

**Anti immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands and the reactions of
Moroccan associations**

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Abstract

In this paper the development of the Netherlands from a tolerant and liberal society into an unfriendly surrounding for immigrants is described and analyzed. The reactions of the ethnic group that was targeted most, Moroccans, were investigated by interviewing board members of associations. Three main types of reactions towards the stigmatization of Islam and Moroccans are distinguished.

1. Introduction

In the 18th century, the Netherlands were famous for their advanced tolerance (Lucassen & Penninx 1997). Huguenots, religious and political refugees fleeing from France, and Jews from Spain and Portugal were received without hesitation. Incorporation into Dutch society seemed to take place without a lot of problems. For ages the image of the Netherlands as a tolerant and open society has survived, even though the actual attitudes by both citizens and government did not remain as positive as sometimes presented. Though this development did not start in one day, the changes in the last five years are dramatic. To plea for immigrants or asylum seekers rights, or to present immigration as a phenomenon that also might have positive consequences, is suddenly labeled as 'old fashioned', 'politically correct', 'unrealistic' and 'uninformed' by leading figures in the media and politics.

I will distinguish two interrelated aspects of this general change in discourse: the policies by the Dutch government and the attitudes and behavior of autochthonous Dutch towards immigrants in their direct communication in neighborhoods and cities. The actual causes of the changes in discourse are multiple, interactive and it is difficult to prove which one is more important. There is a clear relationship between international policies, Dutch policies, presentation in the media and the increasingly negative attitudes of the Dutch public.

As a side effect of the gap between the rich North and the poor South and the increasing globalization, immigration has become a normal phenomenon in rich countries. Both in the US and in several European countries immigration is more and more considered a threat. In the US the debate on closing the Mexican border and halting all possibilities to work as an illegal immigrant have recently caused huge protest demonstration in the main US cities. Also in several European countries a fear developed of a too large increase of the immigrant population, and right wing politicians gained votes in Austria and Denmark.

Some theorists reason that attitudes start to change, when the actual percentage of immigrants in a traditionally mono-cultural country reaches 10% or more. This could be true, but the fact that anti-immigrant sentiments even seem to develop in the US, a traditional country of immigration, shows that the sheer percentage cannot be the only reason.

Another factor is probably the change in international relations in the period preceding the increase of negative feelings towards Muslims. The breakdown of the Soviet block and the collapse of the Berlin wall have influenced major relations in the world. After the disappearance of communism as the ideological enemy of the West, the Islamic world attracted attention, as a possible producer of 'bad' ideologies. The general negative propaganda against Muslim countries looks similar to the negative propaganda that targeted communists earlier. The first American attack on Iraq (Kuwait) followed. Actually 9/11/2001 was only a reconfirmation of the then existing assumptions on the possible dangers, coming from the Muslims countries. Afterwards 9/11 has often been pointed to, as the cause of negative attitudes towards Muslims. Of course this event hasn't improved relations, but

actually the deterioration of relations started before that. The anti-immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands cannot be taken as an isolated case, they are also visible in the surrounding countries.

Dutch Policies

Bader (2005:9) correctly remarks that the Dutch government – while in the 1970s and 1980s one of the forerunners on multiculturalism – has now one of the most restrictive immigration and integration policies of the Western world. These restrictions encompass the terrain like asylum, family reunification (higher age requirement for spouses: 21), required income guarantees for visitors and expelling 'white illegals'. On integration policies the government also became stricter. The pressure for immigrants to adjust and assimilate to Dutch culture and to speak the Dutch language has increased. The recent introduction of citizenship exams in the country of origin has been covered widely in the international media, because the introductory movie starts with topless sunbathing ladies and kissing gay men. A voice remarks: "nudity and homosexuality are commonly accepted in the Netherlands. As an immigrant you have to accept these norms." Many of the migrant measures are developed with Turks and Moroccans in mind, while the immigration of Chinese and Poles is increasing unnoticed. The percentage of Muslims is about 8% of the Dutch population of 16 million. By stressing norms on nudity and homosexuality immigrants from Muslim countries are indirectly discouraged from coming to the Netherlands

