

Changing debates on Islamic schools in the Netherlands from 1988 to 2019

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Introduction

In September 2019, Dutch Newspaper research revealed that materials used in Islamic primary schools contain phrases such as ‘boys and girls should never look each other in the eyes’, ‘Allah abhors homosexuality’ and that Allah ‘curses’ boys who want to look like girls and vice versa.¹ Earlier that year, the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) reported that pupils of an Islamic school in Amsterdam are influenced by teachers who have ties with terrorist organizations.² The above findings on Islamic schools raised serious concerns and led to a revival of the recurring discussion among members of parliament on the adaptation of article 23 in the Dutch Constitution, which states that everyone should be able to set up a school and that public and special education should be treated on an equal financial footing.³ This debate does not touch upon Islamic education alone, it concerns the Dutch education system in which religious schools can be seen as a heritage of the Dutch pillarized society. Critics have often argued that segregated education hinders the integration of pupils with an immigrant background.⁴ Islamic schools are especially criticized, as the integration of Muslims has been an issue of concern ever since they have become a part of Dutch society. Despite their controversial reputation and the negative publicity they received, Islamic schools have grown by 60 percent in the last decade.⁵ As of 2020, The Netherlands has 54 Islamic primary schools and 2 secondary schools, with over 15,000 children attending.⁶

In this thesis, the course of the debate on Islamic education in the Netherlands will be analyzed. It answers the question: *How and why have public and political debates on Islamic schools in the Netherlands changed from 1988 to 2019?* The objective of this research is not only to identify how the debate has evolved since the establishment of Islamic schools in the Netherlands and what actors and factors were key to these changing debates, but also to

¹ ‘Allah verafschuwt homoseksualiteit, leren kinderen op Islamitische basisscholen’, NOS 11-09-2019. <<https://nos.nl/nieuwsuur/artikel/2301278-allah-verafschuwt-homoseksualiteit-leren-kinderen-op-islamitische-basisscholen.html>>, Accessed 28-04-2020.

² ‘Kabinet dreigt islamitische school met sluiting, Rutte raadt school af’, NOS 08-03-2019. <<https://nos.nl/artikel/2275016-kabinet-dreigt-islamitische-school-met-sluiting-rutte-raadt-school-af.html>> Accessed 28-04-2020.

³ ‘PvdA en VVD willen via grondwetwijziging meer grip op islamitisch onderwijs’, NOS 13-09-2019 <<https://nos.nl/artikel/2301385-pvda-en-vvd-willen-via-grondwetwijziging-meer-grip-op-islamitisch-onderwijs.html>> Accessed 28-04-2020.

⁴ M. Beemsterboer, ‘Islamitische scholen dragen bij aan integratie’, *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid* 10:1 (2019) 26-36, spec. 26.

⁵ ‘Islamitisch onderwijs groeit in tien jaar met 60 procent’, NOS 11-12-2019. <<https://nos.nl/artikel/2314225-islamitisch-onderwijs-groeit-in-tien-jaar-tijd-met-60-procent.html>> Accessed 28-04-2020.

⁶ Ibidem.

compare debates at the national and local levels of government. Newspapers will be analyzed to identify the public debate, and to determine to what extent the press and politics related to each other and where influenced by each other. Islamic schools have been disputed at several moments and for several reasons in history. These moments caused reactions at the national, as well as local level, as they concerned schools in different municipalities in the Netherlands. It is therefore interesting to look at diverging responses to Islamic schools at different levels and to determine what issues were identified and how problems were framed with regard to the schools. This way, a comprehensive and complete narrative of the debate on Islamic schools in the Netherlands is created. For this research, different types of primary sources have been analyzed: parliamentary debates and policy documents, reports from public authorities, newspaper articles from national and local newspapers, municipal council reports and policy documents from local governments. The sources will be extensively discussed in the section on material and methods below.

The first two chapters of this thesis provide a theoretical framework and background information that is important to contextualize the following analysis. In Chapter 1, the section on theory outlines explanations on why the issue was a topic of debate as well as theories that could explain why change in the debate occurred. The historiography section gives an overview of the academic debate and discusses publications on Islamic schools in the Netherlands as well as other Western countries, and it explains in what ways this thesis adds to the existing literature. The materials & methods section discusses how primary sources had been acquired and how the sources were used in this research. Chapter 2 consists of contextualizing information on pillarization, Muslims and Islamic education in the Netherlands. Chapter 3 to 5 consist of the analysis of primary sources. These chapters are chronologically divided into time frames that will be further explained in the material & method section. The conclusion answers the research question of this thesis and outlines the contribution of this research to the field.

1 Theory & Historiography

Theory

Change of the debate

A number of factors can explain why the debate on Islamic schools developed in a certain way. According to Duyvendak and Scholten, several policy frame shifts can be identified with regard to immigration and integration policy in the Netherlands.⁷ The goal of the 1980s Minorities Policy in the Netherlands was to achieve ‘a society, in which the minorities that live in the Netherlands, as individuals and as a group, can have an equal place and have full opportunities for development, by means of promoting emancipation and socio-economic participation and combating discrimination.’⁸ Islamic institutions were thus seen as a means of emancipation. In the 1990s, this idea shifted to an emphasis on the integration of minorities into Dutch society, and the responsibility of newcomers to comply with Dutch language, norms and values, manifested in the 1994 Integration Policy. Moreover, in the beginning of the 1990s, leader of the Liberal Party VVD, Frits Bolkestein, broke taboo and triggered a public debate by being one of the first politicians to declare that ‘Islam was a threat to liberal democracy and a hindrance for integration of immigrants.’⁹ From the 21st century, integration policy took an even more assimilationist turn in response to claims that Dutch policy had caused a ‘multicultural tragedy’. Among others, the populist politician Pim Fortuyn made the claim that the Dutch integration approach had failed, especially in socio-cultural terms. Whereas the Integration Policy had stressed ‘active citizenship’, the new integration policy stressed ‘common citizenship’, which meant that ‘the unity of society must be found in what members have in common – that is that people speak Dutch, and that one abides to basic Dutch norms.’¹⁰ These frame shifts are important for the way in which Islamic schools were perceived, as integration of minorities increasingly became problematic, and Islamic schools were seen as hindering integration and fostering segregation.

⁷ J.W. Duyvendak & P. Scholten, ‘Deconstructing the Dutch multicultural model: A frame perspective on Dutch immigrant integration policymaking’, *Comparative European Politics* 10:3 (2012) 266-282.

⁸ P. Scholten & R. Holzhaacker, ‘Bonding, bridging and ethnic minorities in the Netherlands: Changing discourses in a changing nation’, *Nations and Nationalism* 15:1 (2009) 81-100, spec. 90.

⁹ Scholten & Holzhaacker, ‘Bonding, bridging’, 93.

¹⁰ Duyvendak & Scholten, ‘Deconstructing the Dutch multicultural model’, 274.

Another important factor is the securitization debate that followed after several international and national events such as 9/11 in 2001 and the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004. The securitization debate focused on Islam as a threat to democracy and Western society, which influenced the way in which Islamic institutions were associated with political Islam and radicalization.¹¹ In this era, a political shift to the right took place in the Netherlands: after 8 years of a ‘purple’ cabinet consisting of the Labor Party (PvdA), the Christian Democrats (CDA) and the Liberals (VVD), a more right-oriented government took office in 2002. Moreover, the popularity of right-wing populism and anti-Islam rhetoric the anti-immigrant Party for Freedom (PVV) led by Geert Wilders increased, which influenced the debate about integration and the ‘islamization of society’.¹² Related to the securitization debate, the sense of Islamophobia that increased in the Netherlands since 2015. According to Vellega, the perceived threat regarding Muslims has increased since 2000, and it has fluctuated with violence committed in the name of Islam in the West. Apart from 9/11 and the murder of Theo van Gogh, the attacks in Paris in 2015 and bombings in Brussels in 2016 were incidents that triggered islamophobia in the Netherlands.¹³ This corresponds with the way in which the debate around Islamic schools developed since the 21st century, in particular with the way in which the principle of the freedom of education was being debated. Finally, the interaction between Dutch political actors and the press are an important element that can explain why the debate developed a certain way. The interaction between media and politics is a frequently researched topic. Newspapers express their views and often make their own contribution to political agenda-setting and opinion formation through their editorials.¹⁴ Roggeband and Vliegthart have demonstrated that a mutual influence between framing in the media and in the political arena exists, but that there is relatively little correlation between both spheres, and that there are diverging shifts in framing in both realms during different periods in time.¹⁵

¹¹ F.J. Buijs, ‘Muslims in the Netherlands: Social and political developments after 9/11’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35:3 (2009) 421-438, spec. 421.

¹² S. Vellenga, ‘Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands: concepts, developments, and backdrops’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 33:2 (2018) 175-192, spec. 186.

¹³ Ibidem, 187.

¹⁴ C. Roggeband & R. Vliegthart, ‘Divergent framing: The public debate on migration in the Dutch parliament and media, 1995–2004’, *West European Politics* 30:3 (2007) 524-548, spec. 527.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 543.

Historiography

Achievement levels

The majority of literature on Islamic schools can be placed within the field of educational science. Two major debates within the literature can be identified: one focusing on school performance and the other on social integration. Geert Driessen and Michael Merry have published a lot on Islamic schools in the Netherlands, as well as in other countries. Driessen, in cooperation with Bezemer, Valkenberg and Merry, has done several quantitative studies dating from 1999 to 2016 on Dutch Islamic schools' achievement levels. Studies up to 2008 show that Islamic schools perform somewhat better than schools with a comparable socio-economically disadvantaged student population but continue to lag considerably behind the average Dutch school.¹⁶ One of the central motives for founding Islamic schools was to improve the educational environment and quality and thus the children's learning outcomes. Islamic schools should perform better than comparable schools. Driessen noted that, in 2008, the realization of this ambition has not yet been successful and that there has been virtually no development in this area over the years.¹⁷ In 2016, Driessen and Merry present slightly more optimistic results on Dutch Islamic schools' performances. They show how over time, Islamic schools have begun to tackle educational disadvantage, attributed to several reasons: First, they argue that Islamic schools attend to the cultural and religious background of their pupils and therefore improve their motivation to learn.¹⁸ Second, stronger discipline and parental support, but also complete financial support from the government, would have made gains in improving the academic performance of their pupils.¹⁹ Finally, due to the monoethnic character and alignment with their home environment, pupils would be more likely to feel at home and experience greater self-confidence, and this can contribute to improved academic performance.²⁰

Dronkers largely shares these views and states that a more conservative pedagogic approach, more time-on-task for core subjects, lower ethnic school diversity and the active Islamic community around the primary school could explain the relative higher quality of

¹⁶ G. Driessen & J. Bezemer, 'Background and achievement levels of Islamic schools in the Netherlands: are the reservations justified?', *Race Ethnicity and Education* 2:2 (1999) 235-256; G. Driessen & P. Valkenberg, 'Islamic schools in the Netherlands: Compromising between identity and quality?', *British Journal of Religious Education* 23:1 (2000) 15-26; G. Driessen, 'De verwachtingen waargemaakt? Twee decennia islamitische basisscholen', *Mens & Maatschappij* 83:2 (2008) 168-189.

