# Should we be Scared of all Salafists in Europe? A Dutch Case Study

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***Abstract***

*European governments consider the Salafi movement to be primarily a security threat. Yet developments in the Dutch Salafi movement reveal that quietist and political Salafists distance themselves from coercion and violence in the European context and also respect democratic authority. The movement manifests itself in very different ways worldwide. A more nuanced and contextual approach is necessary in order to assess and interpret potential threats. The peaceful branch of the movement should be understood as orthodox in nature, with the accompanying social and societal problems, but not by definition as a threat to the democratic rule of law.*

**Keywords:** Salafism, The Netherlands, Jihadism

***Introduction***

The Salafi movement is an orthodox Sunni Islamic movement. Like the Muslim Brotherhood, it has been rooting itself in Europe since the 1980s, due to the arrival of Islamic activists from the Middle East [1]. In the past decade, the movement has gained notoriety for acts of violence that are attributable to jihadist Salafism, a violent offshoot of the movement. Filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in the Netherlands in 2004, and there were bombings in London (2005) and Madrid (2007) by Islamists. More recently, in 2012 and 2013, jihadists operating as individuals or in groups have carried out acts of violence in Belgium, France and England [2]. As a result, the Salafi movement as a whole is viewed as a security threat [3].

In this article, it will be shown that important sections of the Salafi movement distance themselves from violent extremism. In recent years, prominent Salafi religious leaders have condemned acts of violence committed in the name of Islam. They have also spoken out against young Europeans who go to Syria to fight [4, 5], and have also criticized groups that call for the introduction of Sharia (Islamic law) in Europe [6]. This has led to confusion: radical Salafists are the product of the Salafi movement, but the very same movement is making concerted efforts to stop extremism. How should we understand these anti-extremist attitudes? Are these moderates merely wolves in sheep's clothing? What are their ambitions and views regarding Sharia and jihad? Should we continue to consider the Salafi movement primarily as a security threat, now that parts of it are distancing themselves from violence?

This article is based on the PhD dissertation *Living Like the Prophet in the Netherlands. About the Salafi Movement and Democracy* [7]. It sought to answers these questions on the basis of extensive fieldwork carried out within and around the Dutch Salafi movement. Although it provides insight into how the Salafi movement has developed in the Netherlands, it is also relevant to the manifestation of the movement in other parts of Europe. Indeed, the movement has a strong transnational character and exists throughout the continent. It will be shown that the Salafi movement can manifest itself in extremely diverse ways and is developing in various directions. This is apparent in its religious and political organisation and participation, as well as on the ideological level. Given the continuous evolution and diversity, it is at the very least problematic to present Salafism by definition as a threat to democracy. Indeed, some Salafi groups respect democracy and are explicitly committed to combating violent factions.[8]. According to Quintan Wiktorowicz, all Salafi currents have the same belief (*aqidah*) but use different strategies alongside given answers to contextual political issues. He distinguishes three currents: purists (quietists), politicos and jihadis. The dissertation research summarised in the present article consisted of participatory observation

within organisations and the Salafi community at large, and informal conversations and interviews with religious leaders and other people [9]. More than 50 participants in the networks around the As-Soennah mosque in the Hague, the El Fourkaan mosque in Eindhoven and the youth organisation Alfeth in Roermond were interviewed while a few other Dutch Salafi organisations (see following section) were also visited. These networks and organisations can be categorised as either purist or political. However, during fieldwork, it was found that a few jihadists also visited the facilities mentioned on an incidental basis.

This study is unique since it describes both the organisational forms and the ideology proclaimed by religious leaders as well as the multifaceted daily religious practices of those who connect to the Salafi movement. Other researchers in Europe have described the ideological developments and historical roots of Salafism, but either they do not provide an insight into the movement in practice [10] or they largely failed to look at internal arguments and existing oppositions within the Salafi movement [11]. Research that did reveal the internal ideological arguments and conflicts in Salafism failed to adequately address their practical implications in the daily lives of European Muslims [12]. Research into the Salafi movement in the Netherlands touches primarily on the organisational level of Salafism [13], focusing only on the context of Salafism, omitting the religious and organisational embedding or concentrating on individual cases [14]. It also failed to deal with the question how the Salafi movement relates to democracy [15].

