CHALLENGING BOUNDARIES: THE EFFECTS OF PVE/CVE POLICIES ON MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Embracing the promise of brighter days I quote a sentiment that echoes my feelings:

Our most beautiful days
we haven't seen yet.
And the most beautiful words I wanted to tell you
I haven't said yet…[1]

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[1] Nazım Hikmet Ran, 24 SEPTEMBER 1945
https://www.nazimhikmet.org.tr/en/nazim-hikmet/works/selections-from-his-poetry/

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Introduction

The question of whether there is a connection between Islam and violent extremism or terrorism has become a contentious issue in recent years, prompting significant debate and research in the fields of religion, politics, and security. In response to the perceived threat of radicalization within Muslim communities, various governments around the world have developed and implemented policies such as Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). These policies aim to address the root causes of radicalization and mitigate the potential risks of terrorism (Käsehage, 2021). However, the effectiveness and consequences of these policies on communities remain unclear, and there are concerns that they may inadvertently marginalize or stigmatize Muslim communities and infringe upon religious freedom.

The relationship between religion and violence is complex at the academic level, involving various nuances and intricate connections that must be considered in the scholarly discourse. However, governments and security bodies often require simpler and more understandable information due to their inherent nature, which leads PVE/CVE programs to rely on reductionist models that may oversimplify the issues at hand (Borum, 2011) (Kundnani, 2014). In this context, PVE/CVE programs have been criticized for associating Islam with violence, potentially perpetuating stereotypes and fostering negative attitudes toward Muslim communities. For instance, a study conducted in the Netherlands concluded that Muslims perceive PVE policies negatively, resulting in increased distrust of government bodies within Muslim communities (Welten & Abbas, 2021a).

In the context of PVE, the state's relationship with a particular religious group offers an opportunity to examine the balance established between the 'secular sphere' and the 'religious sphere' in modern nation-states. Implementing these policies raises important questions about the state's role in regulating religious practices, the limits of secularism, and the potential consequences for religious freedom. By exploring the intersection of PVE policies, secularism, and the state's engagement with Muslim communities, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and implications of navigating the delicate balance between the secular and religious spheres in contemporary societies.

Aim of The Study

The main research question of our thesis is whether the possible effects of PVE practices on Muslims can be interpreted as state intervention and whether such interventions can influence the behaviour of those who are in a position to represent Muslims. We are therefore interested in whether PVE practices erode the assumed boundaries between the secular and religious spheres and whether the explanatory power of this binary categorisation is sufficient.

The number of Muslims in the Netherlands is considerable. The effects of the problem that is the subject of our research are likely to be felt by each individual at different scales. However, the position of representative individuals is more critical in this regard. As a result of their position, these individuals often speak not only on their own behalf but also on behalf of a community. Their interlocutors are sometimes the state, sometimes the wider society and sometimes Muslims. It is essential for them to be more careful and sensitive about being exposed to external influences due to their representative duties. Because their actions and words may have consequences that will affect not only themselves but also the whole community. In addition, people in such positions are more exposed to different interactions than other individuals. For instance, a CSO representative has more contact with decision-makers and governmental bodies. Or an Imam is more likely to deal with the religious questions of Muslims. This is why the study focusses specifically on individuals in representative positions.

The special attention to PVE policies is due to the fact that these policies have a transitional position between the religious and secular spheres. This position allows us to ask various questions about the distinction between the secular-religious sphere. Do PVE practices assume a particular religious group/view as a threat? Does the securitisation of certain religious expressions, concepts or behaviours by PVE practices lead to changes in the religious sphere? If yes, to what extent is it possible to draw a boundary between the secular and religious spheres?

Organisation of The Thesis

This thesis consists of three main chapters. The first main title is ‘Discussions in the literature and conceptual framework’. Under this heading, firstly, three academic debates that our study will engage with will be discussed: PVE policies, the relationship between religion and violence, and secularism and the relationship between religion and the state. In the first three sub-headings, the debates in these areas will be discussed from a broad perspective. In the last subheading of this section, 'Discussions in the Dutch Context', the discussions addressed under the first three headings will be brought to the Dutch context, which is the geographical focus of our study.

Under the second main heading, 'PVE in The Netherlands', the emergence, development and transformation of PVE policies in the Dutch context will be discussed. Then, by analysing various government documents and the reports prepared on these documents, the possible consequences of some PVE practices that can be interpreted as intervention in the religious sphere' will be mentioned.

In the third and final part, interviews with three different people representing three different representational positions will be analysed. The data obtained from these interviews will be analysed in terms of the direct or indirect effects of the PVE practices on the persons in representation positions.

Research Methods and Limitations

The first two parts of the research are based on secondary literature. In the literature review part, the literature on secularism-religion, violence-religion, PVE was reviewed in two stages. In the first stage, the debates shaping these areas outside the Dutch context are discussed. In the second step, the literature on the Dutch context is evaluated.

In the second part of the research, various official documents and reports prepared on these documents, especially the reports prepared or commissioned by NCTV and AIVD, were analysed.

For the third part of the research, interviews were conducted. The three interviewees were selected from three different representational positions. The first interviewee deals with the government on behalf of Muslims. The second interviewee deals with questions from the wider society and non-Muslims on behalf of Muslims. The third interviewee is a representative for religious affairs in an organisation that is respected by the Muslim community.

The most important limitation of the research is that it does not aim to reach generalisable findings as it is a qualitative research. The number of participants we interviewed was only three. Due to this situation, it should be accepted that we can only reach limited findings.

Our research was conducted in a limited period of time. I had to cancel my interviews with many people on my interview list, especially due to the earthquake disaster in Turkey in February, followed by the arrival of the month of Ramadan and the approaching hajj season. For this reason, we could not conduct the interviews we had planned with many names, especially those who work in executive positions in umbrella organizations and NGOs, which I believe would provide us with more insights. I find it appropriate to mention this as a limitation of our study. Because it would be a greater enrichment for a research that sets out with the aim of researching representativeness to include representatives in executive positions.

The theoretical basis of our research is largely composed of academics who are critical of secularism, PVE practices and the relationship between religion and violence. Although I endeavour to be objective, the fact that most of my reading has been in this direction may have prevented me from recognising the different nuances and subtleties in other approaches.

Chapter 1. Discussions in the literature and conceptual framework

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The intersection of religion and statehood has been a topic of enduring debate in Europe. Discussions beginning with Enlightenment and reform movements gave way to ongoing debates on the separation of church and state and models of religion-state relations. These debates evolved further with the increased presence of Muslims in Europe through labor migration and other means (Göle, 2012). The renewed interaction with Islam encouraged a reassessment and refinement of concepts such as secularism and church-state separation. However, the post-9/11 era has added a security dimension to the approach towards Muslims and Islam, bringing new depth to ongoing debates. This thesis will explore the subject of Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE), an area replete with significant nuances and discussion points regarding the interaction between European governments and Muslim communities.

Administrative mechanisms like governments, state bodies, international organizations, and local administrations create and implement PVE programs. Islam has played a pivotal role in the evolution and shaping of these practices. In many European countries, the perceived threats that PVE practices aim to mitigate are frequently linked to Islam. Consequently, activities targeting Muslims are often included in PVE programs. These initiatives have fostered a unique interaction between states and Muslim communities, as evidenced by activities with Muslim community leaders[2], events to prevent Muslim youth from adopting radical ideas[3], and support for NGOs conducting these activities (Guittet et al., 2014, p. 27). It is reasonable to assert that PVE programs can yield significant insights about the state-Muslim relationship.

Preventing Violent Extremism programmes, in contrast to security-oriented approaches in the fight against violence, imply the introduction of various methods that can be characterised as soft power. Within the framework of these programmes, there are different practices and approaches in each country. However, it can be said that the main point that distinguishes PVE from other elements of the fight against violence is that it employs non-coercive methods such as community engagement, educational activities, prevention of polarisation. The reason why

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[2] Like the key figures network in the Netherlands. Practices involving partnerships with community representatives are frequently used in many other countries. (Guittet et al., 2014, p. 27)

[3]

PVE acts with these methods is parallel to its purpose. PVE programmes aim to prevent future acts of violence. Therefore, the focus of these programmes is on preventing the factors and thought patterns that may lead to a particular act rather than the act itself. However, questions such as how far it is possible to identify a potential act that has not yet occurred, or to what extent causality between certain ideologies and certain acts can be established, remain important challenges for PVE programmes.

Although they utilise soft power elements, PVE practices undoubtedly have various consequences. Therefore, I think that these practices can be characterised as a kind of intervention. I use the term intervention neutrally. Intervening in a situation, a community or a person can be positive or negative. Parents supporting their children emotionally in a difficult moment is also an intervention, as is parents getting angry with their children. Therefore, whether an intervention is positive or negative requires a context-related evaluation. Sometimes even negative interventions can be explained on contextual grounds. Or it is also possible to discuss whether these interventions are effective or not, for example whether getting angry discourages the child from misbehaving or whether the intervention is justified or not. However, in any case, there is an intervention. Our aim in this thesis is not to make such evaluations. Rather, we focus on the question of whether the religious-secular dichotomy, which is based on a sharp distinction between the two fields, has sufficient explanatory power. We see PVE practices as interventions that erode the boundaries of this binary categorical distinction. We test the assumptions based on this dichotomy, such as state-neutrality towards religion and non-interference in the religious sphere, which are the first features that come to mind when we think of state secularism.

We will analyse the PVE interventions within this framework. Since we are testing the theses of secularism based on the religion-secular dichotomy, we will use this binary category in our thesis, even though we are sceptical about the explanatory power of this dichotomy. This use is motivated by our desire to be able to test this distinction rather than finding it useful. In our thesis, government bodies that organise and implement PVE programmes and prepare reports and evaluations on them will be taken to represent the secular sphere. Representing the religious sphere, we will deal with the actions of individuals in the position of representatives in Muslim NGOs in relation to representing the Muslim community in the Netherlands. We will try to identify the indirect or direct effects of the PVE programmes on the opinions or actions of the representatives. While examining the behavioural changes caused or likely to be caused by these effects (being more careful when speaking on certain issues, self-censorship, etc.), our aim will be to show the power of the state as a secular entity to transform and influence the religious sphere. In doing so, we aim to pursue not only the direct effects of PVE practices, but also phenomena such as othering, suspect community, and securitization, which have been included in the critical PVE literature. The fact that PVE practices are driven by soft-power elements makes it difficult to observe their effects directly. However, such analytical concepts allow us to explore various indirect chains of influence. These concepts will be discussed later in the thesis during the related discussions.

In our thesis, we will use PVE practices and their effects, which we characterise as state intervention in the religious sphere, to test the state-neutrality feature of a secular state towards the religious sphere. We define state-neutrality as the absence of state promotion or endorsement of any religion, its variations or interpretations, and non-interference in the processes by which individuals or institutions understand, interpret, and practise religion. We argue that a breach in state-neutrality, resulting in the state governing the religious sphere, erodes the boundaries of the secular-religious dichotomy.

Our study is located at the intersection of various academic literature due to its structure. Firstly, it is essential to analyse the PVE concept, which is also included in the title of the thesis. Therefore, we will start the discussion by addressing this concept and the debates around this concept.

Immediately after the PVE concept, we will discuss different views on the relationship between religion and violence. The literature on the relationship between these two concepts is quite extensive. Therefore, our main aim here is not to summarise all the literature. Rather, we will discuss the views of a few prominent figures in the field representing two opposing positions on the relationship between violence and religion. Our main aim in this section is to emphasise that the concept of religion does not have as clear boundaries as it seems. This is the main issue that complicates the relationship between religion and violence. If we simplify the relationship between religion and violence, many of the problematics that are the subject of this research will lose their value.

I believe that different theoretical approaches to the relationship between religion and violence will fundamentally affect contextual assessments of the state's intervention in the religious sphere, since the theoretical acceptance of causality between a particular religion or religious view and violence will make such interventions largely unproblematic. However, as we emphasised a few paragraphs ago, whether causality can be established between acts of violence and a particular ideology is an important question. Therefore, discussions on the relationship between religion and violence will make important contributions to our discussion in this respect.

