which language courses are taught in, which has limited the development of Islamic religious instruction (Marechal B., Allievi, S., Dassetto F., And Nielsen J. 48; qtd. in EP 144).

Governments of Turkey and Morocco (to a lesser degree) are influential partners in Islamic education institutions in the Netherlands. Turkey's Presidency of Religious Affairs has appointed imams to the 140 Turkish mosques in the Netherlands (OSI 36). To counteract what the government fears is a barrier to integration, Dutch officials require all imams and other religious leaders to complete a year-long integration course before they are allowed to practice in the Netherlands. The state also subsidizes education for local citizens who desire to become imams. Other educational partnerships are developing such as the founding of an Islamic institute in February 2005 by a coalition of Muslim organizations in partnership with individual university programs. Since September 2005, there is also master's course for Islamic spiritual caregivers at the Free University in Amsterdam. The Amsterdam program will train imams in Dutch culture and Christianity (US Dept of State, 2006; OSI 36).

For higher education, there is the privately-funded Islamic University of Rotterdam (IUR) and an Islamic University of Europe in Schiedam as well as some smaller training institutes. There is also a four-year training program in the Education Faculty of Amsterdam to train teachers for secondary schools.

Islamic Practice

There are at least 400-500 Muslim places of worship in the Netherlands, with traditional mosques being built in the major cities. Of these, nearly half are primarily Turkish and some 90 are primarily Moroccan. Although there have been reports of obstruction by local officials, mosque building has continued without substantial barriers.

Dutch law allows for traditional Islamic burial rites and public cemeteries typically offer special sections for Muslims. Although there has been some protest by animal rights groups, there have not been any legal barriers to halal slaughter, which is disciplined by a 1996 law (*Besluit 16.11.1996, houdende uitvoering van artikel 44, negende lid, van de Gezondheids- en welzijnswet voor dieren (Besluit ritueel slachten) Stb 1996/573*).

There are no laws banning headscarves and cases before the Equal Rights Committee have generally been resolved in students' favor. In some cities, including Amsterdam, attending classes with a veiled face is not allowed. In 1998, the National Committee of Equal Treatment ruled on a case about teachers wearing a headscarf. The Committee found that the hijab was not a threat to the "open " and "tolerant" attitudes required by Dutch laws on public education. Only safety reasons or reasons of functionality could provide legitimate ground for prohibition. In late 2005, the Parliament passed a resolution urging the government to ban the wearing of burqas (Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2004; US Dept of State). In March 2007, the fourth coalition government of Prime Minister Balkenende's decided not to enact the ban (Dutch News, 3 March 2007).

Security, Anti-Terrorism and Immigration Issues

The attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon (September 2001), the terrorist attacks in

Madrid (2004), the assassination of Theo van Gogh (November 2004), and the bombings in London (2005) have led to a proliferation of plans for anti-terrorism measures in the Netherlands. After 9/11, the government presented an Action Plan to Fight Terrorism and Security (Actieplan Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid) and in 2004 a national anti-terrorism coordinator position was created. [7] The government has spent considerable effort creating initiatives to prevent further radicalization that involves community building, strengthening individuals' attachments to civil society, and adequate capacity for interventions against radicals (Maussen 118-119).

Immigration policy practices in the 1960s and 1970s accommodated Muslim immigrants who were guest-workers in the Netherlands. In the 1970s, immigrants began settling more permanently in the Netherlands and subsequently the 1980s saw an increase in family reunification and marriage migration (Maussen 119).

Since the mid-1990s, there have been efforts to make Dutch immigration policies more restrictive. This transformation has happened in three respects: first, an 'asylum-seekers crisis' in the mid-1990s was caused by a great influx of asylum applicants. The asylum application process was reformed in the Aliens Act of 2000. As a consequence, the number of asylum requests has decreased significantly. The Netherlands now receives only 25% the number of asylum applications it did in the late-1990s.

Second, general immigration requirements have been tightened, especially in relation to family reunification and marriage migration (Maussen 120). This has coincided with a doctrinal shift in immigration attitudes toward cultural assimilation-in other words, toward policies which encourage immigrants to embrace Dutch culture. The Integration of Newcomers Act (WIN) of 1998 required all new immigrants to take a civic integration course. As of March 15, 2006, the application process was enhanced to include an examination to evaluate immigrants' Dutch language comprehension. The test also gauges immigrants' familiarity with Dutch culture and includes film footage of gay men kissing and of a bare-breasted women coming out of the sea. The goal of this film, according to then Justice Minister Rita Verdonk, is to inform newcomers about what they can expect when coming to the Netherlands and serves to emphasize how Dutch values as "a free society" might conflict with "the values of immigrants." [8]