Forms of political and orthodox Islam, including Salafi Islam and its relationship with democracy, are generally considered problematic [16]. The Salafi movement is seen as anti-democratic because its teachings supposedly legitimise hate, coercion and violence, and promote the repression of women and those who think differently. There is concern that the Salafi movement poses a threat to the democratic rule of law because of its anti-democratic and anti-integrative character, which emerges from Salafi dogma and can result in intolerant isolationism, exclusivism and the creation of parallel social structures (based on Sharia). In addition to the fact that the Salafi movement is considered a potential hotbed of radicalisation to violence, the non-violent aspects of the movement are also seen as problematic. There is concern that Muslim enclaves in which democratic freedoms are not recognised will be formed in the midst of Western societies [17]. The Salafi movement is primarily perceived as a security threat since Salafi Jihadists are held responsible for violent acts in many countries [18]. In short, the jihadist movement is viewed as only the tip of the iceberg of the much larger problem of political or jihadist Islamism [19].

In various models of explanation for terrorism, it is assumed that processes of non-violent radicalisation precede acts of violence [20]. The policy consequence of this assumption is that non-violent groups are by definition suspect, being viewed as potential terrorists. As a result, forms of expression that occur in the Salafi movement – such as the wearing of the niqab (face veil), informal marriages and the refusal to shake hands with persons of the opposite sex – are considered as potential indicators of a political security threat [21]. In the first place, a clear distinction must be made between social and societal problems (socioeconomic disadvantage, dealing with cultural and religious diversity, etc.), which require a social policy, and security problems (such as coercion and violence), for which a judicial approach is required. Should the entire Salafi movement be looked at from the perspective of security? And how is non-violent Salafism related to this jihadist movement?

To answer these questions, empirical research was conducted on the following aspects of quietist and political Salafi networks in the Netherlands in the light of the threat of jihadist Salafism: 1) religious disciplining, 2) forms of organisations, 3) political views and 4) forms of participation. Relevant questions asked were: Do these networks legitimize coercion and violence in their religious disciplining? Can the movement be characterized as a sect that isolates itself from the rest of society? Is it worrisome that the movement is becoming professionalised? Do the Salafists want to implement Sharia law? Does participation in the

movement lead to clear-cut radical identities, isolation and the development of Muslim enclaves in which democracy is not recognised?

***Religious Disciplining: Intolerant Perfectionism, Tolerant Behaviour***

The Salafi movement is a Sunni reform movement that pursues the restoration of 'pure' Islam through the moral re-education of the Muslim community, a literal reading of the Koran and *hadith* (report of the words and deeds of the Prophet and other early Muslims), the rejection of religious innovations, and the imitation of Mohammed and his companions in the early days of Islam [22]. Salafists claim that their religious interpretation is the only one that is true to Islam. They seek to form a moral community of true believers and claim to be the representatives of the only legitimate Islam [23]. The movement has developed in a multitude of forms around the world and is particularly characterised by internal polemics, theological disputes and conflicts despite but also due to its quest for religious purity. The movement includes both violent and non-violent branches, also in Europe [24]. A few Salafi networks have rooted themselves in the Netherlands since the 1980s, and some of these have a more formal character, such as the As-Soennah Foundation/Centre Sheikh al Islam Ibn Taymia in the Hague (in which Abou Ismail and Imam Fawaz Jneid are the best known figureheads; the latter was recently fired), the El Tawheed Foundation in Amsterdam, the Islamitische Stichting voor Opvoeding en Overdracht van Kennis (ISOOK -Islamic Foundation for Education and the Spread of Knowledge) in Tilburg (led by Suhayb and Ahmed Salam) and the Al Waqf al-Islami Foundation/El Fourkaan mosque in Eindhoven. In addition, there is a quietist network around Imam Bouchta, based on a scholar named Madkhali, and there are about ten smaller Salafi-oriented networks and organisations, such as Alfeth (led by Ali Houri, alias Al Khattab) in Roermond and Stichting Moslimjongeren (Foundation of Muslim youth) in Utrecht. During fieldwork all of these were visited.

The moral re-education and reformation of the Dutch Muslim population form the basis of the Salafi movement's activism in the Netherlands. The Salafi movement is a utopian movement that attempts to reorganise Muslims' daily lives according to an idealised image of the past. Salafists create a way of life that they experience as more satisfying and just, contrasting it starkly with a world of immorality, repression and temptation [25].