Next, we will discuss the literature on secularism and religion-state relations and some of the debates in this literature. In doing so, we aim to highlight the critiques that emphasise the normative aspect of the secular. This is because the question of whether PVE practices are a form of state intervention converges in a sense with the question of whether the secular is normative over the religious.

In the last section, we will bring these debates to the Dutch context. We will try to address the main features of secularism in the Netherlands and the transformations in the perception of Islam.

1.2 PVE/CVE policies: development, goals, and criticisms

In 2015, following the tragic massacre in Ankara, Turkey, the then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu made a critical statement. He claimed, "There is even a list of people who capable of executing suicide attacks in Turkey. …(E)ven though you are aware of their intentions, you cannot arrest them unless they initiate an actual action, or there is evidence suggesting their potential execution of such an action." (*Davutoğlu: Elimizde Bombacıların Listesi Var Ama Tutuklayamayız*, 2021).

This quote from Davutoğlu sheds light on defining a terrorist and the limitations of preventive action against potential terrorist activities. What turns a person into a terrorist? This question is similar to one posed by the renowned scholar, Juergensmeyer, who argued that the distinction between "terrorists" and their "non-terrorist" supporters is exceptionally thin (2017, p. 7).

In essence, the execution of a terrorist act extends far beyond the individual who performs the violent act. Several elements come into play, such as the motivating factors that drive the perpetrator, the organization orchestrating the act, the ideology fuelling this organization, and the supporters nourishing this ideology. The main question remains- where should we draw this thin line that Juergensmeyer mentions?

It's not necessary for us to delve into the complexities of the term 'terrorist' in this context, as that's a topic worthy of its own separate study. What we need to focus on here is the target audience for what's referred to as Preventing Violent Extremism, or PVE.

PVE efforts have come about as a component of the larger process known as the Global War on Terrorism (Bak et al., 2019, p. 3). The emergence of PVE practices is primarily driven by the grave consequences of military interventions in counter-terrorism and the uncertainty surrounding the success of these interventions[4].

Rather than resorting to military interventions and the application of 'hard power' (military force), PVE programmes utilize 'soft power' (cultural influence and persuasion) to strengthen the resilience of societies and individuals (Stephens et al., 2021). The cornerstone of preventive work lies in the concept of intervening before violence takes place. The specific strategies developed under PVE can differ significantly from one country to another. For instance, practices in the Netherlands will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programmes have faced criticism from various angles. Critics argue that these programmes are overly reactive, externally imposed, and infringe on civil liberties, including privacy rights. They are also accused of targeting specific communities, thereby increasing the risk of stigmatization, and fostering ambiguity in defining terms such as 'violent extremism' and 'radicalisation.' (Zeuthen, 2021, p. 4).

Kundnani, a prominent critic of PVE practices, highlights how the target audience of counter-terrorism programmes has expanded with the preventive approach's incorporation into Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) terminology. According to him, with PVE practices at the forefront, the perceived enemy extends beyond a single individual or organization. It has grown to include a set of ideas—most notably 'radical Islam'—defined so vaguely that the spending on the war, amounting to hundreds of billions of dollars, would continue even after the death of figures like bin Laden (Kundnani, 2014, p. 13).

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[4] On why military interventions under the GWOT have been found to be unsuccessful, see. (Kattelman, 2019)

The term 'radical' has indeed become a key criterion in identifying suspects targeted by PVE programmes. However, it's crucial to remember that radicalism can encompass a broad range of views that aren't inherently illegal or necessarily undesirable. For instance, the civil rights movement of the 1960s, deemed radical at the time, contained elements still considered radical today (Berger, 2016, p. 13). Despite such ambiguity, the concept of radicalisation remains at the heart of the discourse. Models of radicalisation have been used to identify individuals likely to turn to violent extremism—a key objective of PVE programmes (Kundnani, 2014).

These models and the ambiguities in defining 'radicalisation' bring us back to our initial question regarding the concept of 'terrorist': How far does the possession of 'extreme' ideas, that don't translate into action or sharing similar ideas with a terrorist, make one suspicious? More importantly, how do we determine the potential in the phrases 'potential suicide bomber' or 'potential terrorist'?

In his book, The Muslims are Coming, Kundnani points out the lack of empirical data to support the assumed causality between ideology and acts of violence (2014). In spite of the lack of empirical data and the uncertainties seen in the above questions, numerous researchers argue that PVE programmes lead to the stigmatisation of the Muslim community. M. S. Abbas, in his book on UK practices, maintains that legislation since September 11, 2001, has increasingly restricted civil liberties and criminalised Muslims in Britain (2021). A separate study, Making CVE Works, reveals that despite the term "Muslim" appearing only once in the latest US legislation, the proposed solutions are unmistakably targeted at the Muslim community (Berger, 2016, p. 11). A survey in the Netherlands shows that PVE interventions are viewed negatively by Muslims, causing increased distrust of government bodies (Welten & Abbas, 2021).

Incidents such as the 7/7 attack in the UK or the murder of Theo Van Gogh in the Netherlands were the starting point for the birth of PVE programmes. The perpetrators of these incidents seem to be somehow related to Islam. Does this justify making Islam and Muslims the target group of PVE? To answer this question in the affirmative, we need some kind of causality. In order to understand whether such causality can be established, we need to refer to the literature analysing the relationship between religion and violence.

1.3 Religion and Violence

Post 9-11, academia, media, policy-making circles, and security institutions have shown a significant interest in the relationship between religion and violence. However, this topic's widespread attention has led to an oversimplification of these complex concepts, often addressed through a reductionist lens. This oversimplification overlooks the nuanced structures of religion and violence.

A multitude of individuals engaged in this discourse, including journalists, politicians, and analysts, often imply a certain definition of religion in their assertions. These definitions arise either consciously or unconsciously. However, despite the apparent clarity of terms like 'religion' and 'violence', defining them poses significant challenges. These challenges underpin many academic debates, which largely revolve around the struggle to define—or not to define—these concepts.

Taking a superficial approach to these concepts and avoiding their intricate aspects results in ignoring their sophisticated structures. Take for example the statement that 'religion encourages violence'. As we begin to dig beneath the surface of this simple and popular statement, dozens of questions will emerge that will prompt us to think more nuanced. All religions? What do we mean by all religions? Is Buddhism a religion? Or capitalism, nationalism? Why isn't every religious person prone to violence? Hundreds of questions like these can be asked. An approach that is not contradictory - or at least satisfactorily coherent - in answering all these questions will only be possible after a deep and critical reflection on the analytical concepts that are our tools of thinking. In a scenario where concepts are not well defined and examined, our minds will be captive to the baggage of these concepts.

Given these complexities, a central question guides our review of the literature on the relationship between religion and violence: 'How is religion defined in these studies?' This is because the concept of 'religion' is at the very center of this adventure of thought, perhaps the concept that seems the simplest but has the capacity to affect our findings most profoundly.

The literature in question is expansive, comprising various conflicting approaches across multiple disciplines. Therefore, drawing concrete conclusions from this extensive literature requires certain limitations. Consequently, the aforementioned guiding question will hopefully steer our exploration through this expansive field of research. Given the breadth of the field and the limited engagement of the subject of this thesis, we will consider the views of three names representative of this vast literature.

Mark Juergensmeyer, author of "Terror in the Mind of God," is one of the most influential voices on religion and violence. Juergensmeyer does not explicitly define 'religion' in this work. However, his views on the relationship between religion and violence offer us some clues as to how he understands religion. For instance, he accepts 'religious violence' as a valid category. This acceptance, which seems quite natural at first glance, actually brings with it a strong claim: Religious violence can be distinguished from non-religious violence. Therefore, according to Juergensmeyer, religion should be a concept whose boundaries can be drawn to a certain extent. It should be distinguished to a certain extent from the political, from the cultural and, more importantly, from the non-religious - from the secular. Juergensmeyer's treatment of religion as another factor that comes into combination with factors such as social and political implies this. (2017, p. 5)[5].

Another important figure, Scott Appleby, in his influential work The Ambivalence of The Sacred, defines religion as a human response to a reality perceived as sacred. And the sacred is defined as an ultimate reality that is neither intrinsically good nor bad (2000, p. 28). William Cavanaugh, the third and final name to be discussed, considers the category of religion as a product of the West's unique history and complex power dynamics (2009).

When we consider the theses of these three names on the relationship between religion and violence, we will see more clearly that the main issue is how religion should be defined. As will be seen, each author's position approaches religion from different angles and these approaches naturally evoke different insights into the relationship between religion and violence. Juergensmeyer treats religion as a functional element. He argues that religion provides justification, organization and worldview for acts of violence and points to its instrumental role in these acts (2017, p. 6). Appleby, on the other hand, focuses on its transcendent dimension. The sacred is 'mysterium tremendum et fascinans' - a mystery that both terrifies and fascinates (2000, p. 28). Man is a limited being. This limited understanding brings with it an ambivalence (2000, p. 29). Therefore, in his approach, religion can produce arguments for both violence and peace-building (2000). Cavanaugh's approach to religion is a call for deconstruction. Religion has emerged as a social construction in the historical process. The dichotomy between religion and secularism, which we unintentionally bring up when we talk about religious violence, is an artificial distinction as it is a part of this construction (2009). Therefore, he criticizes Juergensmeyer and Appleby for ignoring this artificiality and failing to define religion precisely.

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[5] "But more often it has been religion—often in combination with social, political, and other factors—that has been tied to terrorist acts."

Juergensmeyer and Appleby discuss 'religion' in general rather than specific religions (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 34). This situates religion in a place that transcends time and space. This is precisely what Cavanaugh is against: he rejects the idea of a transcendent concept of religion that extends beyond time and space. According to him, such a definition of religion is not possible. In fact, both of these names have failed to define it. Cavanaugh points out that the works of both Juergensmeyer and Appleby exhibit ambiguities and contradictions in terms of defining religion and its boundaries. For example, the hallmarks of religious violence that Juergensmeyer lists may also apply to nationalism [6] (2009, p. 31). Similarly, Appleby's work equates the potential for ethnicity to be as normative, sacred and irrational as religion (2009, pp. 47-48) [7]. To avoid such contradictions, Cavanaugh suggests avoiding essentialist definitions of religion. Only in this way can we have real insights into violence.

What Cavanaugh means by real insights may need some clarification. Cavanaugh argues that the religious-secular dichotomy often obscures the true nature of violence. Because of this dichotomy, religious violence is treated as irrational while secular violence is hidden behind a kind of veil. In Juergensmeyer's work, this irrationalization process operates through cosmic warfare. The perception of cosmic war in religions takes violence to another dimension. It completely demonizes the enemy and the war loses all its rationality (2017). In Appleby's work, the experience of the sacred serves a similar function. Given the transcendent nature of the sacred, any violence based on this experience is considered irrational.

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[6] Cavanaugh used Juergensmeyer's own words to prove this, such as: "Much of what I have said about religious terrorism in this book may be applied to other forms of political violence— especially those that are ideological and ethnic in nature." (Juergensmeyer, 2017, p. 217).
In addition, Cavanaugh discusses one by one what Juergensmeyer lists as the four characteristics that distinguish religious violence from secular violence and argues why these characteristics are not exclusive to religion. For detailed information, see the section on Juergensmeyer in Cavanaugh's work: (2009, pp. 28-36)

[7] *Elsewhere, Appleby acknowledges that ethnic identity itself—stories of birth and blood, the feeling of attraction to one's group and repulsion to outsiders—has a "normative dimension," reveals "inexhaustible depths of value and meaning," has a "transcendent dimension," and invokes "sacred warrants." In the face of this evidence that ethnicity qualifies as religion under his own definition of religion, Appleby nevertheless attributes these dimensions of ethnicity to the "role of religion" in ethnic conflicts.* (Cavanaugh, 2009, p. 48)

Cavanaugh's approach opens a more fruitful space for our thesis. If we accept an instrumental or causal relationship between violence and religion, we significantly limit our ability to critically address interventions in the religious sphere under the umbrella of combating violence. Moreover, in this study, we do not aim to draw general conclusions about religion. We are questioning how the adherents of a particular religion in the context of a particular country engage with their country as a religious group and how this engagement erodes the boundaries between the secular and religious spheres. Therefore, I believe that deconstructing the relationship between 'religion' and violence within a specific historical and spatial process will be the most fruitful method for us.