¹⁷ G. Driessen, 'De verwachtingen waargemaakt? Twee decennia islamitische basisscholen', *Mens & Maatschappij* 83:2 (2008) 168-189, spec. 169.

¹⁸ Driessen & Merry, 'On the right track?', 864.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 875.

²⁰ Ibidem.

Islamic primary schools.²¹ However, he adds to this by arguing that a challenge for Islamic schools are the gender values and norms related with the Islamic religion in the Mediterranean region, where most Muslim migrants in continental Europe originate. Dronkers argues these gender values and norms could hamper educational performances of both male and female children because they reference a society which no longer exists for them and thus blocks adjustment to modern society.²²

Social integration

A more contested debate in the literature, is whether or not Islamic schools contribute to the social integration of pupils.²³ Merry and Driessen noted in 2006 that most teachers at Islamic schools are non-Islamic, which makes it difficult for the teachers to convey Islamic norms and values and rather improbable that they will propagate anti-integrative ideas.²⁴ Moreover, they question whether the stricter rules imposed by the government, referring to the requirement that new schools have no more than 80% of its students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, will have the intended effect of promoting integration: The disappearance or marginalization of Islamic schools as a possible outcome of this rule can result in Islamic children moving to existing schools with a high concentration of immigrant students from disadvantaged milieus. There would be no reason to expect that this will improve these students' achievements. Moreover, this may result in Muslim parents sending their children to extracurricular instruction in mosques which fall outside of state control, some of them being known for spreading anti-integrating ideas.²⁵

More recent research by Merry touches upon the worry many people have regarding the harm that Islamic schools would do by indoctrinating their pupils. Merry balances two different types of harm Muslim children might face: that of indoctrinating anti-integrative ideas *within* the schools, and discrimination and racism and socio-economic disadvantages

²¹ J. Dronkers, 'Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands', *Journal of School Choice* 10:1 (2016) 6-21, spec. 18.

²² Dronkers, 'Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands', 19.

²³ M. Beemsterboer, 'Islamitische scholen dragen bij aan integratie', *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid* 10:1 (2019) 26-36; G. Driessen & M. S. Merry, 'Islamic schools in the Netherlands: Expansion or marginalization?', *Interchange* 37:3 (2006) 201-223; M.S. Merry, 'Indoctrination, Islamic schools, and the broader scope of harm', *Theory and Research in Education* 16:2 (2018) 162-178; I. Niehaus, 'Emancipation or disengagement? Islamic schools in Britain and the Netherlands', in: A. Alvarez Veinguer, G. Dietz, D. Jozsa & T. Knauth eds., *Islam in Education in European Countries: Pedagogical Concepts and Empirical Findings* (Münster 2009) 113-129.

²⁴ G. Driessen & M. S. Merry, 'Islamic schools in the Netherlands: Expansion or marginalization?', *Interchange* 37:3 (2006) 201-223, 216.

²⁵ Driessen & Merry, 'Islamic schools in the Netherlands', 217.

outside of these schools. According to Merry, the latter one is the most harmful for the pupils' future. Merry confirms the idea that most Islamic schools are indeed guilty of indoctrination. However, they can play an important in mitigating the harm that exist outside the schools, in terms of academic challenge and critical thinking but also by providing an educational space in which to feel safe, belong, and foster positive relationships. Therefore, parents have strong reasons to select Islamic schools for their child over the alternatives.²⁶

In her doctoral research in 2019, Maartje Beemsterboer concluded that Islamic schools in the Netherlands do foster social integration, contrary to the general opinion. Her research explains with practical examples how Islamic primary schools contribute to the integration of Muslims in Dutch society. According to Beemsterboer, Islamic primary schools offer parents and children a sense of security. The feeling of security forms the basis for a close school community, which increases the involvement in education. The feeling of parents and pupils that they are safe and understood increases pupils' self-confidence, contributes to educational performance and has a positive effect on integration when discussing sensitive issues. The religious identity of the school makes that teachers are sensitive to possible areas of tension between home culture and the norm at school: the school would often take a step further into the societal context than would happen at home.²⁷

Policies and practices

Another part of the literature on Islamic schools focuses not just their roles and outputs but examines Islamic schools within the wider context of national practices and policies. Merry and Driessen have analyzed and compared the mechanisms for funding, choice and control of Islamic schools in the Netherlands, Belgium and the United States, identifying fundamental differences in each country. In the Netherlands, constitutional guarantees have made it possible for Muslims to demand equal funding for Islamic schools, which make them equal to any other religious group. Equality on paper, however, has not translated into equality in practice: Muslims are commonly seen as a threatening political presence in a way that the other groups generally are not. Islamic schools continue to be viewed with distrust, and elections make them easy targets for vilification.²⁸ Moreover, the maintenance and control of the schools by the Dutch state and lack of Muslim staff make the aims of Muslim educators

²⁶ M. S. Merry, 'Indoctrination, Islamic schools, and the broader scope of harm', *Theory and Research in Education* 16:2 (2018) 162-178, spec. 173.

²⁷ Beemsterboer, 'Islamitische scholen dragen bij aan integratie', 34.

²⁸ M. S. Merry & G. Driessen, 'Islamic schools in three western countries: Policy and procedure', *Comparative Education* 41:4 (2005) 411-432, spec. 427.

extremely difficult to implement.²⁹ In Belgium, a comparable constitutional freedom exists, but the state has tried to circumvent an urgent call for Islamic schools by offering wide-scale Islamic instruction in state schools.³⁰ In the United States, Islamic schools are private schools, which means they receive no direct state funding. This sets them big financial and logistical challenges,³¹ but also means less federal or state control.³² Moreover, with a much wealthier and better-educated Muslim population, many American Muslims are better able to pay the high fees that Islamic schools require to operate.³³

Leeman illustrates the paradoxical relationship between the promoting of citizenship and social integration and faith-based education in the Netherlands. She refers to the heightened political emphasis on the demand for schools to help create social cohesion by teaching and promoting citizenship, norms and values, but schools being free to choose how they approach their citizenship education.³⁴ An increase in regulations has led to confrontations and incidents in which double standards are quickly applied: An example is how comments regarding the disapproval of sexual diversity, gender equality or ethnic-religious tolerance made by Orthodox Christians are easily excused under the guise of religious freedom, while similar statements by Dutch Muslims are not tolerated and are seen as strong signals of non-integration.³⁵

Maussen and Vermeulen argue that a regime shift has occurred in the Netherlands with respect to understandings of religious and educational freedoms, especially with regard to the balancing of associational freedoms and non-discrimination.³⁶ They argue that since the 21st century, liberal equality has gained more importance than religious freedom, which will make it more difficult for conservative religious groups in the Netherlands to organize education in ways they were used to.³⁷

Most existing literature on Islamic schools falls within the field of educational science and focuses on either Islamic schools' performances or their contribution to the pupils' social

²⁹ Merry & Driessen, 'Islamic schools in three western countries', 426.

³⁰ Ibidem, 427.

³¹ Ibidem, 424.

³² Ibidem, 426.

³³ Ibidem, 427.

³⁴ Y. Leeman, 'Education and Diversity in the Netherlands', *European Educational Research Journal* 27:1 (2008) 50-59, spec. 55.

³⁵ Leeman, 'Education and Diversity in the Netherlands', 55.

³⁶ M. Maussen & F. Vermeulen, 'Liberal equality and toleration for conservative religious minorities: Decreasing opportunities for religious schools in the Netherlands?', *Comparative Education* 51:1 (2015) 87-104, spec. 87.

³⁷ Maussen & Vermeulen, 'Liberal equality and toleration for conservative religious minorities', 100.

integration. A smaller share has been written on Islamic schools within the context of national policies and society. Not much historical research on the subject has been done.

This thesis contributes to the literature in multiple ways. First, it provides a historical analysis of the evolution of the debate on Islamic schools. Second, it pays attention to the debate not only at the national, but also the local level, which is something that currently missing in the literature. Third, this thesis identifies the way in which different levels: the national government, local governments and the press interacted, and how this interaction determined the debate.

Material & Methods

For this research, different types of primary sources have been analyzed: Minutes of parliamentary debates and parliamentary documents; Investigation reports from the Dutch Security Service (BVD, from 2002 AIVD) and the Education Inspectorate; Policy documents and reports of municipal council meetings of Schiedam and Vlaardingen, and online recorded meetings of the council of Vlaardingen and national and local newspapers. parliamentary debates and -documents are used to identify the national political debate, and the investigation reports provide context and additional information to the political debate. The parliamentary documents were retrieved from the online database for Dutch parliamentary documents, www.officielebekendmakingen.nl.³⁸ The local debate has been identified with reports of council meetings, local policy documents and local newspaper articles. These sources were found through the website of the municipalities of Schiedam and Vlaardingen.³⁹ National newspapers from 1988 to 1995 had been retrieved from the Dutch newspaper database Delpher⁴⁰, and articles from after 1995 had been retrieved from the newspaper database LexisNexis.⁴¹ For the national as well as local databases, the queries “Islamic school” and “Islamic schools” have been used to find documents in which the topic had been discussed. Analyzing parliamentary and council reports and policy documents has its limitations. These documents clearly display arguments and statements of politicians and political parties, however the underlying motives of politicians can not be retrieved. It is therefore not always clear what the driving forces behind certain statements or argumentations were.

³⁸ <www.officielebekendmakingen.nl>

³⁹ <schiedam.raadsinformatie.nl, vlaardingen.raadsinformatie.nl, schiedam.courant.nu>

⁴⁰ <www.Delpher.nl>

⁴¹ <www.lexisnexis.nl>

National newspapers are used to identify the public debate, as newspapers are crucial forums for this public debate and crucial players in it.⁴² Different newspapers with different backgrounds and political views are used, as specified in figure 1. Moreover, newspapers are used to support the mapping of political debates. Due to the absence of digital council reports and minutes of council meetings until 2000, local newspapers from the city of *Schiedam* are used to identify the debate at the local level from 1988 to 2000, and to support documents from the municipal council to map the local debate from 2000 onwards. Analyzing newspapers needs caution too, as claim makers make use of the media to express their opinion and are steering into a certain direction. An article could be an independent statement, an editorial or an opinion piece. The purpose of analyzing newspapers is important when using newspapers as a source. If objective information is retrieved from newspapers, it is important to take bias into account.

To determine the way in which the debate changed, new problems connected to Islamic are identified in the political and public debate. This thesis analyses different levels of debate: the national political debate, the public debate, and the local debate, and it analyses how these different levels relate to each other. The public debate can deviate from the political debate, as media provide a forum for critical outsiders.⁴³ Stories and claim makers in the media could influence or shape the political debate, and vice versa. This thesis identifies the way in which press and politics differed from each other and were influenced by each other. Moreover, the national debate is compared to the local debate. Policy debates at the local level can differ significantly from nation debates, as Scholten and Poppelaars argue.⁴⁴ Differences between problems related to Islamic schools between the national and the local level are therefore identified.

The Dutch cities *Schiedam* and *Vlaardingen* are chosen to analyze as cases for the local debate, for several reasons. First, the online database for local newspapers from Schiedam as well as municipal council reports for Schiedam and Vlaardingen is extensive and accessible, contrary to other municipality's databases. Moreover, Schiedam has a large immigrant population and 2 Islamic schools had been established. The topic of Islamic schools has been widely discussed in the city's council and newspapers and is therefore interesting to analyse as a case study. As the debate in Schiedam stagnated around 2005,

⁴² C. Roggeband & R. Vliegthart, 'Divergent framing: The public debate on migration in the Dutch parliament and media, 1995–2004', *West European Politics* 30:3 (2007) 524-548.