One of their instruments is religious disciplining, which flows from the principle of *hisba* (commanding good and forbidding bad – *al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar*). It takes a variety of forms. The Salafi movement assumes to be in possession of a superior truth in its interpretation of Islam. Because of this, the movement allows no room for moral or religious pluralism. According to Salafists, this pluralism does not exist in Islam; there is only one correct interpretation of the faith [26]. This suggests that there might be an unequivocal authority within the movement, but this is not the case. Paradoxically, in its endeavour to attain moral purity, the movement is strongly fragmented. Because of the endless internal disputes over the precise content of this truth – which is a result of Salafist rejection of blindly following Islamic scholars or schools of law, and their search for direct evidence based on the Quran and the Sunna, which led to contesting religious leadership – there is in practice no single authority, which can place moral boundaries to the discussion. The recognition of moral and religious pluralism is an important condition for a democratic system [27]. This implies that a person may believe in an apparently objective moral authority or a superior truth. From a normative democratic perspective, however, this individual may not conduct him- or herself in such a way that the political rights of others are violated. People must recognise democratic rights and refrain from using violence or coercion. However, do Dutch Salafists legitimise coercion and violence in the disciplining of their followers?

According to Sharia law, there are indeed punishments (corporal and otherwise) for committing sins, apostasy and failure to follow Islamic rules. This indicates that there are formal means of coercion in the Salafi movement. Nonetheless, Dutch quietist and political Salafists in the researched networks insist that these punishments should never be carried out in a Dutch context. In the eyes of Salafists, *da'wa* (Islamic missionary work, the call to Islam) and *nasiha* ('friendly' advice) are the only permitted means of confronting Muslims with their bad behaviour and sins, and non-Muslims with their non-belief. In their view, individuals can only be tried according to Sharia law in an Islamic state. This means that Muslims may not take the law into their own hands, and must subject themselves to the prevailing democratic authority. Nonetheless, Salafists will never approve of acts that are forbidden by Islam. They justify this by appealing to their freedom of speech and religion [28]. Therefore, Dutch Salafists make a clear distinction between their position in a European context and in the context of an Islamic country.

*Takfir i*s the process by which a Muslim is accused of apostasy. In the international Salafist movement, this is an important theme and it has led to internal arguments and schisms [29]. The discussion about *takfir* is important because it often forms a crucial part in the justification for the use of violence [30]. Salafi networks agree on the conditions that can lead to denunciation, but differ regarding the definition and interpretation of these conditions. The various interpretations can be ambiguous [31]. In recent years, the Salafists in the networks that were researched here have presented themselves as non-extremist, 'moderate' Muslims, condemning the practices of *takfir* prevalent in jihadi circles. In their rhetoric of moderation, they oppose groups that, in one way or another, connect their persona with *takfir*. The Salafi networks that were approached during fieldwork maintain that *takfir* is a matter for scholars and Islamic states to decide, and is not for 'average' Muslims to be carried out. A far-reaching consequence of denunciation is that a Muslim can be sentenced to death or violence against the apostate person can be justified. In the networks researched here, however, the Salafists interviewed expressly stated that these punishments may only be imposed by Islamic judges in Islamic states, and not in the context of democratic states [32].

Self-discipline and self-perfection are stressed, and coercion in religion is not to be permitted [33]. Nevertheless, Salafists use the warning of God's wrath and his unknown punishments in this world and the hereafter to discipline one another. Coercion occurs only if the warning has sanctions attached to it or when it generates fear, and if this religious interpretation is believed. There is no legitimation of actual coercion through sanctions, violence or explicit pressure, but there can be a strong level of social control. This is expressed in practice through *da'wa* (the call to Islam), *nasiha* ('friendly' advice) and the pressure to conform through persuasion, but should always be non-violent. The strongly held view is that participation and the observance of rules should be voluntary and self-chosen based on a pure intention. As a result, belief is experienced in a strong individual sense [34].

In concrete terms, this means that practices such as not praying, not wearing a headscarf and being homosexual are condemned according to Salafi ideology. Nonetheless, this intolerance may not lead to physical or verbal violence or coercion [35]. Moreover, conformism to religious dogma is considered to be a matter between each individual and God. This differs in some Islamic countries where Sharia is implemented (either in part or entirely), and where conformism to religion is enforced through formal means of coercion, such as the criminalisation of dissociation from Islam, adultery and homosexuality. In those contexts, freedom of religion as a democratic right and the autonomy of the individual are not respected. This is why a contextual approach to the Salafi movement is essential. The movement makes a clear distinction between the position of Islam in a European context and in the context of Islamic countries. Instruments of coercion, punishment and violence are not legitimised in a European context. This is where quietist and political Salafists differ from jihadist Salafists, who legitimise violence in some situations. Although coercion and

violence are not permitted in quietist and political Salafist networks, its actual existence cannot be excluded despite the fact that it is explicitly condemned by Salafi leaders.