Therefore, in this thesis, we will approach the relationship between religion and violence from the perspective suggested by Cavanaugh and categorically base our argument on the claim that the distinction between religion and secularity is artificial. From this perspective, it seems quite difficult to establish a causality between any religion and violence. Such a causality can only be possible through an essentialist definition. However, given the diversity of religions, and moreover the richness of each religion, such as different schools of interpretation, sects and differences of opinion, as well as the numerous differences in the way individuals experience religions, the explanatory power of such an attempt at definition would be quite limited.

Debates regarding the definition of religion and the demarcation of its categories are mirrored in the discourse on secularism. This literature on secularism and religion-state relations constitutes another body of work that our thesis will engage with. Our study analyses the interaction between a secular nation-state and a religious community within the context of PVE. Theoretically, PVE practices imply certain assumptions about the relationship between religion and violence. Practically speaking, these interactions suggest a specific form of religion-state relationship. State-determined and implemented soft power practices categorise certain religious interpretations as radical, aiming to decrease their acceptance within society. These observations and similar interactions pave the way for our thesis on the relationship between religion and the state. In the following section, we will analyse the literature pertaining to this relationship.

1.4 Secularism and the state-religion relationship

Modernisation theory posits a core prediction, known as secularisation theory. This theory argues that as modernity, along with its ideas and institutions, takes hold, religion will be relegated to the private sphere, eventually disappearing from public view entirely. Noted intellectuals like Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, and Emile Durkheim saw religion as a phenomenon unique to traditional societies and predicted that it would recede from social life with the onset of modernisation (Tekin, 2022, p. 247).

Understanding the concept of secularisation necessitates exploring the various definitions provided by scholars. Briyan Wilson defined secularisation as a process in which religious ideas, practices, and institutions lose their social significance. On the other hand, Victor Lidz perceived it as the removal of religious beliefs, worship, and a sense of community from the moral life of society (Altıntaş, 2005, p. 44).

Further, Daniel L. Edwards described secularisation as complete indifference to all religious issues and attitudes, including mysticism, while El Wood termed it as semi-paganization. Mark Chaves, meanwhile, approached secularisation as the decline of religious authority. Edward Baily viewed secularisation in its most extreme form, as the anti-religious (Altıntaş, 2005, p. 44). Each of these perspectives provides a different lens to understand the intricate process of secularisation.

Narratives within these secularisation definitions suggest a linear progression of modernisation, positing that humanity evolves from religious to secular, from traditional to modern, and from irrational to rational. As reason and science unveil the mysteries of the world, the perceived need for irrational religious narratives wanes, and the influence of religion, both socially and individually, diminishes in favour of modern values and institutions.

However, events of the 20th century, such as the overthrow of the Shah in Iran in 1979, the perception of Islam as a new threat to the Western world following the collapse of communism, the September 11, 2001, attack, and the rise of fundamentalist movements in both Western and Islamic worlds, seriously challenged these predictions and the secularisation thesis (Karlsson, 2005, p. 13). These events heralded what has been termed 'the return of religion', defying the predictions of the secularisation thesis.

Similarly, phenomena such as the rise of fundamentalism, the steady increase in religiosity, and the emergence of new forms of spirituality have all led to serious criticisms of the secularisation thesis (Marty & Kirman, 2015, p. 132). Some scholars, including Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, have intensified these criticisms (Kucukcan, 2005, p. 114). They suggest:

> *After almost two centuries of misrepresenting both the past and the present with absolutely unsuccessful predictions, it is time for the doctrine of secularisation to be buried in the cemetery of failed theories and told to 'rest in peace'. (Kucukcan, 2005, p. 114).*

The secular-religious dichotomy is integral to modernity's envisioned fragmentation of social spaces. This fragmentation into public and private spheres has also fostered a divide between the secular and the religious. For a long time, societies were characterized based on binary categories, being described as secular or religious, worldly or otherworldly, materialist or spiritual, affirming immanence or the transcendent, etc (Marty & Kirman, 2015, p. 131).

However, the boundaries separating the religious and secular are far from rigid. Analysis of societies and individuals reveals an interweaving of secular and religious aspects. Take, for instance, voting as a civic duty; it appears to be a secular act. Yet, for a member of a religious group, voting might be a religious choice, or at least influenced by religious motives.

Moreover, 'religion' is an incredibly dynamic and diverse category. Owing to this dynamism, religious practices and beliefs adapt to the 'modern'. A similar dynamism exists in the secular realm. Göle captures this in his book on European secularism's transformations after Islam's arrival in Europe:

> *Secularism as a Western grand narrative is undergoing a radical change in that it is shifting from an "indigenous" debate shaped by interactions through Christianity to an encounter with Islam. (Göle, 2012, p. 12).*

Talal Asad similarly draws attention to this dynamism, stating, "the secular is neither singular in origin nor stable in its historical identity, although it works through a series of particular oppositions" (Cady et al., 2013, p. 91). Hence, the dichotomy - which tends to define both in essentialist terms - between the religious and the secular often lacks explanatory power, given the complex realities of both societies and individuals.

The secular-religious dichotomy refers to two highly permeable analytical categories. This permeability is crucial when evaluating the relationship between the state and religion. While it's commonly assumed that a secular state won't intervene in the religious sphere and will remain neutral towards all religions, the blurred boundaries between the secular and religious make this neutrality complex.

Scott Hibbard, who classifies secularism based on its attitude towards religion, introduces two types of secularism (2015):

Irreligious Secularism: Defined by hostility towards religion, this type of secularism advocates for the complete exclusion of religion from the public sphere. Irreligious secularism is essentially the antithesis of religion (Hibbard, 2015, p. 106).
Ecumenical Secularism: Characterized by neutrality rather than hostility towards religion. It does not privilege or exclude certain religions or sects (Hibbard, 2015, p. 107).

The first type aligns with the assumption that secularization is a universal process reliant on the disappearance of religion for human freedom and development. Yet, as previously mentioned, religion hasn't vanished but has seen a resurgence.

The second type, ecumenical secularism, is criticized from various angles. William Connolly and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd argue that secularism positions itself as the authoritarian arbiter of truth (Hibbard, 2015, p. 110). Talal Asad asserts that secularism necessarily excludes certain ideas and peoples (Hibbard, 2015, p. 111).

This structure of the secular state leads it to intervene in the religious sphere, as the 20th century showed, modernist or liberal interpretations of religion were common in the secular public square in societies tolerant of religious and ideological pluralism (Hibbard, 2015, p. 105). Saba Mahmood describes the secularization of modern society as a restructuring of the basic features of religious life by the state, not a withdrawal (2013, p. 147). In many cases, modern nation-states have acted as de facto theologians, discerning what is truly religious and what is not, to bring certain practices under civil law and state regulation (2013, p. 147-148).

As Hibbart notes, " While some states tried to eradicate religion—or greatly restrict it—this was by no means universal. More commonly, states sought to control, regulate, or otherwise use religion to their own ends" (2015, p. 103).

Discussions on secularism and the state-religion relationship yield significant insights for Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programs. We can describe PVE programs as secular initiatives implemented by the state, yet they intersect with the religious sphere, especially when addressing religious violence, radicalization, jihadist groups, and Salafism. Therefore, these programs exist within the intersection of the secular and religious realms. One key audience of these PVE programs is religious groups. As previously discussed, there's evidence that PVE policies and practices often target Muslim communities.

The discussions above suggest that the relationship between religion and the secular state are not suitable to analyse within the dichotomies that suggest completely independent spheres. Rather, they consistently exhibit mutual interactions. Given our thesis' subject matter, here we have focused on interpretations where the state crosses into the religious sphere.

In the examples given, Hibbart emphasizes the state's control and manipulation of religion for its own interests. Asad highlights secularism's exclusionary tendencies, while Saba Mahmood points to the state's presumptive authority to define 'true religion.' In these scenarios, the secular state asserts normative control over the religious sphere.

These critiques of secular normativity challenge state-neutrality principle regarding religion which we discuss in this thesis. Interventions in violence prevention impact the religious sphere. However, it remains an open question whether the religious sphere is inherently more prone to violence. The ambiguity and fluidity of these categories make it difficult for the state to maintain neutrality towards religion. J. W. Scott, argues that the assumption of a sharp distinction attempts to conceal the problems that persist in secular societies by attributing everything negative to religion (Scott et al., 2013, p. 138).

In this thesis, we will scrutinise whether the state's Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) practices in the Netherlands exert normative influence over the religious sphere. Specifically, we aim to investigate whether this potential normative aspect of PVE practices blurs the boundaries between religious and secular spheres.

1.5 Discussions in the Dutch Context

Secularism in the Netherlands finds its roots in the pillarisation system, a framework that enabled religious communities to self-organize. This system permitted various religious groups to establish their own institutions, schools, universities, and media organs. Such pillarisation has long been the defining feature of the Dutch public's understanding of the relationship between the state and religion (Sözeri et al., 2019, p. 436). This system minimized state intervention in religious groups' internal affairs and was dominant from the late 19th century until the 1970s, at which point the process known as depillarisation began (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001).

The arrival of Islam in the Netherlands, largely due to migrant workers, coincided with the start of the depillarisation process. Many individuals from Turkey and Morocco came to the Netherlands as guest workers, but over time, they became permanent residents and now form a significant part of the Dutch Muslim community. This wave of labor migration occurred between the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, Muslims who migrated from Suriname, a former Dutch colony that declared independence in 1975, also represent a significant portion of Muslims in the Netherlands (FORUM Dutch Institute for Multicultural Society & De Wever, 2008).

While there is a historical parallel between the growth in the Muslim population in the Netherlands and the depilarisation process, the pillar system remains a useful concept in analyzing the settlement, institutionalization, and visibility of Islam in the Netherlands. This is largely because depilarisation is not an instantaneous event, but a gradual process.

Indeed, present-day observations suggest the Muslim community in the Netherlands retains elements of pillar-like organization. Over 450 mosques exist in the country, the majority of which are affiliated with Turkish and Moroccan organizations (FORUM Dutch Institute for Multicultural Society & De Wever, 2008). Furthermore, the Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid (CMO - Contact Body of Muslims and the Government), which includes many mosque umbrella organizations, enjoys official recognition from the government as a representative body of Muslims.

Similarly to other pillars, Islamic schools continue to operate. Media organizations, like the Netherlands Muslim Broadcasting Service and the Netherlands Islam Broadcasting Service (Nederlandse Moslim Omroep NMO / Nederlandse Islamitische Omroep NIO), were established as broadcasting organs for Muslims. While they served for a certain period, they declared bankruptcy and ceased operations.

In the first part of her study on imam training in the Netherlands, Sözeri suggests that while there was never an official Islamic pillar, Muslim communities did benefit from the system in their institutionalization processes, similar to other communities (2019, pp. 436–437). Corroborating this view, Nadia Fadil and her colleagues assert that the establishment of mosques, schools, civil organizations, and media outlets by Muslims in the Netherlands has proceeded in line with the pillarisation system (2019, p. 6).

However, Maussen contests this perspective, arguing that such frequent references to pillarisation prevent a proper analysis of the Dutch model of secularism (2012). He notes that regulatory changes during the depilarisation process in the Netherlands have shifted the understanding of religious freedom. This shift is from 'non-interference of the state in the autonomy of religious communities' to 'the right of the individual to be free from the tutelage and authority of religious elites and oppressive communities' (Maussen, 2012, p. 340). These institutional arrangements guaranteeing equality and pluralism have been beneficial for Islam's visibility in the public sphere and the recognition of its religious existence. But, the principle of 'non-financing of religion', which has gained importance in the depillarisation period, has prevented Muslim associations from benefiting from the generous public subsidies that existed during the time when the pillarisation system was dominant (Maussen, 2012, p. 350). Schuh, Burchardt, and Wohlrab-Sahr also discuss a transformation similar to the one Maussen mentioned. They argue that the Dutch model of secularism has evolved, moving from 'secularism in the name of accommodating religious diversity' to 'secularism in the name of individual freedoms' or 'secularism in the name of national integration and development' (Sözeri et al., 2019, p. 436).