⁴³ Ibidem, 537.

⁴⁴ C. Poppelaars & P. Scholten, 'Two worlds apart: The divergence of national and local immigrant integration policies in the Netherlands', *Administration & Society* 40:4 (2008) 335-357.

when the second Islamic school was approved, the debate shifted to the neighboring city of Vlaardingen as there had been the effort for a third Islamic school by the same school board since 2004. Therefore, the debate in Vlaardingen had been analyzed in the last chapter.

The scope of this thesis is 1988 to 2019: it covers the entire time frame of the existence of Islamic schools in the Netherlands. For the research chapters, different time frames have been used. The first research chapter covers 12 years, the second chapter 5 years, and the third chapter 19 years. These time frames are chosen according to important breaking points that generated changes in the debate. 1988 is the starting point of the first chapter, as the first Islamic schools were established in this year. 2001 is the starting point of the second chapter, due to the securitization debate that emerged after 9/11. 2006 is the starting point of the last chapter, as the debate shifted to a focus on the quality of the schools.

The scope of the research is rather large and the debate is extensive, therefore it is not possible to cover everything that has been said or done in political debates and newspapers concerning Islamic schools. From 1988 to 2000, the debate had just been taking off, meaning that the sources available were less extensive than after 2000, when the debate was in full swing. Therefore, the first chapter of the analysis covers a more complete array of the events and debates in parliament and newspapers on what was happening around Islamic schools. For the second and third research chapters, a selection of the available sources has been made based on what are considered the most important moments for the changing of the debate.

Figure 1

Newspaper	Characteristic	Number of articles used		
		1988-2000	2001-2005	2006-2019
national				
Algemeen Dagblad	Merge of 7 regional newspapers, right-wing	2	0	1
NRC Handelsblad	Liberal newspaper	9	2	7

Het Parool	Left-wing newspaper, focused on Amsterdam	3	0	0
Trouw	originally Protestant newspaper, left-oriented	9	3	5
De Telegraaf	Right-wing, populist newspaper	2	4	4
De Volkskrant	Left-wing newspaper	8	4	7
Het Vrije Volk	Social Democrat newspaper, existed until 1991	1	0	0
Local				
De Havenloods	Rotterdam and surroundings	1	0	0
Het Nieuwe stadsblad	Schiedam, Vlaardingen and Maassluis	3	7	0
De Maaspost/ Maasstad	Rotterdam and surroundings	1	3	0
Rotterdams dagblad	Rotterdam and surroundings	0	0	1
Waterweg	Schiedam, Vlaardingen and Maassluis	4	0	1

2 Context

The following chapter provides a context to this research by discussing pillarization, Muslim immigration and integration policies, and Islamic schools in the Netherlands.

Pillarization and education in the Netherlands

In order to contextualize the debate about Islamic schools in the Netherlands, it is important to understand the Dutch tradition of pillarization. Pillarization refers to a period in Dutch history, between the 1900s and the late 1960s, when most areas of group human activity – political parties, labor unions, newspapers and broadcasting and education– were marked by separate organizations representing the different religious and secular identities⁴⁵, the so-called ‘pillars’. As a result, the Dutch society was a ‘pillarized society,’ a typical Dutch way of living apart and living together in a country that is characterized by religious diversity in a monocultural context.⁴⁶ In this context, the establishment of Islamic organizations since the 1980s was often seen as emancipation of Muslims in the Netherlands by creating an ‘Islamic pillar.’

Part of the process of pillarization was the battle for equal treatment of public and private schools in the early 20th century, when a school dispute played out in the Netherlands due to unequal funding of Christian and state schools. It led to the constitutional establishment of equal treatment of public and private schools in 1917.⁴⁷ This implies, among other things, the freedom to establish a school, the freedom to teach according to a particular ideology or principles, and the freedom to choose a school. All these principles are anchored in article 23 of the constitution. However, the Dutch Ministry of Education does set quality standards which apply to both public and private education; it prescribes the subjects to be studied, the attainment targets, and the teacher qualifications.⁴⁸ These freedoms and the associated right to equal funding by the government have led over the years to a diverse array of denominational schools, among them Islamic schools.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ M. Maussen, ‘Pillarization and Islam: Church-state traditions and Muslim claims for recognition in the Netherlands’, *Comparative European Politics* 10:3 (2012) 337-353, spec. 338.

⁴⁶ I. ter Avest & C. Bakker, ‘Islamic education in the Netherlands’, in: H. Daun, & R. Arjmand eds., *Handbook of Islamic education* (2018) 1-14, spec. 4.

⁴⁷ Merry & Driessen, ‘Expansion or marginalization’, 203.

⁴⁸ Merry & Driessen, ‘Islamic schools in the Netherlands after an era of turmoil’, 858.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

Muslims in the Netherlands

Due to extensive economic growth after World War II, the Netherlands soon experienced a labor shortage, especially in sectors that required unskilled labor. This shortage was sought to be resolved by recruiting laborers from abroad. In the 1960s, the Dutch government signed recruitment agreements with a number of Mediterranean countries, among them Turkey and Morocco, leading to a high influx of Muslim guest workers to the country.⁵⁰ From 1970 to 1975 the number of Muslim immigrants doubled from 50,000 to 100,000, and by 1995 the Netherlands was home to nearly 700.000 Muslims.⁵¹ Before 1975 – in line with how they were named: ‘guest’ workers – the Dutch population as well as the guest workers themselves were convinced of their return to their countries of origin.⁵² This idea of temporality was the main reason why the guest worker immigrants were initially received with open arms by Dutch society.⁵³ However, as the family reunification of Turkish and Moroccan labor migrants increased in size and its social implications became visible, the assumption of temporary residence came under increasing pressure.⁵⁴ At the end of the 1970s, a fundamental paradigm shift took place in the vision of Dutch politics on the migration issue: from a ‘temporariness’ or ‘guest workers’ paradigm’ to a ‘minority paradigm’. Whereas migrants used to be considered temporary guests, they would now be accepted as permanent members of Dutch society, whose full position and participation had to be guaranteed by the government.⁵⁵

The 1980s Minorities policy was known for its multiculturalist approach: as a legacy of pillarization, the emancipation of different groups was seen as the way of ‘integration ‘with retention of one’s own cultural identity’.⁵⁶ By the late 1980s and early 1990s, it became evident to policy-makers that the goals of the Minorities Policy had not been achieved: migrants had not integrated into the labor market and educational achievement of immigrant children was low.⁵⁷ In 1994, a new Integration Policy was introduced, which emphasized

⁵⁰ W.A. Shadid, ‘Public debates over Islam and the awareness of Muslim identity in the Netherlands’, *European Education* 38:2 (2006) 10-22, spec. 11.

⁵¹ J. Rath, T. Sunier & A. Meyer, ‘Islam in the Netherlands. The establishment of Islamic institutions in a de-pillarizing society’, *Journal of Economic and Social Geography* 88:4 (1997) 389-395, spec. 389.

⁵² Ter Avest & Bakker, ‘Islamic education in the Netherlands’, 1.

⁵³ S. Bonjour, *Grens en gezin: Beleidsvorming inzake gezinsmigratie in Nederland, 1955-2005* (Amsterdam 2009) 57.

⁵⁴ Bonjour, *Grens en gezin*, 136.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 137.

⁵⁶ Scholten & Holzhaacker ‘Bonding, bridging’, 90.

⁵⁷ E. Vasta, ‘From ethnic minorities to ethnic majority policy: Multiculturalism and the shift to assimilationism in the Netherlands’, *Ethnic and racial studies* 30:5 (2007) 713-740, spec.717.

migrant's own responsibility to integrate and aimed at familiarizing migrants with Dutch language, culture, norms and values.⁵⁸

Islamic schools in the Netherlands

The constitutional freedom of education offered the opportunity for the growing number of Muslims to establish their own schools. The first initiatives were taken in 1980, but it was not until 1988 that the first Islamic schools were founded in the cities of Rotterdam and Eindhoven.⁵⁹ Over time, some Muslim parents had become dissatisfied with the schools their children attended. There were two main reasons for this: the absence of Islamic instruction and scope for Islamic practice in schools, and the academic deficits of immigrant children that these new schools should overcome.⁶⁰ The pioneer work of the first schools and the establishment of the Islamic School Board Organization (ISBO) in 1990 paved the way for the founding of later schools.⁶¹ By 1995 there were 29 Islamic primary schools with a total of 5400 pupils. By 2006, there were 46 Islamic primary schools, and two Islamic secondary schools.⁶² As of 2018, there are 54 Islamic primary schools and two secondary schools, with slightly over 1 percent of all Dutch children and 12,5% of all Dutch Muslim children attending.⁶³ Approximately 40 percent of the pupils are of Moroccan descent, 30 percent of Turkish descent, and the rest constituted a population of mainly Surinamese and refugees from countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq.⁶⁴ In most schools, pupils from one specific ethnic group are dominant, either Moroccan (54 percent) or Turkish (27 percent).⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 718.

⁵⁹ Merry & Driessen, 'Expansion or Marginalization?', 204.

⁶⁰ Merry & Driessen, 'On the right track?', 859.

⁶¹ Merry & Driessen, 'Expansion or Marginalization?', 204.

⁶² Merry and Driessen, 'On the right track?', 861.

⁶³ 'Islamitisch onderwijs Islamitisch onderwijs groeit: aantal leerlingen in tien jaar tijd met 60 procent toegenomen', *De Volkskrant* 11-12-2019.

⁶⁴ Merry & Driessen, 'On the right track?', 861.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

3 1988-2000: Islamic schools are getting off the ground

The following chapters provide an analysis of debates on Islamic schools in the Netherlands from 1988 to 2019. Debates in national politics, national newspapers, and debates at the local level (*Schiedam* in chapters 3 and 4, *Vlaardingen* in chapter 5) have been analyzed, and the relation between these different levels of debate are discussed in the sub-conclusions. This chapter discusses Islamic education in the Netherlands from 1988-2000. In 1988, the first two Islamic schools were established in Rotterdam and Eindhoven and the debate had just started.

3.1 The National level

3.1.1 Politics

In January 1989, *NRC Handelsblad* stated that the discussion in national politics on Islamic schools had barely begun, because ‘no one in the parliament wants to deny Islamic parents the right to their own schools.’⁶⁶ In April 1989, Secretary of State for Education, Ms. Ginjaar-Maas (Liberal party VVD), in consultation with Minister of Education Mr. Deetman (Christian Democratic Party CDA), sent out a policy document to the House of Representatives called ‘Foundation of Hindu or Islamic primary schools.’ The memorandum discusses recent developments with regard to the founding of these schools and assesses these developments against the constitutional frameworks. In addition, some critical comments to these developments were made. The document concludes by stating the schools could enhance pupil’s self-awareness and increase their school results, which could lead to the strengthening of their social position and eventually further integration into Dutch society. It expresses ‘some concerns’ about the possible segregation aspects, and the impediment to the acquisition of Dutch as a second language.⁶⁷ However, Ginjaar-Maas stated that ‘where this is the case, one can regret it, but this is primarily their own choice.’⁶⁸ The document stresses that the foundation of these schools falls within the legal frameworks and does not give any reasons to revise laws and regulations.⁶⁹ The possible disadvantages mentioned do not seem a matter of urgency. In line with the 1980s Minority policy, the document implies that

⁶⁶ K. Versteegh, ‘School met de Koran: De onstuitbare opmars van het islamitisch onderwijs’, *NRC Handelsblad*, 17-01-1989.