Actually these changes in the direction of the policy slowly evolved in a period of 10 years. After the pro immigrant multi-culturalist phase, in which immigrants were viewed as interesting and exotic, a period started (in the 1990s) in which practical issues dominated. The socialist cabinet Kok targeted fighting unemployment. The former factory workers, who became unemployed after factories closed down – were encouraged to find new jobs. During that period critique on Muslim habits increased. The tone became harsher but not openly racist. A first negative writing entitled 'Islam in the polder' by Frits Bolkenstein was received carefully. When the party 'Leefbaar Nederland' was established in March 1999, the discourse finally turned openly racist and anti-immigrant. The ex-socialist, ex-professor, writer and publicist Pim Fortuyn became the first leader on the list of candidates by November 2001, which led to an increase in the number of votes, according to the opinion polls. His method of attracting the attention of the Dutch public was populist: he claimed to represent the interests and opinion of ordinary people and promised to say clearly what he wanted and to act accordingly in a decisive manner. To his opinion ordinary people in old neighborhoods were fed up with supposedly increasing criminality by immigrants and with Turks and Moroccans that wouldn't integrate. Though the Leefbaar Party had a right wing ideology, it also used leftist arguments, which reminds of Mussolini's mixing of arguments creating his 'national socialism' (ref??). Leftwing arguments were for instance that the Dutch nation was at risk of losing its liberal relations between males and females and its tolerance to homosexuality if Muslims would get more influence. That losing tolerance towards other ethnic groups could also threaten the democratic nature of society was in no way seen as a problem, nor that anti Muslim sentiments could be as dangerous as anti-Semitism. Being negative and critical to immigrants became very soon the standard in the media, most clearly in TV debates and current affairs programs.

On February, 10th, 2002 Fortuyn was dismissed by the Leefbaar Party because he suggested in a newspaper interview, to abolish article 1 of the constitution – the anti-discrimination

principle – since that prevented him from characterizing Islam as a backward religion, while Muslim consider gays less than pigs. This statement was even for the Leefbaar Party one step too far.

In a few weeks Pim Fortuyn established his own party, gathering a dissimilar group, including real estate agents and half-criminals. This party won enormously in both the March 6th Municipal Election and the May 15th National Elections (2002), which took place nine days after the murder on Pim Fortuyn (May 6th)¹.

Attitudes in the street

Commentators sometimes stated that Dutch anti-immigrant feelings have been suppressed for some decades after the Second World War. Attitudes towards people in the colonies and South Africa showed that Dutch history has not always been as tolerant and multicultural as in the times of the Hugenots. The assassination of Jews during the Second World War resulted in a more careful attitude for many years. The return of openly racist reasoning and behavior was legitimized by the more explicit statements of politicians. Irritation by autochthonous Dutch about the habits of some immigrants that they had never understood or always disliked suddenly came out. This resulted in more explicit behavior by the man in the street to his neighbors. Especially Turks and Moroccans started to receive lots of comments on their assumed backwardness for instance in dress, in religious habits, in man-woman relations, in child rearing methods, etc.

Examples in neighborhoods are widely available. Negative behavior towards immigrant increased, as the following example shows. The apartment complex where I used to live, had a general entrance for some 40 apartments. On day ball hit the main door of the building, and youngsters ran away. The elderly Dutch lady, living on the ground floor, found the glass of the door broken. Few minutes later the Turkish elderly couple, who lived on the first floor wanted to enter. The husband was pushing the wheelchair of his wife. The Dutch lady started shouting at the astonished Turkish couple: "it must have been you, who broke the door! You Turks only make trouble for us and now you have bumped with the wheelchair into our door". Trying to interfere didn't resolve the quarrel, the Dutch lady kept on shouting that foreigners caused the neighborhood to go down.

Attitudes towards non-Muslim immigrants also became more negative than before. Asylum seekers were looked upon with sympathy, as victims of war, but that attitude also changed in the last 10 years. The belief that asylum seeker are mainly profiteers of welfare and usually lie about their past, has become an accepted story.

Issues

Of all non western immigrants in the Netherlands, Turks are actually the largest group (364,608 including 2nd generation, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics January 1st 2006), then Surinamese (331,953) and then Moroccans (323,272).