It is seen from these studies that the religion-state relationship model in the Netherlands - whether or not it is defined by pilarisation- provides various advantages in terms of the institutionalisation of Muslims and their enjoyment of constitutional rights. However, as we have discussed above under the heading 'Secularism and the state-religion relationship', there is a critical approach that emphasises the normative aspect of secularism and considers it as a project of creating a certain kind of religious subject rather than merely a church-state separation. Mahmood and Asad, who are proponents of this line, argue that this normativity of secularism is used to discipline Muslim subjects in particular (Mapril et al., 2017, pp. 3–4). In the words of Moors and Salih, this normative secularism means, in a sense, '(...) culturalisation of citizenship and a transformation in the meaning of integration from participation in society to an assimilation to dominant normativities' (Mapril et al., 2017, pp. 3–4). In this context, acceptability is indexed to dominant normativities. For example, quoting a report on the need for imam training in the Netherlands, Sözeri et al. states that 'it is of great importance that imams - contrary to what can be expected to those coming from abroad - are able to base their message on the values valid in the Netherlands' (2019, p. 436). Expressions such as 'valid values' in this sentence lead us to a distinction between the constitutional and the cultural level. The framework of constitutional and culturalist/nativist secularism proposed by Verkaik and Tamimi Arab is more accurate in making sense of this distinction (2016). According to this framework, these two forms of secularism are in tension with each other. Constitutional secularism, which is more active in the bureaucracy, is defined as '(...) a discursive practice that draws on the Dutch Constitution, as well as on the dominant notion of secularism as the separation of the state and the church, to defend the right of religious subjects to express their religion publicly as citizens' (Verkaaik & Arab, 2016, p. 171). Cultural/nativist secularism, on the other hand, is taken as the political or ideological expression of a historically formed shared understanding of what the place and role of religion is or should be in a society defined as secular by the dominant voices (Verkaaik & Arab, 2016, p. 170). The tension between these two concepts is analysed through the example of the mosque built in Almere. While the positive attitude towards the construction of the mosque among bureaucrats and public institutions is underlined (constitutional secularism), attention is drawn to the fact that the construction of the mosque was hidden from the media and the public for a long time (cultural secularism). This is because the more the construction of the mosque is covered in the media, the more local bureaucrats and politicians will feel obliged to adopt a culturalist understanding of secularism. It is at this point that what we are trying to address as normativity in secularism debates begins (Verkaaik & Arab, 2016).

Secularism's normative aspect, which we can see in the cultural/nativist secularism in Verkaik & Arab' framework, has led to several dichotomies within the religious sphere. Similar to that De Koning describes secularism as a 'discursive formation' that allows the state to define separations such as public vs. private, religious vs. secular, and acceptable vs. unacceptable modes of religion (2020, p. 125). These dichotomies can be observed throughout the history of Dutch-Muslim relations.

Fadil, de Koning, and Ragazzi highlight a similar dichotomy during the colonial period, making a distinction between Islam as a religion and Islam as a political doctrine. In this context, local Islam was seen as apolitical, whereas political Islam, with its pan-Islamist and anti-colonial ideas, was viewed as a potential disruptor of the social order (2019, pp. 11–12).

Similar dichotomies continue to this day after labour migration. In his article, 'The racialization of danger', de Koning explores the shifting relationship between the Netherlands and Muslims after labour migrations. He points out how perceptions of danger became racialised in relation to Islam throughout different stages of Dutch history (2020).

De Koning classifies these historical periods using four concepts. In the first phase, Islam itself is seen as the perceived threat. From the 1980s, he observes that strategies concerning 'onmaatschappelijken' (anti-social families) were leveraged, and Muslim immigrants became subjects of government intervention (2020, pp. 125–126). Government reports from the 80s expressed fears about potential harm immigrants could inflict on the social structure and the rule of law. During this period, 'integration' was seen as the crucial criterion for acceptability. Sarah Bracke describes how integration has become a security issue in the Netherlands as follows:

> *While discursively connected to the issue of migration yet not confined to it, integration is taken as a crucial way to unnerve forces that could reject the established order. Hence, integration becomes conceptually embedded within the Dutch national security agenda as a 'security issue'. The more integrated Muslim populations are within Dutch society, the reasoning goes, the less chance they will turn to political Islam and thus seek to over-throw the established order and replace it with an Islamic one (*Bracke, 2014, p. 361*).*

In the first annual report of the Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst (BVD, National Intelligence and Security Agency), 'political Islam' was defined as a security problem for the Dutch state in 1992 (Bracke, 2014, p. 360). In 1998 BVD issued a new report warning of a rising form of political Islam that could increase its influence through mosques and receive funding from overseas Islamic foundations (De Koning, 2020, p. 128). This distinction between mainstream Islam and political Islam created a new categorisation of what was deemed acceptable and unacceptable. Political Islam, viewed as a threat to the nation-state, marks the second phase of de Koning's historical classification.

The third phase is characterised by the period of radicalisation, defined by the events of September 11, the 2004 assassination of Theo van Gogh, and the emergence of politicians like Geert Wilders (De Koning, 2020, p. 129). During this phase, Salafism was largely seen as the source of threat. A 2002 AIVD report established a connection between Salafism and the radicalisation process, with the state's interest in the Salafist threat persisting for a considerable time (De Koning, 2020, p. 130-132). The fourth and current phase is described as jihadism, typified by the emergence of homegrown terrorists which stayed on the media agenda for a long time after it was revealed that, in 2012 and 2013 many Dutch citizens had travelled to Syria (De Koning, 2020, pp. 132-134).

It is clear that the correlation between Islam, or certain aspects of it, and security and danger, has endured from the issue of integration up to the present day. As previously mentioned, the relationship between religion and violence is complex. As Kundnani emphasizes, there is no clear empirical evidence of a causal link between a specific religion and violence (2014). However, it is perceived that this security-oriented approach to the Muslim community consciously or unconsciously classifies Muslims according to certain characteristics and establishes a correlation between the 'unacceptable' part of this classification and violence and danger. For example, men who refuse to shake hands are considered to be Salafists, and in Dutch public opinion, Salafism is largely equated with radicalization (Fadil et al., 2019, p. 12). Evaluating the implications of a security- and danger-focused approach to the Muslim community, de Koning observes:

> *At the same time, it is the focus on security and danger that not only draws Muslims into the scope of administrative power but also turns the problema- tization of*

> *Muslims into an almost 'normal' and natural arrangement whereby its racial nature is concealed and legitimized by the managerial language of risk assessment and threats, security and insecurity, as is evident in other European states in a myriad of ways.45 This then makes it appear logical for the state to intervene on behalf of national security and the interest of the general public. Furthermore, the counter-radicalization approach is not only punitive; it is also pre-emptive.* (De Koning, 2020, p. 134).

The main topic of this thesis is to discuss the effects of these pre-emptive counter-radicalisation interventions on the representation of the Muslim community. I would like to investigate whether the 'dangerous' image of Islam has turned into institutional discrimination and what kind of problems this situation causes in terms of representation. For example, an Islamic NGO worker, whom I asked for his opinion about the mayor of Amsterdam's request to mosques to sign a statement condemning violence against LGBTI+ individuals in 2022, said: "This is discrimination. Why only mosques are asked. Churches or other religious groups may have similar ideas. But it is only mosques that are dangerous for them.' Another NGO director said that they had asked the mosques affiliated to them to submit a formal objection to the municipality, but the mosque administrations refused to do so. The fact that the mosque administrations refrain from using their legal rights when there should not be a problem in sight has obviously aroused my curiosity and led me to the subject of this thesis.

In the following sections, we will first discuss what kind of preventive practices are implemented within the scope of PVE in the Netherlands, how terms such as radicalisation, extremism, jihad, salafism, etc. are defined in govermental reports, and then, based on the data we obtained and the interviews we conducted, whether these preventive practices and the dichotomies (acceptable - unacceptable) arising from them have an impact on the representation of the Muslim community.

Chapter 2. PVE in The Netherlands

In Chapter 1, we provided a general overview of PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism) practices and the criticisms levelled against them. However, PVE is not a universally accepted concept with a clear definition or set methodologies and scope. Thus, it necessitates evaluation within a specific context to reveal its limits and implications.

Recognising this need, we will begin this section by tracing the historical evolution of practices in the Netherlands, herein referred to as PVE. Subsequently, in line with our thesis subject, we will discuss whether these practices constitute state intervention in the 'religious sphere'.

It's important to note that the term PVE isn't frequently used in Dutch national security strategy documents. Instead, the 'Dutch Approach', or ‘broad approach’ strategy combining criminal and preventive measures, lays the foundation for the country's counterterrorism efforts (Vermeulen et al., 2021). The Dutch model primarily aims at detecting and preventing radicalisation in its early stages, with preventive measures taking precedence in documents published by NCTV.

Despite the term PVE not being widely used in the Dutch context, it is employed in international academia as an encompassing term for all 'soft power' elements. Numerous academic studies focus on PVE in the UK and US. Vermeulen and Visser titled their Dutch-focused study as 'Preventing violent extremism in the Netherlands: overview of its broad approach' (2021). In my thesis, I favour the term PVE due to its clarity and because it aligns with similar studies conducted in the UK and US under the title of PVE. Hence, I will continue to use PVE in subsequent sections to refer to non-criminal measures and practices forming a significant part of the Dutch national counterterrorism strategy.

2.1 PVE Practices in the Netherlands

The historical roots of the Netherlands' counter-terrorism strategies can be traced back to the 1970s. Initially, Dutch counter-terrorism efforts were largely influenced by the activities of Moluccan factions, communist movements, and the Irish Republican Army (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 20). Despite this, counter-terrorism measures did not gain prominent attention in national policy-making until 2001. Notably, several pivotal events that occurred in the early years of the 21st century significantly shaped the trajectory of the nation's counter-terrorism agenda.

The catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, in the United States prompted an immediate response from the Dutch government in the form of its Counter-Terrorism and Security Action Plan (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 20). Then, a turning point arrived in 2002, when two Dutch youths were tragically killed in Kashmir. The subsequent investigation by the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) revealed that the youths had journeyed to Kashmir with the intent of joining the jihad (“Recruitment for the Jihad in the Netherlands,” 2002, p. 9). This incident underscored the reality that radicalisation could indeed affect Dutch youth, thus influencing the evolution of the country's security policies and preventive measures (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 134).

In 2003, inspired by the Kashmir episode, the Dutch government officially introduced the 'broad approach' (brede benadering) policy (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 20). This policy interweaves both punitive (repressive) and preventive tactics. As outlined in a government letter to parliament, the broad approach aims to 'prevent processes of radicalisation by keeping political organizations or groups promoting extreme, intolerant and undemocratic goals within the boundaries of the democratic legal order through a nuanced approach' (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 135).

During this period, various officials reiterated the significance of preventive measures within the context of the broad approach. The director of the AIVD asserted that terrorism should not be combated as an isolated phenomenon but in combination with adjacent phenomena of radicalization and recruitment. They further argued that "effective counter-terrorism primarily involves the implementation of preventive measures" (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 135). Consequently, this Dutch approach can be characterised by its focus on early detection of radicalisation processes in individuals and groups and the eradication of environments conducive to radicalisation (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 135).

The year 2004 stands out as a critical juncture in the history of Dutch national security. The March attacks in Madrid, coupled with the murder of Theo Van Gogh in November by a Moroccan-origin Muslim youth, precipitated significant shifts in the Netherlands' national security policies. In response to the Madrid attacks, the Dutch government established the

National Counter Terrorism Coordinator (NCTb) (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 21). The NCTb's role was to unify the country's counter-terrorism policy, ensuring an effective balance between preventive and repressive measures (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 135).

In 2005, two important reports, 'Radicalism and Radicalisation' and 'Approach to Hotbeds of Radicalisation', were released (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 21). These reports emphasized a tripartite approach to preventing radicalisation: actively confronting radicals and their facilitators, promoting societal resilience, and reinforcing the bond of individuals and communities with society and the legal system (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 21).

The 'Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan' of 2007 identified Islamic and far-right radicalisation as the key societal issues (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 21). The report's approach suggested that authorities viewed social segregation as the initial phase of radicalisation. In their analysis of how Muslims are portrayed as a suspect community in the Netherlands, van Meeteren and van Oostendorp lauded several aspects of this document (2018). They described the era during which the document was published as a period of 'communicative coexistence', characterized by careful choice of words, an emphasis on precise definitions, and a focus on shared responsibility and the potential detrimental effects of polarisation (Van Meeteren & Van Oostendorp, 2018, p. 532).