⁶⁷ TK 1988-1989, nr. 21 110, 25-04-1989.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

emancipation with retention of one's own identity, rather than cultural integration, was regarded important.

The political party that was clearly the most supportive of Islamic schools at the time, was CDA. The explanation for this is two-fold: First, CDA was a supporter of the emancipation of minorities within their own circle, and second, CDA was, as a Christian party, a supporter of private education. This was reflected in their election program 1989-1993, which states that 'the CDA stands for the right of all cultural minorities to pursue their own emancipation within our legal order'. Moreover, the program states the vision of CDA gives private schools the 'undiminished preference', and that the government 'must respect the own responsibility of the educational institutions and enable them to do so in practice'.⁷⁰ That CDA was the party that was most concerned with Islamic schools at the time, appears from parliamentary questions asked by Mr. Huibers (CDA) In May 1990, A *Volkskrant* article on a so-called 'school dispute' in the West of Amsterdam led to parliamentary questions by Mr. Huibers (CDA). Local representatives of PvdA, D66 (Centre-left) and GroenLinks (Green left) in the West-Amsterdam district council protested against the expansion of the As Siddieq school, as it would inevitably enhance school segregation in the neighbourhood. local deputies of CDA were in favor of the school's expansion.⁷¹ According to Huibers, the district council was trying to thwart the expansion on the basis of false arguments. He posed the question to state secretary of education Mr. Wallage (Labor Party PvdA), if he shares with him the view that 'the constitutional right of school foundations is at stake here and that numerous barriers to enlargement are unjustifiably being raised.'⁷²

In 1992, the tone of the debate changes, as for the first time a Member of parliament speaks out strongly against Islamic schools. Mr. Franssen, education specialist for VVD, said he was 'shocked' by the 'tumultuous' growth of Islamic schools. 'I do not believe that a process in which the number of Islamic schools increases by these numbers is conducive to the integration process of cultural minorities. In my opinion, integration presupposes a more or less permanent way of bringing the Dutch and non-Dutch together', he stated in a radio interview.⁷³ Moreover, he questions the quality of the schools and asks Wallage for a special investigation by the education inspection on this matter through parliamentary questions. He also plead for investigating suspected links with religious fundamentalist or non-democratic

⁷⁰ 'Verantwoord voortbouwen', Verkiezingsprogramma CDA 1989-1993.

⁷¹ M. Sommer, 'Schoolstrijd om witte en zwarte kinderen', *De Volkskrant* 10-05-1990.

⁷² TK 1989-1990, nr. 795, 16-07-1990.

⁷³ 'VVD 'geschokt' door groei islamitische basisscholen', *NRC Handelsblad* 13-01-1992.

organizations in countries of origin when processing applications for Islamic schools. He referred to the constitutional separation between church and state that may be compromised if these links would exist.⁷⁴ Wallage responded by stating he had no intention to slow down the growth of Islamic schools. He did not see any grounded reason for investigating either the functioning of the schools or links between future school administrators and fundamentalist organizations: Taking steps on this ground would imply a strong bias.⁷⁵ CDA and PvdA showed little sympathy for Franssens' requests. Mr. Van de Camp (CDA) reacted by claiming that Islamic schools are a positive contribution for the integration of minorities. Ms. Netelenbos (PvdA) was not necessarily enthusiastic about the schools from the perspective of school segregation, but referred to the constitutional freedom to open such schools.⁷⁶ By this moment, the debate does not seem to have really taken off yet and most parties, apart from VVD, are keeping relatively quiet on the subject. D66, PvdA and Groenlinks, do not seem to be necessarily supportive of the schools, but the parties often refer to their right to exist due to the freedom of education.⁷⁷ CDA is the only party that emphasizes the positive aspect of emancipation the schools imply.

The debate stagnates and continues in 1997. It was still mainly VVD that was problematizing Islamic schools, often in an indirect manner. The issue of school segregation and language deficiencies at 'mono-ethnic' schools were often mentioned in the same breath with Islamic schools by the liberal party.⁷⁸ Separate schools were called the 'cradle of problems' regarding racism and discrimination in schools, as they enhance group formation which stand in the way of integration, mutual understanding and tolerance.⁷⁹ CDA was of the opinion that the involuntary emergence of black schools should be seen in a separate context from the establishment of Islamic schools, where most pupils are of immigrant origin.⁸⁰ From 1998, the negativity around Islamic schools in the media was picked up by Members of parliament as SP and VVD MPs started to ask parliamentary questions regarding conflicts between teachers and school boards on fundamentalist rules and practices (by SP) and the rumor that a school in Almere would apply corporal punishment sentences to children.⁸¹

⁷⁴ TK 1991-1992 nr. 337, 19-01-1992.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁶ 'VVD 'geschokt' door groei islamitische basisscholen', *NRC Handelsblad* 13-01-1992.

⁷⁷ TK 1992-1993, 22-09-1992.

⁷⁸ TK 1997-1998, nr. 23, 12-11-1997.; TK 1997-1998, 25601 nr. 4, 24-09-1997.

⁷⁹ TK 1997-1998, 25601 nr. 4, 24-09-1997.

⁸⁰ TK 1997-1998, nr. 23, 12-11-1997; TK 1997-1998, 25601 nr. 4, 24-09-1997.

⁸¹ TK 1998-1999, nr. 390, 25-11-1998.

From 1998, the central theme in the debate was the hassle around the first Islamic secondary school. Secretary of State Adelmund (PvdA) was willing to make an exception for the school that did not fully meet the founding standards as it did not have enough potential students. VVD did not agree and argued that the rules had to be complied with.⁸² CDA was welcoming towards the school and stated that exceptions were made before with regards to founding criteria for public schools. An important factor for the argument by CDA presumably was that at the same time, an application for an Evangelical school was running that did also not meet the criteria of sufficient students.⁸³ Interestingly, the application for the Evangelical school had been approved after all a few days later, while the Islamic school was still rejected: VVD, CDA and the three small Christian reformed parties SGP, GVP and RPF had voted in the parliament in favor of the Evangelical and against the Islamic school. The reasons given seem rather vague: Contrary to the Islamic school, there would be ‘indications’ that the Evangelical school would have enough pupils.⁸⁴ Adelmund submitted a proposal to modify the rules on the founding of secondary schools so that the Islamic school could still start⁸⁵, with success: In 2000 the *Ibn Ghaldoun* school could open its doors.

3.1.2 Newspapers

Emancipation versus segregation

Up to 1990, newspaper articles on the new phenomenon of Islamic schools in the Netherlands predominantly focused on the reasons behind the founding of these schools. To a lesser extent, attention was paid to discussions arising from the establishment of these schools. In 1988, *Algemeen Dagblad* published an extensive article on the first Islamic school Al-Ghazali in Rotterdam, in which one of the schools’ initiators is interviewed. The article portrays a positive image of the school. According to the interviewee, the school was set up to enhance children’s confidence and sense of identity and security, which is important for them entering Dutch society in the future: ‘We don’t isolate ourselves from Dutch society.’⁸⁶ The resemblance with other schools is emphasized: there are no strict clothing regulations and ‘they just speak Dutch.’⁸⁷ Good relations with the neighborhood are mentioned, especially after an open day where ‘prejudices about Muslims were dispelled.’⁸⁸ *De*

⁸² TK 1998-1999, nr. 7, 29-09-1998.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ TK 1998-1999, nr. 10, 06-10-1998.

⁸⁶ ‘School met de Koran’, *Algemeen Dagblad* 10-12-1988.

⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

Volkskrant and *Het Parool* published articles in which the positive aspect of Islamic schools are pointed out: A *Volkskrant* article discusses how the Minister of Education Deetman (CDA), expected more tolerance through Islamic education. According to Deetman, 'The schools can contribute to mutual tolerance and respect for each other's views.'⁸⁹ *Het Parool* published an interview with J. De Jonge, municipal councilor of CDA in Amsterdam and co-director of Amsterdam's first Islamic school, As Siddieq. He calls Islamic schools a positive example of emancipation by self-organization. According to de Jonge, Dutch schools in the past have not taken good care of migrant children and education was not well equipped for them. He believes this could have contributed to relatively high criminality rates among young people from ethnic minorities. Islamic education could offer a solution here by providing education that fits their needs and prepares them for society.⁹⁰

However, there were also some critical and skeptical noises in the media regarding these new schools. Some newspapers referred to the idea that Islamic schools would hinder the integration of minorities and cause segregation instead. School segregation and the formation of 'black' and 'white' schools in Dutch cities were seen as worrying phenomena in the 1980s, Islamic schools would reinforce this problem by attracting only children from Turkish or Moroccan backgrounds.⁹¹ Articles in *Trouw* and *NRC Handelsblad* mentioned the more conservative aspects of the Islamic school in Eindhoven: boys and girls are seated in separate rows, head scarfs are required for females, and men and women are not aloud to shake hands.⁹² *Trouw* referred to the school in Eindhoven as having 'if not fundamentalist, then strong orthodox traits.'⁹³ The newspaper also states that many progressive Muslims are wary of Islamic schools.⁹⁴ In an interview in *Het Parool* in 1991, Turkish female professor C. Kagitcibasi is highly critical of the schools: 'Immigrant children should be at school with Dutch children, that's when they learn the language and culture the quickest.'⁹⁵ Moreover, as the title reads, Kagitcibasi states that the schools are certainly not favorable for girls, referring to the conservative character of the schools.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ 'School met de Koran wordt nieuwe zuil', *De Volkskrant* 24-03-1989.

⁹⁰ 'Eigen school voor Islamieten is teken van Emancipatie', *Het Parool* 01-11-1989

⁹¹ 'Leerlingenprotest op "Zwarte school"' *Het Vrije Volk* 17-03-1988.

⁹² 'School met de Koran: De onstuitbare opmars van het islamitisch onderwijs', *NRC Handelsblad* 17-01-1989., 'Islamitisch onderwijs wil binnen 5 jaar veertig eigen scholen', *Trouw* 20-03-1989.

⁹³ 'Met of zonder hoofddoek: Moslimkinderen bloeien op in een eigen school', *Trouw* 29-03-1989.

⁹⁴ Ibidem.

⁹⁵ 'Islamitische school bewijst meisjes zeker geen dienst', *Het Parool* 08-11-1991.

⁹⁶ 'Islamitische school bewijst meisjes zeker geen dienst', *Het Parool* 08-11-1991.