***Types of Organisations: Formal Translocal Organisations and Disputed Leadership***

The Salafi movement is also diverse at an organisational level since it is not run by from a single elite group or organisation. Although religious leaders and organisations sometimes collaborate informally, there is also internal competition and strife. The religious authority in the Salafi movement is diffuse, pluriform and subject to change [36]. The Internet is not only used by the movement as a means of religious disciplining but also as a platform where religious authority is challenged and questioned [37]. In a context of internal fragmentation, each Salafi religious leader tries to portray himself as a representative of Islam. Because *taqlid* (blindly following scholars or schools of law) is forbidden, their views are continuously checked by other Salafists for 'truth.' Many religious leaders are accused by outsiders of speaking with forked tongues when they distance themselves from violence, but such behaviour is difficult to hide. A religious leader cannot afford to act in this manner if he wants to maintain his credibility among his more critical followers. When religious leaders change their opinion on a socio-religious issue, some of their followers may not react positively [38].

The categorisation of the Salafi movement as a sect is problematic because doing so ignores both the diversity of the production and consumption of religious authority and its ideological diversity. The forms of organisation and participation and the status of the various religious leaders are ambiguous, constantly changing and in need of being renegotiated which means there is never uniform commitment or a degree of exclusivity and separation that could justify the analytical use of the concept of a 'sect.' There is no communal life (such as in the utopian societies that Kanter has described [39]) in which the members' daily activities all take place at one location and are all coordinated by a central power apparatus. Neither the environment nor the structure of the Salafi movement lends itself to complete isolation. Religious leaders, organisations and networks conduct themselves in what one could call a 'translocal' manner. Unlike in a community that manifests itself in one place, the commitment of participants is temporary and multiform, and physical isolation is hardly an issue. One can, however, argue that Salafists isolate themselves from society in an ideological way. Nevertheless, on the ideological level, there is disagreement on issues such as participation in society and contacts with 'disbelievers'. There is an inherent paradox hidden in *da'wa* (the call to Islam): on the one hand it entails reaching out to disbelievers and on the other distancing oneself from disbelief. In addition, all organisational levels manifest diversity in the ethnic and linguistic background, age and gender of the participants. There are competing organisations and networks, and this results in a constantly changing and diverse movement. For instance, the network around quietist Salafi Bouchta is controversial among the participants in the network around the As-Soennah mosque and Ahmed Salam, and vice versa. During fieldwork, a dramatic change in the organisational structure of the As-Soennah mosque occurred: a famous imam, Fawaz Jneid, was fired as a result of internal tensions. This was one sign indicating that the Salafi movement is constantly developing and changing at an organisational level [40].

According to security agencies, the Salafi movement is continuously professionalising [41]. Indeed, some of the informal organisations have now established education, welfare and broadcasting subdivisions to broaden their *da'wa* activities. Is this worrisome? The formation of organisational structures and the professionalisation of the Salafi movement have a paradoxical effect on the movement's threat to democracy. Organisations tend to become more transparent to the outside world, and board members and other officials can be called to account in cases of suspected misconduct (related to violence and coercion). Organisations are also better equipped than informal networks to enter into formal and informal forms

of collaboration, and it is more difficult for them to isolate themselves. Concretely, the Salafi mosques and networks investigated were collaborating to varying degrees with their local (non-Salafi) environment. Such collaboration related to issues of health, education and security and took place with welfare organisations, religious organisations, politicians, policy-makers and the Dutch police. Although their disciplinary function will become more professional and extensive through better organisation, it will not necessarily lead to more unity among the Salafi networks. Informal networks can operate more easily outside the public eye and are more difficult to monitor. Potential abuses such as coercion and violence escape external control more easily in informal than in a more formal organisational structure with a centralized authority [42]. Consequently, the isolation of Salafi networks is not in the public interest because a lack of control and transparency might give anti-democratic powers free rein.

***Political Views: Criticism of Violent and Sharia Groups***

It is often taken for granted that Salafists reject the democratic rule of law and want to introduce Sharia law [43]. The rejection of democracy as a matter of principle is based on the Salafi conviction that Islam is the superior religion and on the Salafi interpretation of *tawhid*: Allah is the only legislator, and everything that deviates from his law is deemed inferior. A person who does not acknowledge this unity of Allah is guilty of *shirk* (idol worship)–the worst sin that a Muslim can commit. It is not immediately clear what these theological principles imply in practice. Although the principle of *tawhid* and the banning of *shirk* are central to the ideologies of all Salafi networks, there are considerable differences in the interpretation and the effects of the concept on contemporary political issues, such as the life of a Muslim in a Western democracy where Muslims are in a minority position, and on their political participation. In fact, the application of Salafi principles leads to endless discussions in Salafi circles [44].