In 2011, the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) introduced its inaugural four-year plan titled 'National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011-2015'. This strategy established a five-tiered approach: acquiring (information), preventing, defending, preparing, and prosecuting (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 136). A pivotal development in the years 2012-2013 was the surge in Dutch youth traveling abroad to participate in jihad. In response to this increase, the Integrated Approach to Jihadism Action Programme was launched in 2014, encompassing six key elements: risk reduction for potential jihadists, interventions for those venturing to conflict zones, counter-radicalisation efforts, social media, information exchange, and collaboration (Wittendorp et al., 2017, p. 23).

Van Meeteren and van Oostendorp view the period commencing in 2014 as decidedly negative compared to the preceding phase, naming it 'The Jihadist Enemy' (2018). According to their research, divisive 'us versus them' rhetoric escalated during this period, the Muslim community was increasingly held responsible for the issue of radicalisation, and the term 'terrorism' began to be referred to more commonly as 'Jihadist terrorism' (Van Meeteren & Van Oostendorp, 2018, pp. 534-537). The transformation in discourse was not exclusive to far-right politicians, but was also evident among representatives of various other political parties. Some of these statements include[8]: (...) the Jihad is a part of the Islam.(van Klaveren, groep Bontes/van Klaveren), It is naive to claim that it has nothing to do with the Islam at all. (...) the Islam is the discussion point here. (van Haersma Buma, CDA) and (...) there is a problem within the Islam. This will have to be solved within the Islam itself. (Zijlstra, VVD).

In 2016, the NCTV issued its second quadrennial strategic document, the 'National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020'. As part of this renewed strategy, several new institutions were established to support counter-terrorism efforts. The Social Stability Expertise Unit (ESS, as per its Dutch acronym) aids municipalities in developing networks of key figures to tackle radicalisation and polarisation(Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 138). The Internet Referral Unit (IRU) plays a vital role in countering online jihadism, while the School and Safety Foundation (SSV, as per its Dutch acronym) focuses on cultivating a socially secure environment in schools (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 138). The National Extremism Support Centre (LSE, as per its Dutch acronym) offers support to individuals grappling with radicalisation, and the Youth Extremism and Polarisation Prevention Platform (Platform JEP, as per its Dutch acronym) provides information and advice to the youth (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 138).

Fast forward to 2022, and the NCTV unveiled its third quadrennial strategy, the 'National Counterterrorism Strategy 2022-2026'. In this report, Jihadism is identified as the most significant threat, with the escalating trend of right-wing extremist violence across Europe also acknowledged as an additional threat (“The National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2022-2026,” 2022).

As evidenced, the Netherlands boasts a substantial body of national security literature that has been steadily growing since 2001. A common theme permeating nearly all of these documents pertains to the terrorist threats emanating from Muslim sources. The objective of this thesis is not to appraise the success or ethicality of the national security policies and the associated practices. Consequently, such evaluations will not be featured in this thesis. Instead, the central goal of this thesis is to scrutinize whether the policies executed by the state, in its capacity as a secular entity, directly or indirectly influence the lives, decisions, and representation of a religious group. To fulfill this aim, we will examine various government-published documents and reports that analyse these documents, focusing on this particular issue.

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[8] These explanations are taken from the following source: (Van Meeteren & Van Oostendorp, 2018)

2.2 Securitised Concepts: Jihad and Salafism

Upon analyzing the Netherlands' counterterrorism history, it becomes evident that jihadism and jihadist salafism have emerged as the most formidable threat factors. Particularly since the 2010s, as the number of Dutch foreign fighters rose, both jihadism and jihadist salafism became focal points of counterterrorism strategies. Within the Dutch context, jihad and salafism are primarily discussed in relation to radicalisation and extremism due to their central position in security strategies. Nonetheless, both the definitions provided by the NCTV and the perspectives within Islamic tradition suggest these concepts encompass broader meanings.

Jihad, originating from the Arabic root 'jahd', signifying "to exert strength and effort, to utilise all available means to achieve a task", has been employed in Islamic literature to denote a wide array of meanings. These range from "learning religious commandments, living by them, teaching them to others, enjoining good and trying to prevent evil, preaching Islam, and battling against internal and external enemies". In the realm of jurisprudence, the term is mostly used to reference the war against non-Muslims, whereas in Sufism, it denotes the effort to overcome the 'nafs-i emmâra' (the commanding self) (Özel, 1993). However, in the West, the term is largely used by both Muslims and non-Muslims to signify 'Holy War' (De Poot et al., 2011, p. 25).

The definition of jihad included in the annex of the report titled 'The Netherlands comprehensive action programme to combat jihadism' reflects a similar spectrum of meanings. In this report, jihad is defined as 'an Islamic term, usually interpreted in the Islamic tradition as ‘an effort for a good cause'. Its primary meaning is ethical in nature: man has the divine task to fight evil within him. The second meaning of jihad is to make efforts in the interests of Islam and the Islamic community. A third meaning is armed struggle. (Ministry of Security and Justice et al., 2014) ' The same document also provides definitions of other terms stemming from the same root as jihad. For instance, jihadism is defined as 'an ideological movement of political Islam which is based on a specific interpretation of Salafist teachings and on the works of Sayyid Qutb and seeks a global dominance of Islam and the establishment of an Islamic state (caliphate) through armed struggle (jihad)'. A Jihadist, meanwhile, is described as 'an individual who sees him-/herself as part of the jihadist movement and endorses jihadist teachings' (Ministry of Security and Justice et al., 2014).

Our aim is not to discuss the correctness or incorrectness of the definitions of jihadist and jihadism. However, it is clear that words from the same root as jihad are high on the security agenda. This situation largely relegates the other meanings of the concept of jihad listed above to the background. Jihad, in its broad sense, is a concept that belongs to Islam and is in circulation among Muslims, just like other concepts such as prayer, fasting, etc. However, this has not led the vast majority of Muslims to violence. Therefore, in many Western sources (cf. Khadduri, War and Peace, pp. 52-53, 144, 251; Tyan, II, 302; Fattal, p. 71; Kruse, pp. 57, 65, 79; Lammens, p. 8; Massignon, pp. 80-81; Lewis, p. 175; Lambton, p. 201)[9], the claim that jihad refers to fighting non-Muslims until the whole world converts to Islam or submits to Islamic rule is rather pretentious. Such claims can be viewed as overly ambitious. While NCTV reports and other government documents do not directly equate the concept of 'jihad' with terrorism and radicalisation, these contexts often feature the term. As a result of their study, based on official documents published in the Netherlands, van Meeteren and van Oostendorp conclude that post-2011, the term 'terrorism' progressively became synonymous with jihadist terrorism (2018).

The concept of Salafism in Dutch context, displays a similar pattern. The term Salafism first emerged in reports by the AIVD in 2002 and was thoroughly discussed in a 2004 report titled 'From Dawa to Jihad' (Berger et al., 2018, pp. 9–10). This report characterises Salafism as "radical Islamic puritans", suggesting that the contemporary Salafi movement increasingly leans towards "conservative-ultra-orthodox" perspectives and is becoming under the influence of Wahhabism (Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2004, p. 24). A 2015 document by the NCTV acknowledged that "Despite the apparent rigidity of its ideology, the Salafist movement is dynamic and diverse. For this reason, among others, it would not be right to brand the entire spectrum as a problem" (General Intelligence and Security Service & National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, 2015, p. 14).

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[9] The references cited are taken from the following encyclopedia article: (Özel, 1993)

It has become commonplace in Dutch literature to dissect Salafism into three strands: 'apolitical', 'political', and 'jihadist' Salafism (General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), 2014) (General Intelligence and Security Service & National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, 2015) (Welten & Abbas, 2021b). In the AIVD's report 'The transformation of jihadism in the Netherlands', apolitical and political Salafism are bundled under the heading 'dawa-Salafism' (General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), 2014). It's clear that NCTV reports recognise the dynamic and internally diverse nature of Salafism. Nevertheless, similar to how the concept of jihad is framed within a specific context, Salafism is often placed within the radicalism context without being directly equated to it. This has led to the perception of Salafism as a whole as a societal risk. Various quotations from reports underscore this point[10]:

> *Salafism propagates "extreme forms of intolerant isolationism" (AIVD 2004; AIVD 2007a: 11, 44-46; NCTb 2008, AIVD/NCTV 2015: 10).*
> *Salafism strives to "radically transform society while rejecting the Western democratic legal order" (AIVD 2007a: 11) or promotes "antidemocratic activities" (2015: 10).*
> *Violence is denounced, yet may be justified under certain conditions (AIVD 2007a: 22-23, 68-69).*

In the report 'Salafisme in Nederland belicht', it is stated that Salafism is perceived as radical in both NCTV and AIVD reports, which has substantially influenced subsequent academic work on Salafism. The report suggests that the initial state funding of research in this field, coupled with later independent studies feeling compelled to align with existing literature, has contributed to shaping the discourse on Salafism in the Dutch context (Berger et al., 2018).

How does the securitisation of these concepts affect Muslim societies? First of all, as mentioned above, the concepts of jihad and salafism are not specialised concepts that only describe violent individuals. Ambiguities about the scope of these concepts complicate the issue. For example, the report 'Jihadi terrorism in the Netherlands' asks the following question:

> *With regard to some of the individuals or clusters who play an active role in jihadi cooperations, it is not clear whether they are actually prepared to use violence, to*

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[10] The cited quotations are mentioned in the following article: (Berger et al., 2018).

> *threaten to use violence, or to incite people to do this. It may be established that these individuals performed activities in support of a jihadi network. But does this mean that these activities are terrorist acts? And are these individuals consequently terrorists? (De Poot et al., 2011, p. 25).*

Indeed, deciphering this question can be challenging. However, in the context of the Netherlands, the notions of jihad and Salafism appear to draw the line distinguishing radical and moderate Muslims. Radical Muslims are labeled as a threat, while moderate Muslims are encouraged to collaborate in countering this perceived danger. As, in 2004, a parliamentarian proposed that 'moderate Muslims' should more publicly condemn terrorism (Van Meeteren & Van Oostendorp, 2018, p. 533). At this juncture, the question arises: Who constitutes these 'moderate Muslims', and how and by whom are they determined? This marks the onset of state interference in the religious sphere. Here, state security policy starts to bifurcate the religious domain via various dichotomies. Acceptable and unacceptable forms of Islam transform from a religious concern into a matter of politics and security. Worse still, due to the ambiguities brought about by the intricate and dynamic nature of both concepts/movements, individuals who do not fit into such clusters might be erroneously categorized as potentially 'dangerous'. This is because, although these categories seem distinct in theory, they remain quite fluid and ambiguous in practice.

The aspiration to be seen as 'acceptable' or 'moderate' also bears tangible repercussions for Muslims. For instance, the report 'The transformation of jihadism in the Netherlands' notes that up until the 2010s, some Salafist centers and preachers adopted a more moderate stance and enhanced their community relationships in response to government policy and pressure from Muslim communities (General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), 2014, p. 32). This situation appears to be a consequence of securitizing religious orthodoxy and insularity as markers of 'danger' (Berger et al., 2018, p. 13). As the report suggests, the decisions made by these centers and preachers are significantly shaped by government policies. In a sense, one could argue these groups are compelled to adopt a particular religious interpretation contrary to their inclination. However, this scenario also prompts negative outcomes. The same report mentions that this moderate posture leads younger generations to accuse their predecessors of siding with the West, thus pushing them towards more radical and jihadist ideologies (General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), 2014, pp. 31–32).

In another study, we encounter findings that demonstrate the individual impacts of this securitization. According to a study participant, they are persistently held accountable for the actions of others: 'We constantly have to defend ourselves. It's like we are already down 1-0, so we need to work harder against the media to prove that isn't the case' (Welten & Abbas, 2021a, p. 101). This statement is particularly noteworthy because it illustrates how an 'us versus them' rhetoric can prevail. The fact that Muslim communities identify themselves as securitized may indeed create fertile ground for this dichotomous mindset. As evidenced by the shift seen in younger generations of Salafi preachers, this 'us versus them' discourse and marginalization tend to push them closer to jihadist Salafists.