In 1992, the earlier mentioned statements by Franssen were followed by a peak in newspaper coverage on Islamic schools that year.⁹⁷ In a radio show, Franssen had said he was ‘shocked’ by the rapid growth of Islamic schools, which he considers undesirable from the point of view of the integration of minorities in Dutch society.⁹⁸ His reaction received mainly criticism in the newspapers. *De Volkskrant* as well as *Trouw* nuanced the ‘shocking’ number of 20 Islamic schools by emphasizing that there was a total of 8400 Dutch primary schools, with only 3,5 percent of all Muslim children attending.⁹⁹ The question whether Islamic schools comply with Dutch legislation is called ‘suggestive.’¹⁰⁰ The reporter states that worrying about ‘apartheid’ in the Dutch education system is more appropriate than being shocked about twenty Islamic primary schools, referring to the ‘white flight’ from schools with high percentages of migrant children.¹⁰¹ In another *Volkskrant* article, a pediatrician reacts to Franssen by calling his statements discriminating, contrary to a child's fundamental right of identity, and driven by xenophobia. He states that ‘an important factor for integration is the degree of opportunities for participation in society, and this is determined much more by knowledge, education and socio-economic status than by religion.’¹⁰² In *Trouw*, Researchers Van Koningsveld and Shadid made critical remarks about the liberal party's views: they state that Islamic schools do not deviate from lessons with other schools. Responses are called ‘strongly exaggerated and not corresponding with reality.’ They claim integration is not hindered and there are no valid reasons to suspect ties with fundamentalist organizations.¹⁰³

Fundamentalism

The first half of the 1990s, the debate was mainly characterized by the impact of the phenomenon of the Islamic school on integration, and almost no attention was paid to what was happening inside these schools. This changed in 1996, when a number of incidents caused a lot of negative publicity for Islamic schools. Overall, the Dutch Islamic school took on a more orthodox, fundamentalist character in the media from this period. In December, the

⁹⁷ <www.Delpher.nl>

⁹⁸ ‘Zorg rond toename van moslimscholen’, *De Telegraaf* 13-01-1992; ‘VVD ‘geschokt’ door groei islamitische basisscholen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 13-01-1992; ‘VVD wil weten hoe kabinet over Islamitische zuil denkt’, *Trouw* 13-01-1992.

⁹⁹ ‘Islamitische school is voorbeeld van vrijheid van onderwijs’, *De Volkskrant* 14-01-1992; ‘Les op Islamitische school niet anders’, *Trouw* 15-01-1992.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Islamitische school is voorbeeld van vrijheid van onderwijs’, *De Volkskrant* 14-01-1992.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² ‘Aan wie moet de migrant zich eigenlijk aanpassen?’, *De Volkskrant* 18-01-1992.

¹⁰³ ‘Les op islamitische school niet anders’, *Trouw* 15-01-1992.

El Inkade school in Ede became national news because of seven non-Muslim teachers who applied for resignation due to new strict rules imposed by the school board. The teachers opposed strict clothing regulations and a ban on wearing make-up and smoking, but also the fact that no other religion than Islam may be discussed during lessons.¹⁰⁴ Several newspapers published the personal stories of the seven teachers. It leads to the question if the conflict in Ede stands on its own, or if practices like these representative for other Islamic schools.¹⁰⁵ In 1998, *Het Parool*, *Algemeen Dagblad* and *NRC Handelsblad* post articles about former, non-Islamic teachers that strongly criticize what is going on at all 28 Islamic schools in the Magazine of the Dutch Education Association. The teachers refer to the poor educational quality of the schools and cite examples of strict, orthodox rules and illiberal ideas that are being proclaimed.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the magazine revealed that at the end of 1997, the new chairman of the board of the As Siddieq school in Amsterdam, had a pamphlet distributed that called for hatred against Jews, Christians and non-believers. Also, the school board would discriminate against women.¹⁰⁷ In 1999, The Al-Iman school in Almere makes the headlines as the school would apply corporal punishments such as beating and kicking. It would also prohibit the use of toilet paper and children would not be allowed to wear clothes with images of people and animals, or make music.¹⁰⁸ In relation to these events, an article in *NRC Handelsblad* outlines how schools in Islamic countries are very liberal compared to the strict orthodox character of Islamic schools in the Western world. As Siddieq in Amsterdam is taken as an example, ‘where most things were considered *haram*.’¹⁰⁹

Ibn Ghaldoun

At the same time, in 1998, the debate around the first Islamic secondary school in Rotterdam had gotten hold of the newspapers. *Trouw* and *De Volkskrant* argued that the parliament was doing anything to prevent the arrival of Islamic schools by all sorts of formal regulations.¹¹⁰ *Trouw* strongly criticized the arbitrariness of approving an Evangelical school over an Islamic

¹⁰⁴ ‘Ruzie over regels op moslimschool’, *De Volkskrant* 17-12-1996.

¹⁰⁵ ‘Nieuwe scholen, oude ruzies’, *De Volkskrant* 28-6-1997.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Bond haalt fel uit naar Islamschool’ *Het Parool* 29-10-1998; ‘Nederlandse leraren diep ongelukkig op Islamscholen’ *Algemeen Dagblad* 20-10-1998; ‘Islamitische school opnieuw in opspraak’ *NRC Handelsblad* 23-01-1999.

¹⁰⁷ ‘VVD: Islamitische school discrimineert’ *Trouw* 30-1-1999.

¹⁰⁸ ‘Islamitische school zou leerlingen slaan’ *NRC Handelsblad* 16-02-1999.

¹⁰⁹ ‘De vrolijke school: In islamitische landen mogen scholieren gewoon poppetjes tekenen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 20-02-1999.

¹¹⁰ ‘School met de Koran’, *De Volkskrant* 04-09-1998; ‘Evangelische school mag wel van Kamer, Islamitische nog niet’, *Trouw* 01-10-1998.

one.¹¹¹ In a front page article, the newspaper accuses the parliament of ‘double standards’ and ‘unequal treatment in equal cases.’¹¹²

However, when the Ibn Ghaldoun school had finally been approved and opened its doors in 2000, the negative publicity soon followed. This had to do with two issues: the orthodox character and rules of the school, and the poor educational quality. When the school had just opened, *Trouw* published an extensive interview with the Dutch principal, Van Erven, who made the school sound promising: He states that ‘Ibn Ghaldoun should become an educational example for the rest of the Netherlands. There's more to those children than our current system is taking out of them.’¹¹³ Moreover, he claims that the Islamic character is ‘secondary’ and that the main objective is to be an excellent school.¹¹⁴ However, one negative message after another soon appears. The head of the Education Inspectorate stated in *De Volkskrant* that he is ‘seriously concerned’ about the lessons at the school, and the fact there are hardly any qualified teachers.¹¹⁵ *De Telegraaf* claimed that 25 pupils had been suspended because ‘they were not orthodox enough.’¹¹⁶ *NRC* and *Trouw* publish new interviews with Van Erven, but this time with a negative undertone: he had resigned from the school because of conflicts with the school board: ‘his ideas were too enlightened.’¹¹⁷

3.2 The Local Level

Schiedam

In Schiedam, a small city near Rotterdam with approximately 80.000 inhabitants, the first request for an Islamic school came in April 1989. The chairman of the local foundation for Islamic primary education, *Stichting Islamitisch College* (SIC) proved the municipality that there was enough enthusiasm for such a school by collecting 282 signatures.¹¹⁸ VVD council member Ms. De Jong expressed her concerns about what such a school would mean for

¹¹¹ ‘CDA stemt ‘tactisch’ tegen Islamitische school’ *Trouw* 01-10-1998; ‘Evangelische school mag wel van Kamer, Islamitische niet’, *Trouw* 01-10-1998; ‘Willekeur’, *Trouw* 2-10-1998.

¹¹² ‘Willekeur’, *Trouw* 02-10-1998.

¹¹³ ‘De kinderen komen hier omdat ze miskend zijn: Ibn Ghaldoun moet een onderwijskundig voorbeeld voor Nederland worden’, *Trouw* 31-08-2000.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁵ ‘Inspectie vindt kwaliteit Islamitische school te laag’, *De Volkskrant* 30-11-2000.

¹¹⁶ ‘Jongens en meisjes waren niet orthodox genoeg: Moslimschool zet 25 scholieren op straat’, *De Telegraaf* 26-10-2000.

¹¹⁷ ‘Rector the verlicht voor moslimschool’, *NRC Handelsblad* 6-12-2000; ‘Het botert niet op islamitische scholen’, *Trouw* 07-12-2000.

¹¹⁸ ‘Islamitische school: 282 handtekeningen’, *Waterweg* 06-04-1989.

existing schools in the city: she feared for a mass departure of students from existing schools, endangering their existence by reaching the lower limit of 100 pupils.¹¹⁹

In June 1989, PvdA council member Ms. Siljee expresses her concern about the inevitable establishment of the Islamic primary school in Schiedam in local newspaper *De Havenloods*. She realizes the school can't be stopped by the municipality, as the application meets all the requirements. According to Siljee, the consequences of the arrival of an Islamic school will be significant. She expects that some primary schools in the neighborhood will have to close, and that it will lead to the disappearance of teacher's positions at other schools. Moreover, she is concerned about the isolation of ethnic groups as a consequence of the schools.¹²⁰ That the Schiedam city council is anything but enthusiastic about the school, is shown by the headlines of local newspapers that follow. 'Schiedam fears Islamic school'¹²¹, 'Islamic school not a good thing'¹²² and 'Grumbling acceptance of Islamic school.'¹²³ In August 1989, the municipal council was obliged to accept the application, after Siljee's last unsuccessful attempt to stop the school.¹²⁴ She asked the alderman if there weren't any loopholes in the education law, or any strategies to delay the process of establishment, without any success. It was no secret that the city council was strongly opposed to such a school: The proposal on the acceptance explains in detail why the board would have preferred to say 'no' to the application.¹²⁵ In June 1990, the school officially opens with the name 'El Furkan.' In December that year, the local media reports about how the school would have 'pulled away' pupils from other primary schools in Schiedam, as the schools suddenly missed pupils.¹²⁶ In June 1991, the one-year anniversary of the school is being discussed. A teacher of the schools calls it 'a difficult start', as most children hardly speak the Dutch language.¹²⁷ Nevertheless, the popularity of the school is indisputable: in 1993, the number of pupils exceeds the capacity of the original school building, and they ask the municipality for expansion.¹²⁸ Emergency classrooms, initially as a temporary solution, were allocated to the school in 1993. More and more emergency buildings are being constructed for years, leading to

¹¹⁹ Ibidem.

¹²⁰ 'Islamitische school niet tegen te houden', *De Havenloods* 08-06-1989.

¹²¹ 'Schiedam vreest Islamitische school', *Waterweg* 16-06-1989.

¹²² 'Islamitische school geen goede zaak', *Waterweg* 22-08-1989.

¹²³ 'Morrend akkoord Islamitische school', *Waterweg* 24-08-1989.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Ibidem.

¹²⁶ *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* 14-12-1990.

¹²⁷ 'El Furkan heeft een moeizaam eerste schooljaar achter de rug', *Het Nieuwe stadsblad* 12-06-1991.