It is clear that Muslims are the main victims of the anti-immigrant sentiments in the Netherlands. Somehow, of all Muslims, Moroccans are seen as the worst category. Some factors have protected the Turks from becoming the scapegoat: Turkish guest workers were a little better educated than their Moroccan colleagues, Moroccans are generally poorer than Turks, Turkish community tends to watch and supervise it's youngsters more carefully to avoid shame on the family, there is a better functioning civic and business community of Turks than of Moroccans (De Vries 1995; Fennema & Tillie 2001). Some reason that Moroccan and Dutch culture is further away from each other, others reason the integration of Moroccan

¹ Pim Fortuyn was murdered by an animal rights activist.

second generation into Dutch society is actually further underway, and that is why clashes are occurring between Dutch and Moroccans. For sure there is a complicated set of reasons, in which the generational gap between first and second generation Moroccans is huge.

What are the main issues that Moroccans are accused of and that trouble them?

– a – their religion is considered backward and their ideology even dangerous.

The knowledge about Islam among Dutch is superficial; it is for instance not known that Islam has liberal and conservative movements. Generally Islam is associated with dressing habits (head scarfs, jellabia) or with stories on TV about marrying out girls and slaughtering sheep on the balcony .

– b – they are supposed to be unwilling to integrate into Dutch society.

The men that arrived as guest workers – and their wives were not supplied with language courses when they arrived in the Netherlands, since both Dutch and laborers assumed that their stay would be temporary. These men are now over sixty, and though the government tries to provide so called ‘old-comer’ courses, it is difficult at that age and lack of school experience to learn a language. Some of these elderly have given up about learning or social contacts with Dutch. On the whole most immigrants want to learn the language, but don’t want to give up their religion and everything connected to that.

– c – youngsters are viewed as possible criminals.

This applies in particular to teen age boys that gather on the street in groups in specific neighborhoods. The fact that more than four boys hang around in the open, often dressed in leather jackets or bomber jacks, and behave in a macho way, can attract police attention (Gemert e.a., 2003).

– d – since 9/11 they are even viewed as possible terrorists

After the attacks in New York, Washington, London and Madrid, the association between Muslims and terrorists was easily made also in instances where there was no direct relationship. For example two men with white jellabia’s and beards were arrested in a train near Amsterdam, just because travelers phoned the police when they stayed longer than usual in the toilet.

2. Reactions of Moroccans

How did Moroccan associations react to (or against) the increased stigmatization in their Dutch surrounding? Stigmatization means that a group is negatively judged and socially rejected, while it finds itself in a vulnerable position (Verkuyten, 2003).

There are 720 Moroccan associations in the Netherlands. The largest group is religious, but there are also women’s associations, webgroups and Berber associations. After constructing a database of the 720 Moroccan associations, more interviews were held with representatives of 37 Moroccan associations. These interviews were collected between 1997 and 2005 during three larger studies on immigrant associations: a) focusing on the volunteers in associations (Lindo, Van Heelsum & Penninx 1997) b) focussing on the importance of Islam (Kraal & Van Heelsum, 2002) and c) focussing on networks between Moroccan associations (Bouadi e.a. 2001; Van Heelsum, 2001, 2002, 2004 a, b). Interviewers made an appointment with board members of the selected association and asked them about the purpose, number of visitors, number of volunteers, accommodation, finances, contacts with local government and problems encountered. Interviews with board members of these associations took between one and two hours, depending on the level of Dutch and the main topic of the interview.

a) Associations of the first generation: going on with their own goals and targets

In 1997, during the first interviews, nearly no representative of a Moroccan association even mentioned stigmatization (Lindo, Van Heelsum & Penninx, 1997). The oldest associations, the Committee Moroccan Laborers Netherlands exist already for 20 years. The main themes were employment, participation, cultural shows, stimulating political activity and fighting discrimination on the labor market. The focus of attention is to improve the social and economic position and to make up with arrears. Around 1997 one of KMAN's projects was to inform parents about the Dutch educational system. Some of the children that came at primary school age to the Netherlands with their parents, had serious problems: they dropped out from secondary school without diploma and the percentage of criminal Moroccan youngsters increased. The expectation of most community leaders was that this is a temporary problem: they think that youngsters that start at a younger age in Dutch schools, will not encounter such problems. In 1997 none of the interviewed representatives of associations had any programs or activities to react or fight stigmatization of the Moroccan community. But the unrest among youngsters started to increase. Police had to interfere several times because of disorders. The negative attention in the media for Moroccan youngsters caught more and more the eye: fights, assaults in swimming pools, hand bag robbery on the train to Schiphol and aggression towards the police. Obdeijn & De Mas (2001) spend a chapter on the way in which Moroccans appear in the papers. At that moment most associations avoid stigmatisation as much as possible, and they go on with their the things for which they were established. A representative of Moroccan youngsters:

'We don't react on the negative news coverage, going against it is a waste of time it is better to counter it by organising activities that bring forward a positive image, but indirectly we have to work on it, for instance together with the anti discrimination office, to reach something on a higher level.'

The subject stigmatisation was again part of our interviews in 2001. At that time more irritation exists (Kraal & Van Heelsum, 2002). Around that time the relationship between media and Moroccans has worsened drastically. On of the representatives of a Moroccan association in Utrecht answers the question 'do you ever react after negative reporting on Moroccans?':

'It is impossible, because it never ends, and you would be following the media day and night. How can we react every day to journalists that have to earn their bread and write all kinds of things on the Moroccan community? It's better to cooperate with people and institutions that are dedicated. If you have to react to what Telegraaf Newspaper writes, you need a bureau that's busy with it every day. But if you organise a debate yourself on intercultural relations, they don't show up.'

Most representative that we talked to in this period are irritated but still focussed on their own targets. Some associations are actively trying to show the positive side of Moroccan culture to the general public. The two most known examples that promote Arabic art, literature, music and architecture are Al Farabi and El Hizjra. El Farabi presents young artists to a larger public since 1990. The associations has arranged exhibitions for grown ups and children, together with the Tropen Institute, the Amsterdam Historical Museum, some theaters and other institutions.

El Hizjra is know because of it's publishing house and the bookshop at one of the canals in Amsterdam, and also because of it's yearly literature prize. Also this organisation cooperates successfully with Dutch cultural institutions to bring about the yearly festival of Arabic art. The

representative says on the question on negative media attention, that the Dutch press is actually difficult to access:

'The journalist are all white, they don't connect with us, they also don't know what they are talking about and they only think of commercial interests. So it is simply impossible to get through to them, and they create their own publicity. Right now we are not important to them, so we use our own means. In this way you stay dynamic and creative in stead of waiting until some trickster comes up with something. That is a waste of energy.'

The reason why this association was established had nothing to do with the media coverage, but it's attention for the interesting Arab cultural heritage had the positive side effect that not only criminality gets into the paper. Working within their own objectives, they actually add to changing the image.

b) Youngsters

Association of youngsters are more apt to react on the stigmatisation than the associations of the first generation. We will distinguish two subjects: the supposed criminality of Moroccan boys and the image on Islam. Individual Moroccan youngsters cannot avoid to react on the negative representation of Islam. An imam that had been officially banned from preaching in Morocco was cited all over in the Dutch papers on homo's as if he represented the views of all Muslims. Because of this Moroccan youngsters had to explain to their peers at school or work, if they endorse these traditional views.

Because of this, young Moroccans were forced to explain in all kinds of situation like at school or work, whether or not they support these traditional views. This stereotyping has forced Moroccans to defend Islam, but to that they need knowledge. Consequently youngsters were forced to read more about Islam and at the associations a need developed for discussion meetings and lectures. Their members had to be able to explain what being a Muslim implies and to discuss about this. One of the interviewees:

'Moroccans have to deal with an image in the West about Islam that already exists for ages as something barbarian and mainly characterized by suppressing women. When one knows more about ones own culture, and gets the means to study the Koran more in depth, and is able to discuss these issues, things become less complicated. People cannot attack you anymore, that your religion is backward, since you have arguments to prove that this is not so. This is part of consciousness raising, youngsters will disseminate the view that their culture is not backward, but has added value. The parents didn't have the means to study the Koran themselves, and to raise certain discussions about it. But youngsters can explain Islam positively, since they are part of both cultures.'