Third, there have been a number of proposals to create more possibilities to expel from the Netherlands non-nationals who have committed criminal acts. These proposals have come from prominent politicians such as Dutch Justice Minister Piet Hein Donner (December 2003) and Minister of Immigration and Integration, Rita Verdonk (April 2005) (Maussen 121). [9]

Bias and Discrimination

In February 2008, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) released a new and third report on the Netherlands. While the report does not include statistical or numerical data on several key issues, it nevertheless reports on both setbacks and progress made since the second report on the Netherlands, released in 2000. The newest release applauds the development of international instruments relevant to combating racism and racial discrimination in the Netherlands. Anti-discrimination bureaus established to protect victims of racism and discrimination against immigrants and monitor these kinds of offenses are cited as steps in the positive direction. In addition, attention given to the disadvantaged position of members of ethnic minorities in the labor market is cited as encouraging in the report.

However, a number of recommendations made in the ECRI's second report have not been met. This is due partly as a consequence of several "national and international events, the tone of Dutch political

and public debate around integration and other issues relevant to ethnic minorities has experienced a dramatic deterioration" resulting in polarization between majority and minority communities. Muslim, and notably the Moroccan and Turkish communities have been particularly affected by these developments, which have resulted in a substantial increase of Islamophobia in both the political arena and in other contexts.

The current negative climate around Muslims in the Netherlands is closely connected to security concerns posed by terrorism, and racism and violence have particularly exacerbated after the September 11th, 2001 attacks in the United States and the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh. Examples of the rise in Islamophobia are evident from the increase in racial profiling, job discrimination, to inequity in financial services. The ECRI reports that since the second report, there has been a rise in complaints concerning discrimination and the applying for mortgages and "redlining" practices (refusing mortgages to applicants living in certain areas and neighborhoods). From events in global politics in recent years, Dutch politicians have subsequently not hesitated to resort to stereotyping, stigmatizing, and racist attacks against ethnic minorities part of the Muslim community in the country. The ECRI reports that this type of discourse has portrayed Muslims as invading the country and posing a major threat to the country's security and identity, and Islam has also been portrayed as a violent religion in itself.

In this third report, the ECRI recommends that Dutch authorities take further action in a number of issues. It recommends in particular that Dutch authorities promote a public debate on integration, addressing such topics as polarization and antagonism among some communities of ethnic minorities. Addressing racist and xenophobic discourse in politics, denouncement and countering of Islamophobia, and taking measures to redress disadvantage and discrimination experienced by ethnic minority groups in employment and racial profiling are suggested issues of needed attention.

Public Perceptions of Islam

Recurrent issues such as the wearing of the hijab, emancipation of women, respect and tolerance for homosexuals, freedom of speech and criticism of Islam, the role of Imams and the functioning of Islamic schools have caused the debate about Islam and the integration of immigrants to sharpen. Terrorist attacks by Muslims in the US, Madrid, and London, and the murder of Theo Van Gogh have had a negative impact on public perceptions of Islam, but this fear of Islam had already been steadily growing in the Netherlands (see Sniderman et al, 2003; qtd. in Maussen 38).

Since the 1990s, a significant group of native Dutch has had a negative opinion about immigrants. Half of the population feels there are too many Muslims and do not want immigrant neighbors (SCP, 2005; qtd. in OSI 38). Regard for Dutch multi-ethnic society has become increasingly negative, and Muslims are singled out. Three-quarters of Dutch would be unhappy with their child choosing an immigrant partner.

A June 2004 opinion poll revealed that 68% of respondents felt threatened by "immigrant or Muslim young people," 53% feared a terrorist attack by Muslims in the Netherlands, and 47% feared that eventually, the Netherlands would be ruled by Islamic law (Maussen 38). [\[10\]](#) The fact the Theo van Gogh was murdered by a Dutch Muslim who became a radical in the Netherlands had a significant impact on native Dutch perceptions of Muslim youth and their religiosity.

Another significant change in public opinion is reflected in attitudes towards mosques. In the early 1990s, mosques were seen as "enrichments to the urban landscape" and "symbols of emancipation and of recognition" (Maussen, 2004; qtd. in OSI 39). In the 20th century, mosques in traditional style

are now said to be "unimaginative," "ugly," and "cheap imitations." They indicate that Muslims in the Netherlands do not care about their new societal environment and simply build "nostalgia mosques" which serve as reminders of "countries of origin" (see Maussen 2004, 2005, 2006; qtd. in OSI 39).