Another consequence of this scenario is a pervasive sense of fear among Muslims. Again, a participant in one of the studies remarked that 'People are afraid to say anything that could be used against them. We resort to self-censorship. It is not uncommon for Muslim leaders to hold back... or else face the consequences!' (Welten & Abbas, 2021b, pp. 6-7). The fear of being tagged as an extremist seems to pose a significant challenge for Muslims. This is exemplified by the following statements by participants in the same study, indicating the insecurity induced by this situation: 'Sure, the government is currently targeting Salafism. [But] when will it be my turn as a non-Salafi? Or will I soon be classified as a Salafi?' (Welten & Abbas, 2021b, p. 6).

As is evident, despite the ambiguities in the definitions and scopes of jihadism and Salafism, the fact that they sit at the heart of the security agenda and that Muslims are subjected to a binary distinction framed by these concepts has had substantial impacts on the religious sphere. These effects can be briefly summarised as the need to emphasize a 'moderate' interpretation of religion, the need to excessively justify oneself, self-censorship, fear of unfavorable comparison, and bearing responsibility for the perceived threat.

2.3 Municipalities and Key Figures

Mass surveillance has emerged as one of the predominant practices in preventing violent extremism (PVE) in the post-9/11 era. The linear conceptualization of radicalisation by PVE practices, along with the need to preempt future threats, has underscored the importance of early detection of radicalisation and gathering intelligence on potential radical communities. In the Netherlands, an entity known as the Informatiehuishouding (Information House) was established under the Dutch Department of Public Order, Safety, and Security with a similar mandate. Its objective was to identify and analyse early indicators of radicalisation (Kundnani & Hayes, 2018, p. 6).

Several studies, primarily in the UK and US contexts, have analysed these surveillance activities and discussed their various impacts on the Muslim community. For instance, Qurashi concludes in the UK context that 'Its intelligence outputs, along with the emotional ramifications of surveillance, have served to confine and steer Muslim political agency' (2018). Similarly, Sian argues that the monitoring of young Muslims and 'extremism' in UK state schools is problematic and perpetuates the tenets of Islamophobia through practices of governmentality (2013). Following a 24-month qualitative study in New York, Ali posits that some of the outcomes of surveillance practices include 'self-discipline behaviors amid a culture of fear and panoptic gaze as well as diminished intercommunity trust and sense of solidarity among participants' (2016).

Additionally, claims that surveillance practices are racialised have also been noted in the literature (Selod, 2018; Kundnani, 2014;). In the Dutch context, official government reports underline that radicalisation is a process that can occur within various communities, not exclusively within Muslim societies (NCTV, 2022). Likewise, jihadism, along with far-right ideologies and other forms of extremism, are acknowledged as potential threats. However, in surveillance practices, this threat definition tends to be interpreted more narrowly.

In The National Counterterrorism Strategy of the Netherlands, information acquisition has consistently been a critical component. In the strategy for the years 2022-2026, procurement, which refers to 'Gaining timely insight into (potential) terrorist threats', is the first of the four core counterterrorism objectives. Information is identified as a key element that informs threat analyses, thereby forming the foundation for a threat-centric approach (NCTV, 2022). The Netherlands' counter-terrorism strategy, known as a broad approach, is predicated on the active collaboration of diverse institutions and organisations. As such, the responsibility for information gathering is not vested in a single entity. In the 2022-2026 strategy, this is articulated as follows: 'Information is sourced from open and closed channels at local, regional, national, and international levels across multiple disciplines' (NCTV, 2022). Municipalities form an integral part of this information network. The Social Stability Expertise Unit (ESS), which advises municipalities on PVE, assists in establishing networks of key figures. These key figures are influential individuals within hard-to-reach communities - where the risk of radicalisation and polarisation is pronounced - who act as the government's 'eyes and ears' (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 138). In this section, we will scrutinise the potential implications of key figures by analysing the report 'Samenwerken met sleutelfiguren bij het tegengaan van radicalisering', prepared by the Verwey-Jonker Institute upon the request of the Municipality of Nijmegen in 2017. This report probes into three municipalities in Gelderland-Zuid, delving into how key figures contribute to the fight against radicalisation and the lessons that municipalities can draw from each other's experiences.

We have previously noted that surveillance practices often narrow the definition of threat. The report under discussion indeed implies that the specific target of municipal attention tends to be Moroccan men. According to the report, the three scrutinized municipalities maintain robust relationships with men from Moroccan communities, who frequently take on active roles in mosques or self-organisations. However, cooperation with women, youths, and individuals from Turkish or other communities appears insufficient (Meijer & Broekhuizen, 2017, p. 5). It's clear then that the selection of communities as potential hotspots for radicalisation suggests a narrower threat perception in surveillance practices, contrasting with the more comprehensive approach taken in general security strategies. The report's examples and recommendations largely focus on mosques and Muslim communities.

What then is the purpose of surveilling Muslim communities perceived as potential risks? O'Toole et al., in their analysis of preventative approaches, observe that such processes involve '...a series of wide-ranging interventions in Muslim religious, social and civil structures, with the aim of reforming, managing, regulating and 'disciplining' Muslim conduct' (O'Toole et al., 2015). Similar objectives could be inferred in the Dutch context. This is not an evaluation of the effectiveness or morality of such practices, but rather an examination of their implications within the religious sphere.

The report reveals that key figures are expected to command authority, possess comprehensive knowledge, engender community trust, and maintain a profile impactful to the community (Meijer & Broekhuizen, 2017). These desirable traits hint at two expectations: i) the key figure should be embedded within society, using their social standing to gather information and relay it to the municipality or authorities, and ii) the key figure should leverage their influence to effect change in the individuals or ideas they address.

The expectation for information sharing is explicit in the report. Key figures are defined as those who cooperate with local authorities by sharing information (Meijer & Broekhuizen, 2017, p. 3). The report contends that these key figures, being integrated within neighbourhoods, are better positioned than municipal officials or frontline professionals. Properly ensuring key figures' privacy is presented as a facilitator for information sharing. The report also highlights the risk of key figures being perceived as municipal informants (Meijer & Broekhuizen, 2017, p. 4).

The report provides clues towards the expectation for key figures to exert influence and provide guidance. Municipalities request key figures to organise events and meetings with young people and parents. The report stresses that due to the trust placed in key figures, both youths and parents are more likely to participate in such activities and are more receptive to influence. The ability to make an impact within the community is listed as a crucial criterion in key figure selection (Meijer & Broekhuizen, 2017, p. 4).

The report also advocates for a reciprocal relationship with key figures. While financial support is precluded by the church-state divide, other forms of support should be generously provided (2017, p. 6). This implies that a healthy relationship between key figures and municipalities should resemble a form of exchange.

Regarding the potential concrete effects of these practices on Muslims, several observations can be made. Firstly, the reciprocal relationship as mentioned in the report may render key figures vulnerable to shifts in public policy. Within such relationships based on mutual interest, key figures may be incentivised to maintain certain privileges gained through municipal contact, potentially leading to regulate their behaviour in order to protect these privileges.

Another intervention area could be seen in the municipality's enhancement of individuals who hold influence within society through various supports. The identification of key figures is fraught with complications. What criteria are used to select these individuals? In such community participation-based practices, 'moderate' group representatives are heavily engaged with to 'normalise' communities (Vermeulen et al., 2021, p. 143). In this scenario, municipalities seem to hold sway in determining who is considered 'moderate'. This key figure, whose views are deemed 'moderate' by the municipality, is expected to guide the 'risky' segments of society through activities and counselling. Hence, this selection implicitly endorses a specific religious interpretation as 'moderate, acceptable and non-dangerous', and municipalities effectively support the propagation and consolidation of this interpretation. As previously noted, key figures are expected not only to provide information but also to influence society.

2.4 Vague Definitions, Vague Boundaries

Preventive counter-terrorism strategies aim not to address an already committed crime, but to thwart a potential future crime. Such strategies conceive of a particular process leading up to an act of violence, often metaphorically represented as a 'staircase' or 'pathway' to terrorism (Hardy, 2018, p. 76). The effectiveness of these preventive strategies hinges directly on accurately identifying and defining the initial stages of this staircase or pathway. Therefore, theories and models of radicalisation are integral to countries' preventive measures. However, there is no universally agreed-upon definition of radicalisation or a standard process by which individuals become radicalised. In each country where preventive measures are implemented, radicalisation is defined uniquely.

Preventive measures hold paramount importance in the Netherlands' broad approach to combating terrorism. The Dutch strategy is heavily focused on identifying, at their nascent stages, processes that could potentially escalate to violence. This preventive approach, part of the broad approach, engages various stakeholders—municipalities, experts, community leaders, education professionals, and youth workers—to detect signs of radicalisation early (Vermeulen et al., 2021). These stakeholders require definitions, resources, and guidelines to correctly identify radicalisation, highlighting the importance of how radicalisation is defined in the Dutch context.

The 2007 Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan defined radicalisation as the 'willingness to strive for far-reaching changes in society (possibly in an undemocratic manner) to support such changes or persuade others to accept them' (Butt & Tuck, n.d., p. 4). This definition was notably broad and potentially risked categorising legitimate actions like political protests or industrial action as forms of radicalisation (Hardy, 2018, p. 95). However, since 2014, a new definition of radicalisation has come into use. In a report published by the NCTV, radicalisation is described as 'a process that involves an increasing willingness to accept and act—possibly violently—on even the most extreme implications of an ideology. Radicalisation can also be seen as the process by which individuals transition from lawful activism towards extremism and, subsequently, terrorism' (Hardy, 2018, p. 94).

While this current definition is more constrained than its predecessor, it still possesses certain ambiguities. Although the Dutch government acknowledges that radicalisation can occur across different sectors, it considers jihadist ideology as the most significant radical tendency that poses a threat (NCTV, 2022). Jihadism is defined as 'an ideological movement of political Islam, grounded on a specific interpretation of Salafist teachings and the works of Sayyid Qutb, that seeks global Islamic dominance and the establishment of an Islamic state (caliphate) through armed struggle (jihad)' and A jihadist is identified as an individual who perceives themselves as part of the jihadist movement and subscribes to jihadist teachings (Ministry of Security and Justice et al., 2014).

Several ambiguities permeate these definitions, adding layers of complexity to the understanding of what constitutes radicalisation. For instance, in the definition of jihadism, the term 'Salafi teachings' doesn't denote a monolithic doctrine. Roex's study of Salafism in the Dutch context reveals both the ideology and practices within the Salafi movement to be varied, heterogeneous, and at times contradictory (2013). Roex criticises policy formulations that treat Salafism as a single entity, noting such policies result in government intrusion into religious content (2013). Moreover, the concept of identifying oneself as part of the jihadist movement, as per the definition of a jihadist, exhibits a self-declared quality. Returning to the definition of radicalisation, the reference to 'willingness' adds an ambiguous dimension.

Several organisations, such as the School & Safety Foundation (SSV) and The National Extremism Support Centre (LSE), collaborate with NCTV to dispel these ambiguities in field studies. The SSV characterises radicalisation as distancing oneself from democracy and subscribing to an 'us versus them' mentality (School & Safety Foundation (English) - School En Veiligheid, 2022). The LSE defines radicalisation as a black-and-white mindset accompanied by an escalating propensity for polarising actions and social conflict. They list potential symptoms of radicalisation as extreme statements, rejectionist attitudes, endorsement of violence, engagement with hate-promoting platforms, aggressive behaviour, isolation, and fervour for ideological or religious identity (Landelijk Steunpunt Extremisme, 2023). The LSE acknowledges that none of these indicators are individually conclusive.

Preventive work by its nature operates within the pre-crime realm, hence detection efforts at the local level target ideas rather than punishable actions (Van De Weert & Eijkman, 2018, p. 197). This scenario engenders tension between individual liberties and societal safety. Deciding when and under what circumstances ideas overstep the bounds of freedom of speech to become potential threats demands nuanced judgement. Hence, highly trained professionals and clear criteria are crucial for accurately identifying radicalisation. However, van de Weert and Eijkman's qualitative research with youth workers involved in radicalisation detection found that these workers are insufficiently equipped, and the abstract nature of the Dutch system allows for too much discretion. In situations where concrete criteria are lacking, the identification of radicalisation hinges on the subjective decisions of field workers (2018).