In practice, fieldwork in the Netherlands showed that the rejection of democracy as a matter of principle does not automatically imply the rejection of political participation or disobedience to democratic authority. Nor did fieldwork indicate that the belief that Salafist ideology by definition leads to political radicalisation or is a root cause of violence or terrorism is justified [45]. There is considerable diversity in the degree and form of political involvement. In their daily practices Salafists respect Dutch political rights. They believe they have entered into an 'covenant' with the countries in which they live as minorities and in which they enjoy sufficient freedom to practise their faith (although this continues to come under increasing pressure). This is why they think they must respect the prevailing laws [46]. The laws must also be respected because otherwise *fitna* (chaos) would ensue. The motto is 'better a poor leader than no leader at all'.

In the Netherlands, quietist and political Salafists form the majority of the Salafi movement; jihadis are a marginal phenomenon. Exact numbers are not available, but a national survey found that 8 per cent of Dutch Muslims are susceptible to Salafism [47]. Quietist and political Salafists appear to respect democratic legislation and the existing political rights in the Netherlands. They also reject violence and coercion to bring about the realisation of their ambitions and views, political and in other fields [48]. That said, their attitude towards obedience to democracy is conditional. The question remains how this pragmatism will develop in the future. Will it become a position held for reasons of principle?

Dutch quietist and political Salafists do not seek the implementation of Sharia law in the Netherlands and the rest of Europe, nor do they seek the establishment of a worldwide caliphate like Hizb ut Tahrir. They think this is an unrealistic and undesirable endeavour, given their position as a minority in Europe. They give priority to the moral reform of the individual daily lives of Muslims. The Salafi movement in the Netherlands vigorously challenges and criticises groups (such as Hizb ut Tahrir, Sharia4Belgium/Holland) which aim

for such an objective. They also criticize groups that organise 'street *da'wa*' and political demonstrations (groups like Straatdawah and Behind Bars). The above-mentioned groups sometimes employ violence (verbal or otherwise), which is wholeheartedly rejected by Dutch quietist and political Salafists. [49]. The Salafi movement calls for people to respect political rights in the Netherlands and to demand these rights when the rights of Muslims are violated. It also calls for its followers to respond in a non-violent manner to accusations, insults and acts of violence against Muslims. To accomplish this, they primarily make use of religious means: invocations, patience, rectitude, emigration and detachment, of which the last two are realised only with considerable difficulty. *Hijra* (emigration) is desired by many but achievable to only a few, because of a lack of financial resources and due to the belief that no Islamic country is totally organised according to the Salafists' high standards. Finally, the detachment from society is difficult to combine with their *da'wa* activities and their daily contact with non-Salafi relatives, colleagues, neighbours and so forth [50].

Jihad as a violent means to protect, defend and spread Islam is soundly rejected by quietist and political Salafi religious leaders in the context of the Netherlands and other Western, non-Islamic countries. These types of Salafist organisations commit themselves to combating the legitimisation of violence in various ways. They devote many video clips and flyers and much preaching, education and website content to the refutation of Al-Qaeda's actions and ideology. Nonetheless, during fieldwork it was possible to encounter a few believers in and around the Salafi networks who sympathize with jihadist ideas and legitimise violence. Despite communal efforts to steer youngsters away from extremism, these few young hotheads were found to approve, for instance, of the murder of Theo van Gogh [51].

In regard to defensive jihad in the context of Islamic countries, the networks visited assume a more ambiguous position. In some networks, the current situation in, for instance, Syria is designated as jihad, yet at the same time they call on followers not to go there. On their webpages and during their Friday sermons, political Salafists of the As-Soennah mosque (Fawaz Jneid and Suhayb Salam) call on youngsters to stay at home and not participate in jihad. There are other quietist Salafi networks that contend there is no jihad whatsoever going on in Syria [52]. According to the Dutch security services (AIVD), around 100 Islamic youngsters from the Netherlands are actually participating in the ongoing conflict in Syria. On this issue too, both quietist and political Salafi networks strongly disagree with the Sharia4 groups and Behind Bars. It is from the ranks of these groups that many young Muslims left the Netherlands to follow the path of jihad in Syria.

To summarise, quietist and political networks in the Salafi movement tend to respect democratic authority in Europe, do not want to institute Sharia law, react non-violently to critical statements about Islam and do not call on their followers to engage in jihad. The political detachment of some Salafists (who refuse to participate in the political system or to react politically to dissatisfaction) can result in societal detachment, but it is not primarily a security problem. Jihadists, on the other hand, violate democratic values by calling on people to commit violent acts in certain circumstances. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between the various Salafi strands in terms of security policy.