Van Gogh's murder accelerated the rise of explicitly anti-Muslim politics, reflecting skepticism toward the ability to integrate Muslims into the society and critiquing Dutch ideals of cultural diversity. A parliamentary report determined that "multiethnic society had been a dismal failure, huge ethnic ghettos and subcultures were tearing the country apart and the risk of polarization could only be countered by Muslims effectively becoming Dutch" (Fekete, 2004). The publication in 2000 of an essay by Paul Scheffer entitled "The Multicultural Tragedy" also had a huge impact on Dutch public opinion regarding the multicultural approach that had been a point of pride in previous decades. This essay, which identified socio-economic, geographical and cultural segregation, lifted the taboo on critiquing Dutch multiculturalism (OSI 45).

Media Coverage

Since the 1980s, media coverage on Islam has jumped from incident to incident: the Iranian Revolution, the "Rushdie-Affair," the canceling of a December 2000 opera performance of *Aisha and the Women of Medina* because it was considered offensive. In May 2001, the television program NOVA broadcast an interview with Moroccan imam Mr. El Moumni, who criticized homosexuality as a "contagious disease" and made other offensive critiques of European lifestyles, leading to the "El Moumni affair" (qtd. in Prins, 2002; see also Meuleman, 2001, 2003; qtd. in Maussen 125). The events of 9/11, bombings in London and Madrid, the van Gogh murder, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali's controversy have all received heavy media coverage. Hirsi Ali is a Somalia-born Dutch politician and writer (as of July 2007, she works for a conservative think tank in Washington, DC), who received attention for her critique of Islam as a misogynistic and backward religion and was the center of a political controversy regarding the integrity of her citizenship application.

In spite of this sensational coverage, Uitermark and Hajer, in a study of public debate in national newspapers surrounding the van Gogh murder, conclude that "after an initial period of moral confusion and a search for new meaning-giving narratives, there was a marked rise in the appreciation of several structural problems that face migrants in the Netherlands" (2005, 22; qtd. in Maussen 126).

Intellectual and Political Discourse

Such anti-Islam sentiment is the product of an evolving discourse in the Netherlands about immigrants and multiculturalism. In the 1980s and even through the 1990s, the government made steps to help Muslims catch-up to more established religious groups in the Netherlands and were generally supportive (see Landman, 1992; Hampsink, 1992; Shadid and Van Koningsveld, 1995; Rath et al, 2001; qtd. in OSI 45). In the 1990s, immigrant incorporation policies were redirected toward cultural assimilation. By the mid-1990s, "good citizenship" and "civic integration" became key political concepts. Paul Scheffer's essay, "The Multicultural Tragedy" critiqued the Dutch multicultural model for being based on naïve and ineffective measures (Maussen 45). Openly-gay Pim Fortuyn's vocal and heavily publicized critiques of Islam lifted the taboo on Islam and helped shaped the increasingly prominent concept that liberal Western values are in opposition to Islamic values. This dichotomy still dominates intellectual and political discourse. An issue has arisen with Muslim attitudes towards homosexuality. Traditionally, the Netherlands has been extremely tolerant of gays, and was the first country to legalize gay marriage. With an influx of a number of more conservative Muslims, there have been concerns that this tolerance was under threat. This provided some of the political capital of Pim Fortuyn, an openly gay anti-immigrant politician, who was assassinated during a successful campaign

(although not by a Muslim).

Prior to his murder, Theo Van Gogh turned a high profile lens on the issue of the treatment of women in traditional Islamic society. His film *Submission* told the story of a Muslim woman forced into an arranged marriage in which she is seriously abused. The film was made with the help of Hirsi Ali, a liberal Dutch-Somalian politician who escaped from an arranged marriage herself. Particularly controversial in the film were scenes of a semi-naked woman with marks from beating and verses from the Qu'ran inscribed upon her body.

Before the controversy surrounding Ayaan Hirsi Ali's political life and asylum application, Hirsi Ali was a prominent figure because of her criticisms of Islam. Her critiques focus largely on Islam as a misogynistic and violent religion. She has published two books so far (*Infidel*, 2007 and *The Caged Virgin*, 2006). She believes that the 21st century has begun with a battle between the values of Islam and the West. [11]

Most intellectual discourse about Islam has tended to be quite critical of Islam. Right-wing politician Geert Wilders, politicians Marco Pastor, Joost Eerdmans, and Hilbrand Nawijn, philosophy professor Herman Philipse, Iranian refugee, law professor and *NRC Handelsblad* columnist Afshin Ekkub, and Ethics professor Paul Cliteur have all been prominent critiques of Islam as a threat to secularism.

Recent Legislation on Islam

In 2006, the Dutch cabinet backed a proposal by the country's immigration minister Rita Verdonk to ban Muslim women from wearing the burqa in public places. The burqa, a full body covering that also obscures the face, would be banned by law in the street, and in trains, schools, buses and the law courts. The cabinet said burqas disturb public order, citizens and safety. The new government decided in March 2007 not to support the ban, on account of the fact that only an estimated 150 women in the Netherlands wore the burqa and that it would be stigmatizing and counterproductive. [12]

There has been a shift in the tone of the government since the installation of Prime Minister Balkenende's fourth coalition government on February 22, 2007. Prime Minister Balkenende appointed two minority Cabinet members: Nebahat Albayrak (Turkish) became State Secretary of Justice and Ahmed Aboutaleb (Moroccan) was appointed to State Secretary of Social Affairs and Employment.