After September 11th 2001, the image that Dutch have on Muslims became even more negative: Muslims are potential extremists. Most of the Turks and Moroccans in the Netherlands adhere to moderate Islamic schools, but this is not known among the majority of the autochthonous population. The consequence is that youngsters constantly need to explain what Islam really encompasses. A representative of an organisation of youngsters:

' Since 9/11 youngsters really need information on Islam and want to discuss it. I organise activities for a student association for students in higher vocational training, and we had a discussion meeting about the consequences of 9/11. Youngsters really want to talk about

this, because they see their religion as part of their identity, and that is something that you should be able to explain.”

Associations of youngsters support the search for information, by inviting experts and by discussing issues. Because of the stigmatisations from outside, they feel pressured to take clear stand points on issues like the head scarf, gayness and the attitudes towards women.

The second important subjects related to the stigmatisation of Moroccans is their supposed high involvement in criminality. An organisations that is founded to play an active role in fighting this kind of stigmatisation was ‘Towards a New Start’ (TANS). In 1997 this association of highly educated Moroccan youngsters was founded (see <http://www.tans.nl>). They ask for attention for the boys and girls that have actually succeeded in Dutch society and they want to present a positive image of Moroccans. Members of TANS are computer engineers, economists, etceteras. TANS organises with the largest Dutch Bank (Rabobank) career days, courses for starting entrepreneurs, but also a gala night. The activities of this group are a conscious reaction on stigmatisation by positively reformulating the existing negative image and by emphasizing that successful Moroccans also exist.

Striking is also that a lot of young Moroccans participate in the activities of Amazigh or Berber associations. The majority of Moroccans in the Netherlands comes from the areas in Morocco with a predominant Berber population, but the Moroccan government does not attach high value to Berber languages or culture. Since 1990 one can find Moroccan associations in the Netherlands that stress the Amazigh or Berber identity of their members. The first three Amazigh associations that were established in the Netherlands were related to the opposition in Morocco, but nowadays the identity aspect has gained attention. In the last ten years some twelve new Amazigh associations were established. Firstly because of political changes in Morocco: with the liberalisation that occurred after King Mohammed VI came to power, more attention was given to the rights of the Berber population. Secondly the popularity of the Amazigh movement has a lot to do with the identity issues that we discussed above. Calling oneself a Moroccan has negative connotations. Moroccans youngsters are easily associated with street criminality and the suppression and even beating of their wives at home, while incidents that took place where a group disturbed women in the train and swimming pools are widely known. To call oneself a Berber can be used as an alternative, since Berber is associated with the brave and independent warrior that some of the Berber historic figures were. It can thus be seen as a manner to escape from negative stereotyping by putting more emphasis on other aspects of ones identity. Obviously that doesn’t mean that stigmatisation is the only reason to become a member of a Berber association.

Summarising, the associations of youngsters react actively against stigmatisation and encompass the following:

- and increasing number of discussion meetings;
- providing information on Islam to that members can arm themselves in discussions against prejudice
- organisations that focus on other aspects of the identity become popular, like the Amazigh organisations;
- reformulating the negative stereotype by showing positive examples, for instance TANS.

d) September 11th and the upsurge of the anti immigrant party LPF

It is quite obvious that the assaults on September 11th, 2001 in New York and Washington and the upsurge of the anti immigrant party Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in the beginning of 2002 have enhanced the contradictions. The fear among Dutch for extremism among Muslims has increased and the multicultural society as an ideal is abandoned by nearly all political parties. The coalition cabinet of LPF, Christian democrats (CDA) and liberal conservatives (VVD) put considerable stress on the fact that immigrants have to integrate into Dutch society and the LPF minister for migration and integration affairs, voices several times views which show that immigrants are supposed to adjust to Dutch habits, in other words to assimilate, leaving less room for the receiving society to change accordingly. The minister also speaks of abolishing all subsidies to migrant associations. A new aspect of stigmatisation is hereby added to the discussion, namely that migrant associations are primarily conservative and traditional clubs that actually discourage integration.

In the interviews in 2002, we asked whether Moroccan associations have strategies to react on these sharpened contrasts. Results show that a number of organisations, particularly of the first generation, still not reacted upon this development. They choose explicitly for this strategy, not to further boost the contrasts. Just after the LPF minister had made some rather extreme statements, the following quotations were recorded from interviews by the end of 2002:

‘Because of the current situation we are more aware of the fact that we really should not become political and that we have to remain a neutral organisation.’