***Participation: Opposition, Variability and Pluriformity***

Participation in the Salafi movement is often equated with the pursuit of segregation, distancing and isolation [53]. Yet does participation in the Salafi movement really lead to societal isolation and a clearly defined identity? Does the Salafi movement distance itself from societal participation in Europe, and are, through them, Muslim enclaves in which democracy is not recognised coming into existence?

To answer such questions, one has to keep in mind that Salafi organisations attract a diverse audience whose

members manifest differing levels of involvement. Participants also differ in background and motivation for participating in the activities that the Salafi organisations offer. As a result, heterogeneity exists in participation [54]. At the same time, Salafists invest in a uniform group identity and express this by stressing brotherhood and sisterhood through their clothing, language and religious practices. For instance, Salafists can distinguish themselves by wearing certain clothing: women wear the *khimar* (a veil that hangs down to just above the waist, covering the hair, neck and shoulders, but leaving the face clear) and the *niqab* (a veil for the face that leaves the area around the eyes clear and is worn with an accompanying headscarf) and men wear baggy, short-legged trousers. They frequently use Islamic terms and expressions and follow ritual practices like the *salat* (daily prayer) with precision. These group symbols are used in many ways and sometimes only temporarily: they are subject to debate and thus to change. For instance, there is no agreement on the obligation and desirability of wearing the *niqab* in the Netherlands. Only a few women choose this style of covering themselves and many of those who do, wear it only some of the time. The diversity in the use of group symbols makes the group boundaries unclear [55].

Even if the dividing lines between the various Salafi schools of thought are not always clearly demarcated, each Salafi network tries to present itself as the representative of the only true Islam in contrast to other Muslims who have 'gone astray'. In addition to ritual behaviour, clothing and language, this is also expressed in the labels they give themselves. Self-definition is a powerful means to construct symbolic boundaries (moral and otherwise) and to create and reinforce a feeling of community in the process [56]. Self-definitions determine the position that Salafists assign themselves in relation to society and other Muslims [57]. But distinctive self-definitions are controversial, multiform and subject to change in practice [58]. Some Salafists call themselves *selefies* (a practice engaged in by some quietists), other prefer more neutral labels like 'Muslim' or 'Muslim following the Quran and the Prophet and the first three generations'. They choose to use more neutral terms as an expression of personal modesty. In addition, these more neutral terms express the claim of being not a sect in Islam, but the only true Islam itself. Paradoxically, the term Salafist is highly controversial among Salafists and they rarely use it. As a result, group boundaries in terms of group labels are fluid and there is no clearly defined commitment or group. Furthermore, it is difficult to distinguish clearly between insiders and outsiders of the Salafi movement.

In a movement that propagates purity and unambiguity, the daily and religious practices of Salafi believers are also less black-and-white than one might assume. This is not only because Salafists are surrounded by a pluralistic society, but also because their belief system is accompanied by all sorts of contradictions and is implemented and experienced in so many different ways – leading to even more ambiguity. As a result, the Salafi identity is not clear-cut or easy to recognise. In their practice of the ideal Salafi lifestyle, Salafists walk a tightrope between values and interests (for instance, 'being a good Muslim' and educating people about Islam versus being successful in their professional careers and avoiding conflicts, *fitna*), which leads to a considerable friction.

The construction of the perfect moral self, which is favoured by the Salafi movement, is surrounded by contradictions, variability and temporality, both ideally and in practice [59]. For instance, the call to Islam is at variance with the endeavour to attain purity because it implies contact with the 'impure other'. Many Islamic rules are difficult to observe, too. For example, it is difficult to keep the two sexes separate at school, at work, on public transport and so on. Finally, those who manifest their Salafi identity through their clothing and behaviour often encounter negative sentiments: family members, friends and colleagues can be very critical about it. Salafists have to make compromises every day. The purity, the unity and the moral framework propagated by the Salafi movement result in tensions in the daily lives of Muslims [60].

The above remarks lend substance to criticism of those who unjustly represent the religious moral

frameworks as a coherent and clearly demarcated whole. Those who portray them like that have insufficiently examined the ambivalence, contradiction and ambiguity of the moral frameworks themselves and how they work in practice.

The impact of involvement in the Salafi movement on social relationships with friends and family and on male–female relationships is not straightforward. Involvement does not always lead to exclusivity of social relationships and isolation, not even among those who strive for segregation. Contact with people who think differently is unavoidable. In their daily practice, Salafists attempt to find a balance between their religious life and society at large [61]. The level of involvement in the Salafi movement and the extent to which the Salafi lifestyle is practised can change over time. Salafists can and do modify their religious interpretation or practice, or even eschew the Salafi movement [62]. Muslims also form mixed groups, in which they combine Salafi ideas with those from Sufism or from the Maliki school of law [63]. Participation in the Salafi movement is not uniform or life-long, nor is it straightforward in nature.