In December 2006, VVD Immigration and Integration Minister Rita Verdonk was in the middle of a political controversy related to the deportation of rejected asylum seekers. On December 12, Parliament (in a motion supported by all the left-wing and centre-left parties) requested that Minister Verdonk halt the deportation of approximately 26,000 individuals until a new cabinet had been formed. She refused. She also did not respond to a second demand to halt deportation for 24 hours until the issue could be discussed further in Parliament, causing Parliament to demand an official statement from Prime Minister Balkenende's cabinet. [13] Prime Minister Balkenende stated his support of Minister Verdonk at which time Parliament accepted a motion of no-confidence. Before the vote occurred, a representative of the VVD party said they would pull all their ministers from the cabinet if Verdonk resigned. To avoid a collapse of the government, the cabinet met for ten hours and decided that Verdonk's immigration responsibilities would be assumed by Hirsch Ballin, the Justice Minister. [14] Minister Ballin executed the December 12 motion by the PvdA in Parliament to postpone deportation. [15]

Verdonk had been a prominent minister. She was nicknamed "Iron Rita" and had a reputation for toughness, outspokenness, and uncompromising immigration policy. [16] She was also a central

character in the summer 2006 controversy surrounding the deportation of homosexual Iranian asylum-seekers back to Iran. She claimed they would not face persecution so long as they were discreet. In 2006, the government declared Iranian homosexuals a "special group" facing persecution at home and deserving of asylum. [17] In his fourth cabinet, Prime Minister Balkenende assigned Turkish Minister Nebahat Albayrak over immigration policy. In May 2007, the center-left government announced that it would grant amnesty to approximately 30,000 failed asylum-seekers, indicating a break from the get-tough policies of Minister Verdonk. This decision also involved appropriating \$74 million to municipalities to help subsidize housing and integration courses. [18]

In June 2007, Albayrak announced plans to modify immigration restrictions in order to bring more skilled laborers to the Netherlands. To meet Dutch requirements as a highly skilled immigrant, an applicant must have a job offer with a minimum salary dependent on the immigrant's age. In 2007, the minimum annual income for those under 30 years of age was €34,130; the wage minimum for those over 30 years of age was €46,541. The government plans to fast-track the application process for these highly-skilled migrants. [19]

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Acronyms

CDA Christian-Democratic Appeal (*Christen-Democratisch Appel*) Party

D66 Democrats '66 (*Democraten '66*)

EUMAP European Union Monitoring and Advocacy Program

EUMC European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia

GL Green Left Party (*Groen Links*)

OSI Open Society Institute

PvdA Labour Party (*Partij van de Arbeid*)

SP Socialist Party (*Socialistische Partij*)

[1] "The Netherland's Social and Cultural Planning Office (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, SCP) is a Government agency that conducts research into the social aspects of all areas of Government policy. The main fields studied are health, welfare, social security, the labour market and education, with a particular focus on the interfaces between them. The SCP's reports are widely used by the Government, civil servants, local authorities and academics. Further information is available on the SCP website at: <http://scp.nl>." [Footnote 11] In ISO 11.

[2] "De heilige Ayaan" *Zembla* 11 May 2006. Available online at: <http://omroep.vara.nl/>. Accessed 20 July 2007.

[3] "Cabinet crisis as D66 demands Verdonk's resignation" *Expedia* 29 June 2006.

[4] "A follow-up study is Van Heelsum & Tillie (2006), Opkomst en partijvoorkeur van migranten bij de gemeenteraadsverkiezingen van 7 maart 2006." [Footnote 53] in OSI 33.

[5] "Profile of the Netherlands" European Muslim Network. Available online at: <http://www.euromuslim.net/index.php/islam-in-europe/country-profile/profile-of-the-netherlands/>. Accessed 20 July 2007.

[6] "Dutch ex-Muslims create new organization" *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* 2 May 2007.

[7] "See <http://www.nctb.nl>." [Footnote 154] In Maussen: 118.

[8] 'Immigrants have to pass a racy test. Netherlands show its liberal culture' *Associated Press* 16 March 2006.

[9] See Advisory Committee on Aliens Affairs, "Openbare Orde en Verblijfsbeëindiging" April 2005.

[10] " 'Griezelen uit onbegrip. Angst voor Moslims' *De Volkskrant* 23 June 2004." [Footnote 63] In ISO 38.

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