The text of the court's decision (Rechtspraak.nl - Zoeken in Uitspraken, n.d.), which resulted in the acquittal of 9 young people known as the Eindohven terror suspects, which received a lot of publicity, shows the limits of the Dutch judiciary on when ideological radicalisation ceases to be freedom of opinion and becomes a criminal offence. These 9 young people were arrested after they were reported to have made speeches about wanting to kill politicians such as Wilders and Rutte while using a garage they rented as a gym during the pandemic period. The court stated that there was no doubt that the suspect had studied IS propaganda and rhetoric intensively and over a long period of time and had followed IS media channels. However, in an interim ruling on the related charges, the court concluded that 'neither the file nor the defences at the trial showed that the defendant had been radicalised'. In relation to a bomb-making video that the defendant had watched, the court stated that 'the question for the court to answer is with what intention the defendant watched this video, showed it to five of his fellow defendants and discussed it with them' and that it could not be established with what intention the defendant had watched the video. As can be seen, the defendant has many of the indications identified by the LSE and mentioned above. However, the court decided that these did not constitute an element of the crime. In this case, the biggest dilemma of preventive work in the pre-crime field comes to the fore again. To what extent is it possible to establish clear criteria that would allow for the early detection of an offence that has not taken place? Especially when even ‘the clearest signals’ do not constitute an criminal offence under the law. Or - as in this case - while there is disagreement even among the highest legal experts on the difference between freedom of opinion and crime, is it possible to specialise in fieldwork to make this subtle distinction? Otherwise, subjective judgements by fieldworkers seem inevitable. Moreover, the broad Dutch approach is based on cooperation with many professional and non-professional radicalisation workers. The extent to which the training of these workers in the field of radicalisation is adequate is another matter of debate.

2.5 Chapter Evaluation

The counter-terrorism strategy of the Netherlands employs a 'broad approach', encapsulating both preventive measures (PVE) and criminal interventions. Early detection of radicalisation underpins preventive practices in this approach, with responsibility for combating radicalisation dispersed across a multitude of institutions. Various ministries, municipalities, departments, and professional and volunteer staff actively contribute to these efforts.

Following the events of 9/11, as with many Western states, Islam and Muslims emerged as the primary perceived threats in Dutch strategies to counteract terrorism and violence. The trajectory of this threat perception narrowed progressively from Muslim immigrants, to political Islam, and then to jihadism and radical Salafism. However, such narrowing has not precluded the securitisation of Muslims as a collective group. While official documents broadly define terms like radicalisation and violent extremism, not exclusively pertaining to Muslims, practical initiatives to counter these phenomena have largely targeted the Muslim community. Ambiguities in defining concepts such as radicalisation, Salafism, and jihadism contribute significantly to this generalisation of threat perception across all Muslims, as these definition gaps allow extensive room for individual discretion and subjectivity in identifying radicalisation.

The theoretical foundations of soft power practices employed in combating radicalisation, which we categorise as PVE, and their practical manifestations, exert various impacts on Muslims. This thesis aims to determine which of these effects can be interpreted as interference by a secular state into the religious domain. From the effects we've explored in preceding sections, it's arguable that networks of 'key figures', especially those who promote a particular religious interpretation as ‘moderate’ within the religious community, support or facilitate the propagation of this perspective to the wider public. This indirect practice could signify a state preference for one religious interpretation over another, which contravenes the principles of a secular state's neutrality.

Another significant issue pertains to the vagueness of concepts. Definitions of terms such as radicalisation, jihadism, and Salafism, frequently invoked in PVE practices, could potentially implicate an extremely broad suspect pool. For instance, how can one distinguish a Salafi from a non-Salafi Muslim? Given the dynamism and diversity inherent within Salafism, what criteria define the fine line separating dangerous Salafism from its acceptable variant? Despite such nuances, the full incorporation of these concepts into the security agenda categorises Muslims in various ways. Dichotomies such as moderate-radical, jihadist Salafist-political Salafist, and so forth, are increasingly utilised to discipline Muslims. This situation fosters pressure for Muslims to conform to 'moderate' and 'acceptable' Muslim identities, in some cases inducing mechanisms like self-censorship.

Chapter 3. Impact of PVE on Muslim Representatives

In this section, we will explore the impacts of PVE practices in the Netherlands on the representation of Muslims. As noted in the preceding section, PVE practices afford the state various means of intruding into the religious sphere. We will attempt to elucidate the challenges these practices pose for Muslims through insights gleaned from interviews with three individuals who represent Muslims in different capacities.

Our three interviewees were selected to exemplify different facets of representation. The first interviewee represents an NGO in ongoing dialogues with the Ministry of Education concerning weekend schools. Another interviewee serves as an Imam at a mosque, routinely hosting primary, secondary, and university students, answering their queries. The third interviewee is an NGO employee specialising in religious publications. These three distinct roles embody three different forms of representation. The first interviewee represents Muslims - a subset of Muslims - in a governmental context, the second represents his community to the broader society, and the final interviewee represents the religious interpretation of the NGO to which he belongs within the Dutch Muslim community. Consequently, these three interviews aim to shed light on representational challenges within official, broader societal, and narrower community contexts. Nevertheless, as this is a qualitative study with a limited sample size, we make no claim of the findings being generalisable.

3.1 It's Not About You

On November 18, 2022, the Dutch Minister of Education, Dennis Wiersma, presented a letter to parliament titled "Free and Safe Education." (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2023). This letter outlined several measures against non-formal, or informal, education. The proposed changes intended to streamline and simplify the process of intervening and supervising institutions that provide informal education. These proposals elicited strong reactions, particularly from organisations providing Islamic informal education (NOS, 2022). We interviewed Sarah[11], a representative from an NGO involved in the negotiations, to gain insight into these developments and how Muslims are represented within the government.

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[11] At the request of the interviewee, a nickname was used to protect his/her identity.

In essence, the minister's letter is quite broad, targeting not just mosque-based education but also weekend sports schools, education provided by other religious minorities, among others. However, the majority of the reactions to the Minister of Education's letter came from the Muslim community. When questioned about this, Sarah highlights three words in the statement:

> *Although the first letter contains general statements, in fact, whenever there have been some discussions about Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands for the last 20-30 years, the three words I just mentioned 'against the rule of law, antidemocratic, anti-integration' have always been terms used together with Muslims. Therefore, everyone, no matter who we meet, is very aware of whom these expressions directly and indirectly point to.*

A critical issue highlighted in studies concerning potential adverse effects of PVE practices is the depiction of Muslims as a suspect community. The identification of the three words in Sarah's statements with Muslims could potentially signify such an impact. The term "suspect community" refers to a sub-group of the population that is singled out for state attention as being ‘problematic’ . Specifically in terms of policing, individuals may be targeted, not necessarily as a result of suspected wrong doing, but simply because of their presumed membership to that sub-group (Van Meeteren & Van Oostendorp, 2018, p. 528). Sarah's remarks hint at this kind of perception:

> *In the meetings, you always say It’s not about you, you are not the issue, but you are putting us (all mosques) under the accusation. You don't talk to your main target group or the groups you find problematic, you can't reach them, or they wouldn't sit at the same table with you anyway if we are talking about a Salafist group. ... (To specify what you are targeting) You do not use expressions such as we saw a few mosques here and there, here are a few Salafist groups representing them. Instead, Muslims are always being labelled in more general terms.*

As can be seen from this statement, Sarah complains that the actions of a certain group or individuals are attributed to all Muslims, thus creating suspicion. She frequently emphasises that the general statements in the letter are purported, and points out that the Minister of Education and the media have dealt with the issue from a purely Muslim framework:

> *The minister himself, in his television programmes and press statements, directly mentioned sharia law and the extremism of Muslims, and directly targeted Muslims as the target group. Because all examples are based on them (Muslims), through the Salafis, through Sharia. Like when he claimed that there were talks in a mosque about throwing a homosexual off a building. He always gave such examples.*

Sarah also has concrete evidence to feel targeted:

> *In his (the minister's) own political party programme, there is a statement in the party programme among the things he wants to do: after saying that we want to intervene more quickly in anti-democratic, anti-integration and anti-law-state institutions that offer informal education, he explicitly mentions mosques as an example. Therefore, we felt that we were directly targeted. We have enough evidence to feel that we were targeted, they put it in the party programme, and then, after he became a minister, he directly put these goals into practice.*

Sarah's comments suggest that the notions of being 'anti-democratic,' 'anti-integration,' and 'anti-rule of law' are leveraged to securitize and manage Muslims. Indeed, the references to Muslims in party programs, media coverage, and the minister's own statements might signal that Muslims in Dutch society are framed as a threat through these extreme concepts. In our analysis of the concept of radicalization, we noted the emphasis in government publications that radicalization is not a process exclusive to Islam or Muslims. Yet, in our examination of municipalities' key figure networks, we pointed out that in practical applications, the threat perception of radicalization has narrowed and often only includes Muslims. A similar contraction might be occurring here. Of course, informal education or terms such as anti-democratic, anti-integration, and anti-law aren't solely directed at Islam or Muslims. Nevertheless, in practice, it can be seen that these terms undergo a narrowing of meaning. Perhaps the concepts outlined in official documents do not directly stigmatize Muslims, but their interpretations and media portrayals lead to a certain degree of stigmatization. Concerning the ambiguity of these concepts, Sarah provides the following insights:

> *Additionally, these three terms I've mentioned are undefined. Their usage is problematic in itself. They are left vague, yet they are employed. What is intended by their use? In the second letter, since they couldn't clearly define them, they*

> *established a norm. The norm revolves around any action that might incite discrimination, violence, or hatred. It's a very broad definition. During the meeting, the ministry's legal representative stated that it would be quite difficult to meet these criteria. In essence, they suggested it wouldn't be a significant cause for concern, but I raised a query on the spot. In my view, these are such generic terms that one could argue that anything could be an action leading to hatred, indirectly contributing to violence or resulting in discrimination. These are rather nebulous and indistinct statements, yet they have been used to set a standard. These terms have never been invoked in discussions about the far right. Only when the topic pertains to Islam and Muslims do phrases such as anti-law, anti-democratic, and anti-integration come into play.*

In the definition of suspect community above, we said that individuals may be targeted not necessarily because they are suspected of wrongdoing, but only because they are assumed to be members of this subgroup. At this point, when I asked Sarah about the reason for being targeted, she said the following:

> *They refer to the signals they receive from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Security, but it is never clear how they get that data, or what kind of data they have. There is one TV programme they keep referring to. The research of that TV programme is not a research that reflects the situation as it is, that we can use as objective, scientific research. But it is constantly used as an example. In that research, there is no definite statement, only statements such as such trainings may possibly lead to such and such results. ...(W)hen issues such as protecting children are mentioned as the justification for this law, these questions arise: against whom and against what. (They say) to protect against the negative effects of someone who has undergone this training on third parties. It is such an indirect thing: the child is receiving education at the mosque, it will supposedly be a negative education, he/she may hear things that will lead to such discrimination, violence or hatred there, and that may have a negative reflection in the society again(!).*

3.2 This is the Netherlands, Here Everyone Can Fall In Love With Whoever They Want

Discussions of sexuality and gay rights have taken a central role in debates about identity within the Netherlands. Given its pioneering work on sexuality and gay rights, sexual progressivism has become a key aspect of the Dutch national identity (Krebbekx et al., 2016). Consequently, discourses surrounding sexuality and gender have become significant differentiators between native-born Dutch (autochthonous) and immigrants (allochthonous). Juxtaposed against the image of the native Dutch individual who respects gay rights is the stereotype of the homophobic Muslim immigrant. Although such immigrants possess legal citizenship, their cultural affiliation is often questioned. That is to say, in the case of Muslims, what is perceived as their inherent homophobia is considered non-Western (Balkenhol et al., 2016, p. 104). Within this narrative, Muslims are portrayed as threatening disruptors of the secular moral landscape, unsettling the vision of a secular and morally progressive nation.