Participation in the Salafi movement does not always go hand in hand with societal isolation and segregation, and only a minority aspire to distance themselves from the non-Salafi environment. It is true that there can be isolationist trends, about which the AIVD (Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service) expressed concern in various publications [64]. However, a clearly defined counterculture [65] and Islamised spaces or anti-democratic Muslim enclaves [66] do not exist; intermingling, negotiation and compromise all take place.

Longitudinal research is required to investigate the changes Muslims undergo throughout the various phases of their lives and explore the future of children who grow up in Salafi families. There is currently no explicit exclusivity or isolation in the Dutch context. This is because forms of participation are frequently non-binding, diverse, contradictory and temporary. Due to the fact that diversity among participants exists, the boundaries of group identity are broken down, and there is inclusiveness of social relationships and societal participation. Nonetheless, the autonomy of children in Salafi families who do not go to or have not yet started school and women in informal marriages can be put under pressure when they are completely isolated from their surroundings. Although the Salafi movement does not call for the abolition of the autonomy of women and children, it does not stimulate such autonomy. Isolation sometimes does occur, but occasionally it is self-chosen. At the same time, women can join the Salafi movement in order to achieve autonomy from their parents, family members or partners, and to break with traditions, like forced marriages, that hinder them in their personal development. There is no direct connection between the Salafi movement and the violation of women's autonomy.

***Conclusion: the Salafi Movement is not by Definition a Threat to Democracy***

In the Dutch context, quietist and political Salafists reject violence and coercion. In their religious, societal and political practices, they respect democratic freedoms. These conditions apply only to the majority of Salafists who are present in the Netherlands today–not to those Salafists who sympathise with jihadist ideas and consider the use of violence legitimate. There is no clear and strong occurrence of isolation, nor are there anti-democratic Muslim enclaves. However, even if isolation from Dutch society is not propagated or violence legitimised, the existence of disciplining practices, for example, forcing women to wear headscarves, cannot be excluded even though the practice is not legitimised by their ideology. Yet this particular problem is a societal one, and does not pose a security risk. The question whether it is fair to consider the entire Salafi movement as security threat, and a threat to the democratic system, must, at least with regard to the Netherlands at this moment in time, be answered negatively.

The Salafi movement in the Netherlands does not encompass a homogeneous, clearly delineated group that

forms an unequivocal threat to the rule of law. When one studies the Salafi movement in its local contexts, its internal diversity becomes visible. The representation of all manifestations of political Islam as an early stage of, or initial step towards violent jihadism and terrorism, has found no corroboration in this case study; it does not reflect Dutch reality. The large majority of Dutch Salafis, while adhering to orthodox and fundamentalist opinions, eschew acts of violence. So far, the existence of anti-extremist forces in important parts of the Salafi movement has been largely ignored and the movement as a whole has been discredited to prematurely.

It is important that academics, journalists and politicians guard against the careless use of the term 'Salafist' as a uniform label. Both the practices and the ideology of the Salafi movement are variable, heterogeneous and contradictory. The Salafi movement is not a unitary entity with clearly demarcated group boundaries. It is inadvisable to judge the Salafi movement and enact policies with regard to it only on the basis of certain ideological Salafi positions. In reality, the practices, the internal social relationships and the relationships with the outside world are decisive for the proper assessment of the movement. These relationships are currently variable, multiform and contradictory. There is internal disagreement on important issues like sharia and jihad, as well as regarding social and political participation in Dutch society. It is also important that the Salafi movement and its members are not excluded from Dutch society. Placing restraints on them (such as instituting a ban on burkas or headscarves) can facilitate isolation, even when such measures are intended to encourage participation in society [67].

Finally, the Salafi movement ought to be encouraged to participate in politics. Its spokesmen should be invited to join public debates and participate in political parties. They should also be allowed to stage public demonstrations. Political participation is beneficial in that it allows them to building civic competence while de-legitimising the use of violence as a political instrument. It is important that quietist and political networks are given a platform to explain their anti-jihadist position vis-à-vis those who sympathise with jihadist ideas. It ought to be the responsibility of the community and its imams, religious leaders, educators, as well as friends and families to discourage the legitimisation of violence whenever they come into contact with it.

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### *Notes*

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[2] See e.g. press release NCTV, National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice, 22 June 2012; http://english.nctb.nl/currenttopics/press_releases/2012/persbericht-20120622.aspx, retrieved 22 May 2013.