¹²⁸ *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad*, 12-06-1993.

dissatisfaction of local residents.¹²⁹ From 1998 residents of Groenoord, the neighborhood where the school is located, start to express their dissatisfaction and take action against further expansion of the emergency classrooms and their seemingly permanent character of the school. The arguments given are traffic problems, noise and the fact that the school takes up so much space in their neighborhood at the expense of other projects. They argue for an alternative location for the school.¹³⁰

Conclusion

During the first decade of Islamic schools in the Netherlands, the topic was not frequently discussed in the parliament. It was mainly VVD that started to problematize Islamic schools since 1992, due to the idea that they would counteract the integration of minorities. The harsh statements by Franssen about Islamic schools are in line with the paradigm shift from emancipation to integration of minorities from the 1990s generally, and specifically the course of the VVD since 1991 led by Frits Bolkestein, known for his negative statements about Islam. CDA saw the establishment of the schools as a positive development for the emancipation of the Muslim community. However, the issue between the Islamic and the evangelical schools in 1998 suggests that supporting Islamic schools was also in political self-interest of CDA: after all, the continued existence of Christian schools was closely related to it.

It was merely the rise of the phenomenon of ‘the Islamic school’ and their implication for school segregation and integration, rather than what was going on behind or inside these schools, what occupied politicians. This was similar for the public debate until 1996, when newspapers started to shape a rather orthodox and fundamentalist idea of Islamic schools, caused by non-Islamic staff members that started to communicate with the press about the circumstances inside the schools.

The political debate was hardly influenced by the public debate. The other way around, the public debate occasionally reacted to the political debate. This was the case in 1992 after Franssen’s statements, and in 1998 after the debate on the Islamic and Evangelical secondary schools. In both cases, the press reacted critically to the way in which Islamic schools were problematized in politics.

¹²⁹ ‘Bewonersoverleg over El Furkan moet eindelijk tot oplossing leiden’, *Het Nieuwe stadsblad* 23-11-2000.

¹³⁰ ‘Basisschool El Furkan mag uitbreiden’, *De Maaspost* 19-08-1998; ‘Nieuwe uitbreiding van Groenordse basisschool El Furkan is er één teveel’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad*, 05-10-2000; ‘Bewonersoverleg over El Furkan moet eindelijk tot oplossing leiden’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* 23-11-2000.

The local debate has similarities as well as differences with the national debate: One reason the Schiedam council opposed to an Islamic school, was that of isolation and hindrance to integration, similar to concerns in national politics. The other argument: the fear for existing schools in the city to lose pupils, teachers or having to close down, however, is only heard at the local level. Moreover, local politicians seem to be much more negative and open about their resistance to Islamic schools, already in 1989, than national politicians at the time. Local residents do not seem to have problems with the Islamic character of the school, but they relate the school to spatial issues and nuisance.

4 2001-2010: Islamic schools in the securitization context

This chapter analyzes the debate from 2001 to 2005. 2001 is taken a starting point, due to the changing debate about the securitization of Islam in the context of 9/11.

4.1 The National Debate

4.1.1 Politics

Investigation reports

The attention for Islamic schools in the parliament increased significantly from the beginning of 2002, which is visible in the number of parliamentary documents related to the issue: from only 4 in session year 2000-2001, to 24 in 2001-2002, and up to 65 in 2003-2004.¹³¹ During these years, several investigation reports concerning Islamic schools had been published, and they were discussed extensively.

In February 2002, MPs from VVD, SP en CDA asked Secretary of State Adelmund (PvdA) for an explanation regarding a news item by the tv-show NOVA that claimed that there were Islamic primary schools in the Netherlands that incited Muslim pupils to hatred against Western society and maintain direct ties with Saudi Arabia.¹³² In her answer, Adelmund referred to a report of the Dutch Security Service (BVD) that had just been published a few days after the news item, and which, according to her, 'indicated some very serious aspects of concern.'¹³³ Although it would make sense to place the investigations by the BVD in the context of the terrorist attacks of 9/11, it should be noted that The BVDs initiative for the report came in 1998: In the report's introduction, it is stated that one of the motives for the investigations, where a number of media reports on incidents at Islamic schools from 1996 to 2001 in newspapers and on tv-shows.¹³⁴ On the one hand, they referred to news reports about 'developments and activities in Islamic education and the principles of tolerance and non-discrimination applied in the Netherlands.' and on the other hand, to reports about 'attempts by foreign organizations to gain influence in Islamic education in the Netherlands.'¹³⁵

¹³¹ <www.officiëlebekeendmakingen.nl>

¹³² TK 2001-2002, nr. 892, 21-02-2002; TK 2001-2002, nr. 893, 21-02-2002; TK 2001-2002, nr. 894, 21-02-2002.

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst 'Democratische rechtsorde en Islamitisch onderwijs. Buitenlandse inmenging en anti-integratieve tendensen' (Den Haag 2002)

¹³⁵ Ibidem.

The report concluded that one in five schools received support from controversial foreign organizations, or had members in the school board that maintained ties with radical Islamic organizations.¹³⁶ It caused worries in the parliament and a call for ‘more openness’ at Islamic schools.¹³⁷ A review committee by the Education Inspection was set up to supervise religious education, as part of the legislative proposal ‘Supervision of Education.’¹³⁸ The new law, adopted in June 2002, would imply that the inspection would now have full access to supervise all aspects of education, including religious education.¹³⁹ This became a highly discussed issue in parliament. GroenLinks and PvdA were of the opinion that religious classes at all religiously based schools should be subject to inspection, not just at Islamic schools. CDA, ChristenUnie and SGP were skeptical about the supervision of religious classes, because it would be at odds with the freedom of education.¹⁴⁰

In December 2002, a follow-up research on the BVD report by the Education Inspectorate was published, and it presented positive outcomes: it concluded that Islamic schools do contribute to integration and social cohesion.¹⁴¹ The parliament reacted skeptical to the outcomes of the report. Overall, the idea was that the report did not serve its original purpose: to examine whether Islamic schools incite to hatred and anti-integrative ideas. D66 called the report a ‘rather rosy picture’ and doubted whether the given image corresponded to reality. PvdA, SP and VVD suspected the research to be too limited and questioned the methodology of the Inspectorate.¹⁴² The Christian parties called for trust in the Inspectorate’s expertise. All parties in the government, except for the Christian parties, argued for follow-up research.¹⁴³ From 2002 onwards, the topic started to cause polarization in the government. Members of the VVD had started to speak out more strongly against Islamic schools. MP Ms. Hirsi Ali, known for her fierce criticism of Islam, noted she wanted to get rid of article 23, which guaranteed the freedom of education, due to the harm that Islamic schools would cause.¹⁴⁴ Ms. Hirsi Ali, as well as party leader Mr. Zalm, plead for a law to discourage the arrival of Islamic schools by tightening rules for setting up a school.¹⁴⁵ Coalition partner

¹³⁶ Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst ‘Democratische rechtsorde en Islamitisch onderwijs. Buitenlandse inmenging en anti-integratieve tendensen’ (Den Haag 2002)

¹³⁷ TK 2001-2002, 28006 nr. 7, 20-02-2002.

¹³⁸ TK 2001-2002, 27783 nr. 186a, 12-03-2002.

¹³⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁰ TK 2002-2003, nr.20, 13-11-2002.

¹⁴¹ Inspectie van het Onderwijs ‘Islamitische scholen en sociale cohesie’ (Den Haag 2002)

¹⁴² TK 2002-2003, nr. 28600-VIII, 29-01-2003.

¹⁴³ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁴ TK 2004-2005, 29754 nr. 53, 21-10- 2005.

¹⁴⁵ *Trouw*, 03-12-2002.

CDA strongly rejected these ideas as they conflicted with the freedom of education.¹⁴⁶ In October 2003, the Inspectorate presented a follow-up report called ‘Islamic schools further investigated.’ The conclusion was that education in Islamic schools ‘was not contradictory to the basic values of a democratic legal state’ and ‘to a lesser or greater extent furthered conditions favorable to the integration of the students.’ The educational quality appeared to be equal to and sometimes even better than comparable schools. The didactic quality of religious education, however, ‘left much to be desired in many schools.’¹⁴⁷ Moreover, the Inspectorate underlined the administrative vulnerability of many Islamic schools.¹⁴⁸ In a memorandum in 2004 called ‘Education, citizenship and Integration, which contained a follow-up of the last Inspectorate report, the Minister of Education presented plans of action to tackle the identified problem at Islamic schools. First, Islamic schools were required to pay a certain extent of attention to citizenship education, and this would be supervised by the inspection. Second, the quality of school boards would be improved and monitored. Third, a new, tailored teaching method for religious education in Islamic primary schools would be developed (that complied with Dutch norms and values.)¹⁴⁹ Moreover, the memorandum contained another announced policy which caused debate: the so-called 80/20-rule that was aimed at counteracting school segregation. The rule implied that primary schools could have a maximum of 20% of the pupils with an educational disadvantage. D66, Groenlinks and PvdA criticized this policy proposal. The parties reminded the Minister of Education that it seemed as if the new rule had been developed just to make the establishment of Islamic schools impossible, as the vast majority of pupils at Islamic schools had an educational disadvantage.¹⁵⁰ This idea was contrary to the freedom of education, many parties stressed.¹⁵¹

In the aftermath of the murder of Theo van Gogh in November 2004, Islamic schools and mosques became a target of violence. Up to March 2005, 13 incidents took place at Islamic schools all over the country.¹⁵² Investigations into the violence and the protection of schools became the central theme of debate during 2005 and the debate seems to have settled down until 2006. In this year, former VVD MP Geert Wilders had established his right-wing populist Party for Freedom (PVV). Their campaign against the ‘islamization of society’ became a cornerstone of the party. The party plead, amongst other things, for the closure of

¹⁴⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁷ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, ‘Islamitische scholen nader onderzocht’ (Den Haag 2003)

¹⁴⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁹ TK 2003-2004, 29536 nr. 1, 23-04-2004.

¹⁵⁰ TK 2003-2004, 29536 nr. 3, 12-08-2004.

¹⁵¹ Ibidem.

¹⁵² TK 2004-2005, nr. 1355, 13-04-2005.

all Islamic schools.¹⁵³ This rhetoric now recurred in almost any parliamentary debate that involved Islamic schools. Moreover, the party regularly sent out parliamentary questions regarding incidents on Islamic schools that had appeared in the media.

4.1.2 Newspapers

BVD and Inspectorate reports

At the end of September 2001, just after the 9/11 attacks, an incident related to the Al Aman school in Almere gripped the media: *De Telegraaf*, a right-wing populist newspaper that had not been publishing much on Islamic schools until 2000, had gotten hold of a so-called ‘hate calendar’ with images that propagated terroristic violence, that would have been distributed at the school.¹⁵⁴ The case led to thorough investigations by the BVD as well as the inspection, who had found that the calendar originated from Egypt.¹⁵⁵

In February 2002, the report of the BVD on foreign influences at Islamic schools caused commotion once again. The press reacted to the BVD report in different ways. *A Telegraaf* headline referred to ‘Muslim schools’ as a ‘source of hatred.’¹⁵⁶ *Trouw* published several reactions by respondents with an immigrant background that were full of critique to the government's reaction to the report. Ali Lazrak, a candidate MP for the Socialist Party and once a Moroccan guest worker, states in his article that it should not be seen as a surprise that Islamic schools are funded by radical organizations, as Dutch policies made this possible to happen. He refers to the failed minority policy that enhanced neighborhood and school segregation, insufficient government intervention, and insufficient funding of the schools by the government.¹⁵⁷ In another piece in *Trouw* by Ibrahim Farouk, Egyptian filmmaker and co-initiator of the Arab Democratic Party, the author claimed that ‘the Netherlands creates its own Muslims-extremists’, by criminalizing Islam.¹⁵⁸ After 9/11, he states, it is suddenly suspicious to receive funding from abroad, while before, the government was only too happy that Islamic institutions were able to find their own sources of subsidy. Moreover, he critiques the fact that the inspection will supervise religious lessons at Islamic schools in reaction to the BVDs findings, but that this does not apply to Christian schools.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ TK 2006-2007, 30800-VI, nr. 127, 06-09-2007.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Haatkalender duikt op bij Moslimschool’, *De Telegraaf* 26-09-2001.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Almeerse kalender geproduceerd door uitgever in Egypte’, *De Telegraaf* 29-09-2001.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Moslimscholen bron van haat’ *De Telegraaf* 19-02-2002.