Sarah regards the second letter submitted to parliament by the Minister of Education—which is intended to clarify the ambiguities present in the initial letter—as highly significant. The letter commences in the following manner:

> *The letter is very ironic. The first sentence goes like this: The Netherlands is a free country. The second sentence is that everyone can fall in love with whoever they want. Even these expressions show what the letter aims to do. Such an introduction is very meaningful. Because if we list what will be legally possible at the beginning of the letter…*

Gay rights are used as a tool for the production and disciplining of Muslim others. Dutch citizenship is culturalised and citizens are expected to embrace liberal democracy, secularism and repressive values related to gender and sexuality. Sarah countinues:

> *(This introduction is made because) the letter goes on to say, 'This is our understanding of liberal ethics and everyone should adapt to it'... I mean, we talk about the freedom of opinion, but there is a desire to impose his own understanding of liberal ethics as a general understanding of ethics... Respecting and accepting. We respect, but we are already a religious organisation. If you know that I am a*

> *religious organisation, you know that I have certain ideas. But we respect everyone. Everyone lives and makes their own preferences.*

Our discussion on the impact of both this issue of sexuality and gay rights and the othering in the context of 'anti-democratic, anti-integration and anti-law' on the representation of Muslims concretely developed largely through the agency of Muslims:

> *In matters concerning Muslims, Muslims have always been talked about and certain ideas have been formed about them. They have never been spoken to. It was always about 'how we see them (Muslims)', but we (Muslims) were never spoken to, just like this example of the Ministry of Education. Why don't you (ministry) go to the field, talk to them one-on-one, get their ideas and meet them.. When you do so and talk to us, you say, "Oh, there are indeed good exemplars and commendable actions being undertaken by you."*

Sarah's statements point to the fact that Muslims' agency is ignored and seen as passive figures, or that Muslims are attributed negative agency only in certain contexts. In a way, Muslims are somehow prevented from setting their own agendas or being present in the public sphere with these agendas. Sarah concludes with the following remarks:

> *This does not affect our programme in a reactive way. We are still proactively carrying out our own agenda, our own programme, our own plans. ...I have so much work. Why do we have to talk about this? Why do I have to express myself again and again?*

3.3 Autocensorship and Distrust

The literature exploring the effects of securitisation on Muslims has highlighted outcomes such as self-censorship and the perceived necessity to demonstrate moderation. However, the interviews we conducted did not reveal any adverse experiences in this respect. This is likely attributable to the limited number of participants in our study. Despite the constrained sample size, it's worth noting that there are some instances that may fit into this category. For instance, our interviewee Fatih[12], who is involved in religious publications, mentioned that he translates the word 'jihad' as 'inspanning' in religious texts. I asked him whether he preferred a different translation in such cases, especially in some hadiths where the word jihad is used in the sense of direct warfare:

> *Of course, this translation (inspanning) covers the broad meaning of jihad. We also prefer this translation when it is used in some hadiths in the direct sense of war. It does not give exactly that (war) meaning, but we have to take into account the context of the country we are translating for. (When I asked if the context of securitisation has an impact) Of course, I meant that.*

I questioned Sarah about whether she felt compelled to engage in physical contact, specifically shaking hands, with individuals of the opposite sex during formal meetings, to present a more moderate image. This question was prompted by literature highlighting that the act of refraining from handshakes with the opposite sex is frequently associated with Salafism within the Dutch context. Sarah responded as follows:

> *Handshakes are always a sensitive subject. This is not only within the framework of the official duty I represent. Will I shake hands with my neighbour in my own life? That is a sensitive issue for me, but if I have decided that (not to shake hands) I will never do it, even I will not do it when I go to meet with official institutions. At the moment, I do it according to the situation, but it is not because I have a certain concern.*

Kemal[13], who works as an imam at the mosque and regularly gives presentations to visiting non-Muslims, responded to the question about moderating oneself or practising self-censorship out of security concerns as follows:

> *We have no secrets. Intelligence, for example, sent a spy to a mosque. He was observing there for months. Therefore, this creates a problem of trust among Muslims. You cannot trust the man next to you, the man who comes to the mosque.*

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[12] At the request of the interviewee, a nickname was used to protect his/her identity.

[13] At the request of the interviewee, a nickname was used to protect his/her identity.

> *But if the state came directly to us and said, brother, who are you and what are you doing, everything about us is known. Our lessons and speeches are known. They can come and listen to our sermons and sermons. Our doors are open in that sense. Their secret spying and sending people makes people uneasy.*

All of our interviewees were sensitive to the surveillance practices that Kemal drew particular attention to. They stated that this causes a problem of trust and makes people nervous and disappointed. With similar concerns to Kemal's, Fatih said the following on this issue:

> *The placement of informers in mosques, this is very unfortunate, because there has been an extreme breach of trust. Some municipalities have placed informers in mosques and received information, which the municipalities passed on to various security organisations and ministries. Because of this, there has been an extreme distrust towards the state.*

Sarah gave a much more concrete example. She mentioned an example she had recently heard:

> *There's a museum project in Almelo. There was also a Moroccan mosque they wanted to include in that project. But because of these events (surveillance), the management of this mosque said, "Don't interfere with us, leave us alone. You know, you are causing this in the end. They don't even want the good things they can be involved in anymore. Because they have no idea what can come out of where. You know, such a distrust has been formed.*

3.4 Other Issues and Representation

Due to the use of semi-structured interview technique, we had the opportunity to identify other influences that may be relevant to our topic. Fatih states that the concern of being funded by the state affects the language used by various Islamic NGOs:

> *To whom do you give a fund as a state? If the project presented has something that appeals to you, you give it to them. One of these projects came in front of me. The expressions used there are not very positive expressions in my opinion. But if you*

> *use such expressions, the state can fund this project by saying, "Look, these are the needs".*

Regarding the possible problems that the CMO, which acts as a contact organisation between Muslims and the government and is the officially recognised representative of Muslims before the government, Kemal:

> *They are in constant contact with the state. On the one hand, they have to represent Muslims. That is a task in itself (difficult). Because there are people from different countries, there are (different) communities. Since not everyone thinks the same about everything, how can there be a unified representation? How can you say 'this is the opinion of Muslims'? On the other hand, in order for the state to continue these negotiations with them, it may be necessary to speak with expressions that they would like to hear.*

3.5 Chapter Evaluation

The interviews conducted demonstrate that the securitisation of Islam and Muslims through PVE initiatives can result in negative experiences. In the preceding section, we highlighted the ambiguities in defining terms such as radicalisation, Salafism, and jihadism. Our interviews reveal that a similar ambiguity extends to the concepts of 'anti-democratic', 'anti-integration', and 'anti-law state'. These poorly defined terms, when associated with discussions about Muslims in the Dutch context, either through political rhetoric or media portrayal, have caused various disruptions. We also noted that the debate about LGBTI+ rights within the context of Islam can serve as a tool to frame Muslims as threatening or 'other'. When evaluated holistically, it's apparent that this type of marginalisation, by boxing Muslims and Islam into certain contexts within Dutch society, prevents Muslims from focusing their attention and resources on areas they deem important.

At this juncture, we can highlight some situations that exemplify state intervention. For instance, consider "Sarah" (a pseudonym), who discusses the projects her organisation undertakes to enhance the quality of weekend education. However, her organisation spends much of its energy negotiating with the ministry, constantly assuring them that they are not anti-democratic, anti-integration, or anti-law. In such a scenario, one could argue that the security-oriented framework created by PVE and the various labels it introduces nudges the institution's energy and agenda in a specific direction.

Additionally, these interviews revealed that surveillance practices implemented by municipalities in various forms within mosques have significantly undermined the trust Muslims have in the state. Particularly noteworthy is the unanimous expectation among interviewees for authorities to 'engage in dialogue with Muslims, not just about Muslims' on topics such as radicalisation. Being the object of such surveillance activities not only fuels frustration but also hampers any potential positive steps. For instance, a mosque in Almelo has expressed reluctance to participate in collaborative projects due to its distrust of Dutch institutions.

Conclusion

Post the 9/11 attacks, Islam and Muslims swiftly became central to the security strategies of Western countries. Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE), a soft power practice arising in the post-9/11 era, seeks to address the roots and early stages of the progression towards terrorism and violence, likened to a pathway or staircase (Hardy, 2018, pp. 76–77). Hence, PVE aims to anticipate and prevent violence or terrorism that could potentially occur in the future, functioning primarily in the pre-crime domain.

While the term PVE is not officially employed in the Netherlands, their counter-terrorism approach, termed the 'broad approach', amalgamates preventive and punitive measures (Vermeulen et al., 2021). The emphasis of this approach is on early detection of radicalisation. Along with other Western nations, the Netherlands' security strategies identify jihadism and jihadist salafism as the most significant threats. The concepts of jihad and salafism, despite their diverse meanings in Islamic sources and Dutch government documents, have been securitised and reduced in interpretation due to their central place in security strategies over the years.

Likewise, the concept of 'radicalisation' is afflicted by ambiguity. The definitions provided by the NCTV fail to offer sufficient criteria for identifying radicalisation signals, leading various units working with the NCTV to establish diverse criteria to accurately pinpoint radicalisation. However, these units also assert that these are not sufficient indicators. This situation blurs the boundaries between freedom of opinion and potentially threatening radicalisation.

Such ambiguously defined concepts, central to the security agenda, necessitate viewing the Muslim community through categories with fluid boundaries, such as jihadist-non-jihadist, radical-moderate, salafi-non-salafi, jihadist salafi-political salafi, etc. Given the broad range and unclear criteria of these concepts, this ambiguity engenders a suspect community, with all Muslims perceived as potential threats. Evidence for this can be seen in the targeting of the Muslim community and mosques by the Key Figure networks we analysed in our thesis, and the problematisation of all mosque education, not just those institutions emitting 'certain signals'.

In this study, we aimed to investigate the effects of these phenomena on the behaviours and perspectives of individuals who represent Muslims. Our interviews with a small sample revealed noteworthy insights. We observed that the prevailing situation has complicated the task of setting agendas for Muslim representatives and organisations. Our interviewees reported frequently having to restate themselves in response to criticism from politicians, the media, and others. Furthermore, they expressed a desire to be involved in discussions about Muslims, rather than being spoken about. This suggests that Muslim activism in the Netherlands may be restricted to the security context. It seems that the Muslim voice in education matters is suppressed, and Muslims are merely seen as objects of regulation. The state seems to impose its security agenda, redirecting the energies of the Muslim community towards addressing security-based issues, while constraining the scope for individual engagement and the operation of NGOs.

One concrete example of state intervention is the consideration of the security context in the translation of religious texts, as demonstrated by Fatih, who works in religious translation. This overlooks the interpretations in the religious tradition and the religious context of the concept. In the current context, the religious concept of 'jihad' is often viewed through a security-oriented lens, ignoring its usage and context in original religious texts. This results in 'jihad' extending beyond its limitations in the religious sphere and entering into the regulatory sphere of the secular state.

Lastly, Muslims' exposure to surveillance practices through key figure networks or other means raises issues of discomfort and trust. Although such practices are important for gathering information critical for detecting radicalisation, they can occasionally produce the opposite effect. For instance, surveillance has led certain Salafist groups to project a more moderate stance than their actual beliefs, which has over time led to a new generation of Salafi preachers becoming increasingly radicalised. This radicalisation process was not solely influenced by religious factors and motivations. State intervention, spurred a religious group to adopt a different religious viewpoint (more moderate stance) than the one initially accepted. This action set off a domino effect, inadvertently steering the subsequent generation towards a distinct religious interpretation (more radical).

In addition, as mentioned in our interviews, a mosque in Almelo declined participation in a museum project due to the insecurity and discomfort caused by such practices. The decision of the congregation about the inclusion of a mosque in a museum project has been shaped by PVE practices.

As evidenced in the previous examples, state intervention via PVE practices can trigger various transformations within the 'religious sphere'. This intervention may influence decisions to be taken or emphasise certain agendas. In this case, actions conventionally contained within the secular sphere (according to the traditional secular-religious dichotomy) may transition to the religious sphere and vice versa. Consequently, such shifts necessitate a more nuanced approach, one that acknowledges the fluidity between the two spheres when assessing the relationship between religion and state.

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