[3] R. Coolsaet (2011), The rise and demise of jihadi terrorism in Belgium. In: R. Coolsaet (Ed.), *Jihadi terrorism and the radicalisation challenge. European and American experiences.*. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, p. 169.

[4] Personal communication by phone with quietist imam from Madkhali network, the Netherlands, 24 April 2013.

[5] Public opinion of political Salafis about youths travelling to Syria, As-Soennah mosque, The Hague.http://al-yaqeen.com/va/vraag.php?id=1463; retrieved 22

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[6] I. Roex (2013), *Leven als de profeet in Nederland. Over de salafi-beweging en democratie.* Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam ( PhD Thesis), 2013,206 pp.– Available online (in Dutch, with English summary) at: http://dare.uva.nl/record/444335

[7] I. Roex (2013). *Leven als de profeet in Nederland.* The dissertation focused on answering the question how the Salafi movement is related to the democratic value of individual freedom. This was done by an analysis of exit options. The research was based on intensive anthropological fieldwork conducted within and around Salafi organisations and networks in the Netherlands.

[8] For specifications of the fieldwork locations, see I. Roex (2013). *Leven als de profeet in Nederland*. pp. 39–40, 315.

[9] The majority of the fieldwork was performed between December 2007 and September 2008 within the framework of the study *Salafisme in Nederland. Aard, omvang en dreiging* (Salafism in the Netherlands. Nature, Scale and Threat), which was carried out together with Jean Tillie and Sjef van Stiphout of the Institute for Migration and Ethic Studies (IMES) commissioned by the Research and Documentation Center (WODC) at the request of the Dutch counter-terrorism coordinator (NCTb). A number of interviews were held and observations made after this period of time.

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[14] F. Geelhoed, (2011) *Purification and resistance. Glocal meanings of Islamic fundamentalism in the Netherlands.* Rotterdam: Erasmus University PhD Thesis, 2011.

[15] See e.g. M. De Koning (2009), Moslimjongeren. De salafi-beweging en de vorming van een morele gemeenschap. *Tijdschrift voor criminologie,* 51 (4), pp. 375–387; M. De Koning (2011b), 'Moge Hij onze ogen openen'. De radicale utopie van het 'salafisme'. *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid,* 2 (2), pp. 47–61; M. de Koning (2011c), Tussen de profeet en het paradijs. De morele ambities van de salafiyyah in Nederland. In B. Musschenga & B. Siertsema (Eds.), *Het Kwaad. Reflecties op de zwarte zijde van ons bestaan* (pp. 180–191). Vught: Skandalon, 2011; M. De Koning (2012), 'Salafisme is overal'. Een radicale utopie en de constructie van angst. *Religie en samenleving*, 7 (1), pp. 56–72.

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[33] See e.g. a quotation from a text by the Saudi scholar Fawzaan: 'One is expected to invite people to convert to Islam with wisdom and in a good and gentle manner. On the contrary, the use of violence, fanaticism and defamation is not part of Islam.'(http://www.al-yaqeen.com/va/vraag.php?id=515; retrieved 4 January 2012); and a quotation from a text spoken by a preacher at the As-Soennah mosque in The Hague: 'My job is solely to communicate the news. This is what God says in the Koran: it is your job to communicate it, but it is God's job to lead and it is God that leads people astray'.–I. Roex, op. cit. (2013), p. 169.

[34] I. Roex, op. cit. (2013), pp. 165–178.

[35] For example, they explicitly reject homosexuality and simultaneously reject violence (verbal or otherwise) against homosexuals (I. Roex, op. cit. (2013), p. 185).

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[39] R.M. Kanter, op. cit (1972).

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[41] See e.g. AIVD, op. cit. (2007).

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[49] I. Roex, op. cit. (2013), pp. 203–208.

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[53] See e.g. M. Adraoui, op. cit. (2009); O. Roy, *Globalised Islam. The search for a new ummah.* London: Hurst & Company, 2004.

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[62] I. Roex, op. cit. (2013), pp. 269–272.

[63] Based on observations and interviews during fieldwork in Antwerp (Belgium), May 2–3, 2013; see also S. Hamid, op. cit. (2009), p. 401.

[64] AIVD, op. cit (2007); AIVD (2009), *Weerstand en tegenkracht. Actuele trends en ontwikkelingen van het salafisme in Nederland.* Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst: Den Haag.

[65] M. Adraoui, op. cit. (2009).

[66] O. Roy, op. cit. (2004).

[67] This is already happening in Belgium. During recent fieldwork among various Salafi networks in Antwerp, the author met several Muslim women wearing the niqab (face veil) who isolate themselves from society because of the so-called burka ban. In the Netherlands, there is currently no such ban in place.