¹⁵⁷ A. Larzak, ‘Verbied buitenlandse donaties aan scholen’, *Trouw* 23-02-2002.

¹⁵⁸ I. Farouk, ‘Nederland creëert eigen moslim-extremisten’, *Trouw* 06-03-2002.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem.

An employee of the Investigation Bureau of Intelligence and Security Services strongly disapproves of the actions of the BVD and calls it a 'one-sided investigation.'¹⁶⁰ He notes that only very serious threats to the state and democracy justify the actions of the BVD, which these primary school kids have nothing to do with. 'The BVD participates in the problematization of Islam', he states.¹⁶¹

In 2003, the positive outcomes of the Inspection report on Islamic schools and integration shape the newspaper debate on the subject. In particular *De Volkskrant* published articles in which Islamic schools are portrayed in a positive way. Editorials in the newspaper emphasize that there is evidence that Islamic schools foster integration, that Islamic schools perform better than public schools, and that prejudices about Islamic schools predominate in the parliament, which are inconsistent with the inspectorate's reassuring conclusions.¹⁶² *NRC* states Islamic schools are 'not dangerous', but focuses more on the negative outcomes of the report: that of the substandard quality of the religious lessons and doubts about administrative practices within the schools.¹⁶³ The 80/20 rule: the plans by the government to spread disadvantaged pupils is being criticized by the press, as they claim it is clearly targeted at Islamic schools.¹⁶⁴ The new rule is called 'disguised discrimination' and a violation of Human Rights by a professor educational law Paul Zoontjes in *NRC*.¹⁶⁵ Zoontjes notes that the rule is primarily intended to curb the growth in the number of Islamic schools because of the spectacular growth of Islamic education in a period of fifteen years. He refers to the fact that minister van der Hoeven (CDA) would have been convinced by the VVDs strong opposition to Islamic schools.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ 'BVD heeft geen taak op scholen: Onderzoek is erg eenzijdig', *Trouw* 27-02-2002.

¹⁶¹ Ibidem.

¹⁶² 'Islamitische scholen zijn tolerant: Lessen niet in strijd met democratie', *De Volkskrant* 08-10-2003;

'Islamitische school bevordert integratie', *De Volkskrant* 17-10-2003;

'Inspectie is niet voor de gek te houden: Volgens inspecteur-generaal Kervezee was het onderzoek naar islamitische scholen zeer grondig', *De Volkskrant* 11-11-2003;

'Islamschool doet het beter: Religieuze school beter bestuurd dan openbare', *De Volkskrant* 27-12-2003.

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁴ 'Plan Zwarte scholen 'verkapte discriminatie', *NRC Handelsblad* 01-05-2004; Minister knabbelt aan vrijheid van onderwijs: Islamschool dreigt geofferd te worden, *Trouw* 04-05-2004; 'Maatregel zwarte scholen 'onwerkbaar', *De Volkskrant* 19-05-2004.

¹⁶⁵ 'Plan Zwarte scholen 'verkapte discriminatie', *NRC Handelsblad* 01-05-2004.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem.

4.2 The Local Debate

Schiedam

Until 2001, the disagreement regarding the location of El Furkan was mainly between the municipality of Schiedam and the residents of the Groenoord neighborhood. This started to change when the school board of El Furkan refused a proposed new location by the alderman, because it would be too far away for the majority of the pupils.¹⁶⁷ The school had requested a location in neighborhood *Nieuwland*, where the majority of the school population lived, but without success. Parents now started to get involved with the debate and started to express their dissatisfaction about the actions of the municipal council regarding the lack of space and facilities at the current location and the refusal for a location in Nieuwland in the newspaper.¹⁶⁸ They stated that ‘it is a disgrace that our children go to school in this situation’, and argued that the school belongs in the area where the vast majority of the pupils live (*voedingsgebied*).¹⁶⁹

The debate about the accommodation problems continues and starts to be an increasingly recurring issue in the local press from 2002. The school made a case for both expansion of the current building and a second location in Nieuwland. The municipality had decided that the emergency classrooms had to be removed, but the school still rejected the alternative location the municipality had in mind.¹⁷⁰ Both parties sent letters to the press with their viewpoints: El Furkan invoked its right to expansion and a new school in Nieuwland, the city council insisted that their proposed location was an appropriate solution.¹⁷¹ When the school found a possible location in Nieuwland themselves, it was rejected by the municipality as it would not fit the requirements for a primary school.¹⁷² Up to this point, the issue had not been discussed extensively in the municipal council. This changed in the summer of 2002, when the SIC had filed an application for a second Islamic primary school. ¹⁷³ In July 2002, the inclusion of the second Islamic school in the municipal’s Plan of Schools for the years 2003 to 2006 was being discussed, and the issue caused debate in the council.

It is evident that the council was trying to thwart the coming of a second Islamic school, but the arguments given were rather vague and unclear. First of all, the executive

¹⁶⁷ ‘El Furkan veegt plannen Wiegman voor nieuwe schoollocatie van tafel’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad*, 04-04-2001.

¹⁶⁸ ‘Het is schandalig dat mijn kinderen in die situatie les krijgen’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad*, 25-04-2001.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁰ ‘Tijdelijke noodlokalen El Furkan moeten na schooljaar verdwijnen’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* 19-01-2001.

¹⁷¹ ‘El Furkan mikt nog altijd op Nieuwland’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* 30-01-2002; ‘Gemeente herhaalt standpunt El Furkan’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* 06-02-2002.

¹⁷² ‘El Furkan vindt zelf extra schoolgebouw’, *De Maasstad* 30-08-2001.

¹⁷³ ‘Raad verdeeld over tweede Islamitische basisschool’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* 11-07-2002.

board of mayor and alderman (B&W) was of the opinion that the application should be complied with, because all requirements to start a new school had been met.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, as local newspaper *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* pointed out, the coming of a second school would put an end to the longstanding accommodation problems and lack of space regarding the original location.¹⁷⁵ However, the council could not be convinced. Ms. Elenbaas of VVD stated that the inclusion of an Islamic school in the new Plan of Schools ‘would have a major impact on primary education in Schiedam.’¹⁷⁶ PvdA agreed with this view. Mr. Haan from SP considered that the application of the new Islamic school ‘did not fit in with the policy pursued so far.’¹⁷⁷ He filed a motion asking the council not to allow the foundation of a new Islamic school.¹⁷⁸ The council was not able to reach a decision and had to resume its meeting in September. During this meeting, Mr. Lont, secretary of SIC, attended the meeting on behalf of SIC and spoke out against the actions of the city council regarding the application of the new Islamic school. Lont reminded the council that the current location of El Furkan was set up as a temporary solution from the very beginning, and that a location in Nieuwland had been promised since its establishment in 1990.¹⁷⁹ Lont referred to years of ‘unwillingness’ of the municipality to cooperate in the realization of a location in Nieuwland. Moreover, Lont argued that the city council was careless in handling the school's application by relying too easily on information that turned out to be incorrect. He also referred to the fact that the municipal council had postponed the decision on the school to the end of September, and therefore exceeding the deadline of 1 August set by the Minister. This would have been done in order to deliberately postpone the establishment of the school.¹⁸⁰

The hassle around the Islamic school was a frequently discussed topic in local newspapers, often taking up the front page. Up until 2002, there had been little bias in newspapers regarding the topic, as reporting was mainly about the state of affairs regarding the political debate. However, in August 2002 *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* published an editorial with a very negative undertone about Islamic schools, in which the author connects the undesirability of a second Islamic school in Schiedam to the integration debate. The author states that, ‘to the relief of many’, a second school had not been approved in the council. Approval of a second school would, ‘before you know it’, lead to the undesirable

¹⁷⁴ Notulen Raadsvergadering, Gemeenteraad Schiedam 08-07-2002.

¹⁷⁵ ‘Raad verdeeld over tweede Islamitische basisschool’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad*, 11-08-2002.

¹⁷⁶ Notulen Raadsvergadering, Gemeenteraad Schiedam 08-07-2002.

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁹ Notulen Raadsvergadering, Gemeenteraad Schiedam 19-09-2002.

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem.

establishment of an Islamic secondary school in Schiedam, that, according to the author, already has the reputation of ‘allochthone-city’¹⁸¹ He refers to the schools as ‘a Muslim-conglomerate within a municipality’, that that does not foster integration.¹⁸²

When looking at minutes of the council meeting as well as the newspapers, it becomes clear that the founding of a second Islamic school is a sensitive topic that led to an intense debate in the council. However, what the exact given arguments were against the establishment of the school, remains rather unclear from the policy documents.

However, in June 2004, when a new SIC application is being discussed and rejected once again in the council, some political parties do express ideological arguments against the schools. Mr. Groenewegen from the local party *Gemeentebelangen Schiedam* (Municipal Interests for Schiedam) stated that children from different cultures should learn and play together, and therefore Islamic schools are undesirable. Mr. Haan of SP argues that every form of private education is not contributing to integration. Alderman Lepidis of CDA only refers to a shortage of pupils that does not comply with the founding standards.¹⁸³ In September 2005, the majority of the council voted in favor of an Islamic school, after the Ministry of Education had approved the application.¹⁸⁴ According to newspapers *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* and *Maasstad*, this was because of the election period. *Maasstad* notes that El Furkan was used as a ‘bet’ for the election race, and that none of the major political parties wanted the blame if a school would not be realized.¹⁸⁵

The above indicates that the municipal council of Schiedam was able to prevent the Islamic school for quite a long time, despite the fact that the application met the requirements and that a new school would solve accommodation problems. It is not entirely clear why the majority of the council was so against the second school, but the above narrative suggests that the Islamic character of the school certainly played a role. In November 2004, NRC published an article about municipalities increasingly rejecting applications for Islamic schools. According to Mr. Bal, head of ISBO, this had everything to do Islamophobia after 9/11 and the murder of Theo van Gogh. He refers to the fact that in 2001, before 9/11, 7 schools were established, while in the years after, 7 out of 8 applications were rejected. Education sociologist Mr. De Jong states in the article that the image of Islamic schools had

¹⁸¹ ‘Allochtone’ was the word used for people with a migrant background, but the word has taken on a controversial meaning since the 21st century and the word has officially been avoided in politics since 2016.

¹⁸² N. Wolters, ‘Integratie’, *Het Nieuwe Stadsblad* 07-08-2002.

¹⁸³ Notulen Raadsvergadering, Gemeenteraad Schiedam 28-06-2004.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Uitkomsten vergadering gemeenteraad’, *De Maasstad* 28-09-2005.