‘No, this is no conscious strategy, no policy that we have on paper. We think that integration actually works better when it remains unconstrained. When you open yourself up, it results without effort in a positive effect.’

Some of the Moroccan organisations don’t seem to be aware of the full extend of the contradictions, or don’t want to be aware, they think that avoiding conflicts is the best strategy.

A number of other associations voice another strategy: they stress that integration has always been their main goal. They explain that the Dutch government is asking increasingly for integration, but that it doesn’t understand that this is actually the main goal of most migrant associations. They counter the argument, that migrant associations are a problem for integration and reformulate – correctly – ‘the problem’: without migrant associations integration would actually be much more difficult for individuals. The following quote shows the frustration they experience, caused by a lack of understanding of the relevance of their activities:

‘We are reacting on a policy that considers integration of high importance. Our activities and objectives show that. We think that you can stimulate integrations by creating a place where people can experience their own culture on the one hand and on the other hand to help people to find their place in Dutch society’.

This rephrasing of a negative story into a more realistic and positive approach unfortunately didn’t reach the newspapers.

It are especially the associations of youngsters, which organise – again – a lot of discussion meetings in this period. A representative of one of these associations:

‘Our discussion meetings and activities are actually just on that subject – integration. Unfortunately the government handles this completely in the wrong way: they assume

that people integrate faster when you force them. That doesn't work at all, you have to provoke people's interest in integration, make it as attractive as possible, so they become enthusiastic to join (...). Our association's activities increased enormously after 9/11 because of an incident between youngsters and the police. In this period we had a lot of meetings to discuss how we could improve that situation, and now the situation is better.

At present our attention is directed towards Islam, because the Dutch are so worried about it. The subject of the next discussion will be: why are the Dutch so afraid of Muslims? Aren't there also Jewish and Christian extremists of whom they seem not afraid? I talked to girls that were not allowed to cut off their hair, and who wear thick wool tights, this are Christian extremists, who by the way have respect for religious notions, contrary to many others. The result of the harsh debates on TV about Islam is that we are scared now, instead of them, and that is also not the intention. When Nawijn - LPF minister of migration and integration affairs - says that your staying permit can be withdrawn, people (Moroccans) get worried, they start to feel very uncomfortable. And that is the intention, while everyone should be able to voice his opinion, not only the Dutch.'

In many places, it were the organisations of youngsters, that have taken care that discussion between Moroccans and Dutch continued. But several incidents aggravated the contradictions. For instance the derogatory remark by Labour politician Rob Oudkerk during a local election gathering that 'we also have 'kutmarokkanen' in Amsterdam' (this has a similar tone as fucking bastards), was experienced as very offensive. That this politician could just go on with his career as an alderman of Amsterdam, was considered a sign by young Moroccans, that the Dutch had completely lost any solidarity with them. The incident showed them that a politician can say anything about them and insult them without protest. But they came back in an original and creative manner. The Moroccan Dutch rapper Raymzter becomes popular with a rap song called 'kutmarokkanen', and that is felt like a revenge. Youngsters show that you cannot just go on insulting one particular group in society. Oudkerk's remarks are for months afterwards repeated in a ridiculing way on the popular music station TMF.

Escalation and the Arab European League

Relations between Muslims, particularly Moroccans and Dutch become more tense in the next period. The number of incidents of aggression and violence increases. Stigmatisation with only word is now turning into acts of violence; there are several cases of arson at religious organisations, and also towards persons, like for instance the Dutch imam Abdullah Hazelhoef. A representative of an Islamic school comments end 2002:

'Every time again the image is created that Islamic schools are strongholds of fundamentalism and orthodoxy. Neighbours seem to get enforced in their negative ideas about Islam and foreigners by politicians as Fortuyn. Because of his statements they feel that their views are now legitimate to throw in our windows. Unfortunately this often happened, for instance after 9/11'.

Not only Moroccans suffer from the worsening climate towards Muslims. The chair women of a Somali organisation explains:

'We suffer from the political situation, especially the youngsters have become scared. Since 9/11 a lot has changed. There are a lot of unpleasant stories about foreigners, and the young people don't feel safe anymore. In this neighbourhood it we manage,

but when you see the TV, everything has turned negative. Since the Cold War is over, the West has found anew enemy to talk about and that are the Muslims. They don't realise that we ourselves are the ones that hate fundamentalists most; we know much better than the Dutch what that is and also how to recognize them.'

Many people conclude that the situation is deteriorating. And on that moment a new political party and movement, the Arab European League (AEL) is founded in Belgium. Their spokesmen Abu Jahjah, an eloquent young Lebanese refugee in Belgium, explains that clear terms that he is against discrimination and forced assimilation and that he does not accept that Moroccan youngsters are picked up by the policy without reason, as happens in Antwerp. His demeanour provokes the admiration of young Moroccans in the Netherlands and in the spring of 2003, a Dutch branch is established. The board members of the AEL Netherlands stem from a committee 'Muslim Hatred No'. A spokesperson of an association of youngsters remarks about this:

'Now you've got Abu Jahjah, and he is still quit OK, but the next one who will rise up in the Netherlands might be much worst, and then they will get very busy to cope with that. But was really provoked: of cause you make people very angry with all these remarks.'

A TV interview with Abu Jahjah causes an boosting discussion on the Moroccan websites. He is adored for his clear accounts, but there is also a lot of criticism. The criticism is focussed on his ties with the Shi'a Islamic and paramilitary organisation Hezbollah in Lebanon, that the Dutch Moroccans find too extremist, and also on the Arab character of the AEL and his statements about the Berber language Tamazight. Especially the statement on the AEL website 'Our Arab nation came about because of Islam and through the interplay with it, our Arab Islamic civilization was build up' is not liked by the Dutch Moroccan community, which exists to a large extent of Berbers. The Berber associations organise protests against the Arab focussed approach, that they have fought al their lives. This means that it is not obvious that the Dutch Moroccans will al follow the AEL, and as we will see the AEL doesn't get enough votes in the Netherlands to get into any of the councils.

Besides AEL there are several initiatives that do not use a conflict model but a discussion model. The foundations 'Are you afraid of me?' organises a well visited event in the Amsterdam concert hall Paradiso. And on January 18th 2003 a group of known Moroccan figures gathered with the name 'Change of Course' starts a campaign through eleven cities for a more positive image of Moroccans, promoted on a website with the same name. They call for attention to the uneasiness that was caused, and 'to give this discomfort a place', and they declare that the limits of decency have been passed.

Conclusion

From the interviews that we undertook since 1997, an image appears of an escalating situation. Standpoints of Dutch are rapidly becoming harsher, and there is risk that a climate of contradictions develops, in which extremism on both sides gets more and more shape. Looking at the central question of this article 'how do Moroccan associations respond on the negative stigmatisation of Moroccans in the Netherlands? What kind of reactions do we encounter? and How did this change in the last years', we can conclude that the reactions of organisations are in a process of change.

At first the organisations don't react at all, they don't want escalation. Until the beginning of 2002 there was irritation, but the most encountered strategy of organisations was to

emphasize a positive image instead of the dominant negative stigmas. But when the situation gets worst, organisations feel pressured to react. It are mainly youngsters who take the initiatives. They react by organisation discussion meetings; they reformulate the negative image formation, and help their members to arm themselves with arguments. In a next phase, in which Moroccans experience insults and aggressions, high educated young Moroccans take the lead with national campaigns like 'Are you afraid of me?' and 'Change of Course'. They predominantly employ the discussion model. Until this moment we have not found organisations promote isolation from society, though this might be true for individuals. Organisations may function as a safe haven, but that seem not completely fed up with Dutch society to such an extent that they don't want to be part of it anymore. The foundation of the Arab European League as a political movement, and their registration for a number of city council elections, was an important step. The inclusion in the political system is a logical step in the process of exerting more power within existing frames. This kind of participations is an example of the use of the discussion model. But the intimidating manner in which journalists interviewed Abu Jahjah on January 25, 2003, shows to what level the intolerance has risen (Fennema 2003). A precondition for discussion is that the parties concerned keep in contact and listen to each other. It is therefore promising that we found so many initiatives of high educated Moroccans youngsters that make an effort to keep the dialogue open.

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