¹⁸⁵ ‘Raad stem voor tweede El Furkan’, *De Maasstad* 21-09-2005.

indeed changed, and that municipalities often ‘hide’ behind complicated procedures and laws to counteract Islamic school applications. The article also mentions the example of Schiedam and notes that alderman Ms. Lepidis (CDA) admitted that Islamic education in earlier college periods of the Schiedam Council had indeed been thwarted.¹⁸⁶

Conclusion

In the context of 9/11, worries about anti-democratic tendencies at Islamic schools increased in the Parliament. However, media reports dating from before the 21st century had been the direct reason for BVD to start its investigations. The main focus of the debate from 2001 to 2005 was now what was happening behind and within the schools, as foreign fundings, religious education and administrative malpractices were the main concerns. As a reaction to investigations by BVD and the Inspectorate, new laws and policies were created to restrict the freedom of Islamic schools, which also led to discussions about the freedom of education.

The public debate correlated with the political debate, as worry on fundamentalism increased after 9/11.

However, newspapers, except for *De Telegraaf*, responded critically to the political reactions towards the investigation reports and the new policies in reaction to the reports, that were seen as the problematization of Islamic schools.

The local debate differed from the national debate, as problems around the Islamic school in Schiedam were mainly about accommodation and spatial issues. However, when a second Islamic school was desired, discussions on integration and concurrence between primary schools recurred.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Verstopptje spelen met procedures en wetten: Gemeenten werken volgens koepel islamitische scholen tegen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 23-11-2004

5 2006-2019: Weak schools and Salafism

5.1 The national debate

5.1.1 Politics

‘weak schools’

From the end of 2006, the focus of the debate changed to the quality of education and administrative practices at Islamic schools, as several schools increasingly received negative ratings by the inspectorate. In September 2007, the Ministry of Education started an investigation into all Islamic schools due to increasing signals of financial and administrative malpractices.¹⁸⁷ In December 2007, Mr. Aptroot (VVD) was the first to address the issue in a plenary meeting. His concerns were influenced by media reports: he referred to a list presented in *Trouw* of school ratings by the Inspectorate. Several Islamic schools in this list were labeled ‘weak’.¹⁸⁸ Aptroot specifically mentioned the secondary school Islamic College Amsterdam (ICA), that was labeled ‘very weak’. Aptroot referred to earlier messages about the school on the substandard quality of the lessons, unqualified teachers, and little attention for integration and citizenship education. Moreover, there would be signals for incitement to hatred against democracy and other religions, and large amounts of subsidiary money were missing. Aptroot called for a subsidy stop, or even closure of the school. Minister of Education Van der Hoeven (CDA) called the situation ‘serious and cause for concern and intervention.’ She referred to a ‘failed integration policy.’¹⁸⁹ D66 MP Mr. Pechtold agreed that it was an alarming situation, although it bothered him that the relation between weak schools and Islamic schools was often made in this debate. ‘We have to concentrate on very weak schools in the Netherlands, but I do not want a distinction to be made between Islamic very weak schools and other very weak schools.’, he noted.¹⁹⁰

In response to the debate at 5 December 2006, the Inspectorate started a new investigation into ICA, published in February 2007.¹⁹¹ It concluded that the school’s financial management was not in order.¹⁹² In 2007, one report after another came in about weak educational quality and financial and administrative irregularities at Islamic schools across

¹⁸⁷ ‘Islamscholen doorgelicht’, *De Volkskrant* 26-07-2007.

¹⁸⁸ TK 2006-2007, nr. 22, 05-12-2006.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, ‘Rapport naar een incidenteel onderzoek naar het Islamitisch College Amsterdam’ (Den Haag 2007)

¹⁹² Ibidem.

the country.¹⁹³ It led to a nationwide investigation into administrative practices at all Islamic schools in 2008. It was the first report specifically aimed at Islamic Education in the Netherlands since the Inspectorate's report in 2003. The report concluded that the quality of education was questionable in 50 percent of the schools, and that 86 percent of the schools had problems complying with the financial rules.¹⁹⁴ The Inspectorate's disappointing numbers caused the tone around Islamic schools to harden: in a debate about primary education, all parties, right, left and Christian, addressed the issue of Islamic schools and linked weak schools and Islamic schools together.¹⁹⁵ The two were no longer tried to be seen in isolation from each other in parliament. Rather, Islamic schools in general were seen as problematic. By 2010, three Islamic schools had to be closed due to an accumulation of problems.¹⁹⁶

The increasingly negative reputation of Islamic schools undoubtedly had consequences for the debate about the application for a new Islamic secondary school in 2011, which was running right after the closure of ICA in 2010. The official reason for ICA to be closed down by the government was a shortage of pupils, but the school's poor quality and a lack of trust that the school was able to improve caused that the school did not get another chance.¹⁹⁷ No party in the parliament seems to be welcoming towards the establishment of a new Islamic secondary school, but they were aware that, due to the freedom of education, the application was difficult to reject. VVD, PvdA, PVV and SP spoke out strongly against the establishment of a new school because of the 'drama' of ICA.¹⁹⁸ There were also concerns about several board members, who had been either connected to ICA, or had been suspended for financial mismanagement at the As Siddieq school.¹⁹⁹ Overall, there was the fear for 'a second ICA.'²⁰⁰ The members of CDA were of the opinion that it is not surprising that a new initiative had emerged to be able to offer Islamic secondary education to students again, and that the freedom of education gives them the right to do so. Minister Van Bijsterveldt-Vliegenthart (CDA) emphasized that the school meets the minimum number of students and therefore had to be approved.²⁰¹ Article 23 could not be circumvented, to the disappointment of many.

¹⁹³ TK 2006-2007, 30800-VIII nr. 10, 5-3-2007; TK 2006-2007 30800-VIII nr. 114 .

¹⁹⁴ Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 'Bestuurlijke praktijken in het Islamitisch onderwijs' (Den Haag 2008)

¹⁹⁵ TK 2008-2009, 31293 nr. 24, 23-12-2008.

¹⁹⁶ 'Islamitische school in R'dam heft zichzelf op', *NRC Handelsblad* 26-60-2010.

¹⁹⁷ TK 2009-2010, 32123-VIII nr. 109, 05-02-2010.

¹⁹⁸ TK 2011-2012, 33000-VIII nr. 156, 22-12-2011.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰⁰ Ibidem.

²⁰¹ TK 2011-2012, 33000-VIII nr. 156, 22-12-2011.

The situation at ICA had led to a legislative proposal of VVD MP Mr. van Dijk (CDA) in 2010. It proposed that new schools would have to meet several requirements before the minister approves placement on the plan of schools. It would also provide that the Minister may decide that a school board is ineligible to finance a new school if there is a serious or structural deficiency in the learning outcomes at one of its other schools, or if the school board had received a warning for maladministration and has failed to comply with it.²⁰² The proposal was thus an attempt to restrict the freedom of education, so that future weak schools, in particular Islamic ones, could be prevented.

On 30 May 2013, the Education Inspectorate had been informed by the executive board of the Ibn Ghaldoun school about the missing of final exams French.²⁰³ The exams had been stolen by a number of students at the Ibn Ghaldoun school in Rotterdam, and they had been distributed and sold within and outside the school.²⁰⁴ The fraud case led to debates about examination in secondary education and about the future of the Islamic school in Rotterdam. It mainly resulted in a debate about the fact that this incident happened, again, at an Islamic school and whether the incident was related to the character of the school, and earlier incidents at the school. PVV in particular blamed the Islamic character of the school. The party argued that there was nothing wrong with the Dutch examination system, the problem was the school. D66 rejected this idea and states that not the school is guilty but the perpetrators. SP and CDA referred to the context of the many incidents at Islamic schools in recent years. Mr. Smaling of SP states that he wants to beware populist statements, but that that the ‘sum’ of incidents at Islamic schools can not be unseen.²⁰⁵ The theft of exams in May led to an investigation by the Inspection into the quality of Ibn Ghaldoun’s management, human resources policy, social safety and compliance with legal requirements. It became a damning report. 45 to 80 percent of the teachers turned out to be unqualified.²⁰⁶ The report resulted in the closure of the school.²⁰⁷

The Salafist school

From 2006 to 2016, Islamic schools had been debated in the context of the quality of education, cases of mismanagement and fraud. This shifted when a new secondary school in

²⁰² TK 2011-2012, 33000-VIII nr. 156, 9-9-2010.

²⁰³ ‘Man opgepakt voor stelen eindexamen Frans’, *Algemeen Nederlands Persbureau* 30-05-2013.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem.

²⁰⁵ TK 2012-2013, 31289 nr.163, 05-08-2012.

²⁰⁶ TK 2012-2013, nr. 110, item 10, 12-09-2013.

²⁰⁷ Ibidem.

Amsterdam had been approved. Already before the school opened its doors in 2017, it had a controversial character. This had to do with media reports in June 2014 about one of the future board members, Mr. Khouilani, who had made statements on Facebook in which he expressed his support for terrorist group ISIS.²⁰⁸ Ms. Jadnanansing and Mr. Marcouch of PvdA addressed this news in parliamentary questions. They asked Secretary of State Dekker (VVD) if the statements were a reason to reconsider the start of the school, and if he agreed that the quality of education cannot be dissociated from the quality of administrators, their mission and vision of educating and teaching children, and that this quality was at stake on the basis of Mr Khouilani's statements. Moreover, the PvdA members referred to 'the danger of ISIS for the Netherlands and Europe.'²⁰⁹ Mr. Dekker stated that he does not have the resources to stop the school, but he ensures supervision of the Inspection as soon as the school presents concrete plans to start.²¹⁰

The debate had settled down for a few years, but it revived in March 2019, when the school existed two years. The parliament had been informed by an official notice from the AIVD (Security Service since 2002) and NCTV (Coordinator for Counter Terrorism) about 'signals' that the new school, *Cornelius Haga Lyceum*, would have ties with terrorist organizations. Moreover, the Education Inspectorate was refused and sent away by the school board. The news resulted in a heated discussion in March 2019, although there was as yet no hard evidence of the school's alleged terrorist ties.²¹¹ The parliament was unanimous on the desire to close the school immediately. Minister Slob (CU) made clear that that was constitutionally impossible, due to article 23. This led to frustration and the search for a legal basis to close the school.²¹² It eventually led to a revival of the discussion about the freedom of education, that was now more discussed than ever before. After all, the constitutional freedom had made the existence of controversial schools like *Haga* possible.

VVD, D66, SP, PvdA and GroenLinks declared themselves in favour of abolishing or modernising article 23. However, for Christian parties CDA, CU and SGP this was unthinkable. PVV was in favor of the freedom of education, but argued for exclusion of Islamic education from constitutional principles.²¹³

²⁰⁸ 'Haags raadslid steunt terreurbeweging ISIS' *Algemeen Dagblad* 19-06-2014.

²⁰⁹ TK 2013-2014, nr. 2401, 02-07-2014.

²¹⁰ Ibidem.

²¹¹ TK 2018-2019 nr. 61, item 2, 27-03-2019.

²¹² TK 2018-2019 nr. 63, item 7, 14-03-2019.

²¹³ TK 2018-2019 nr. 63, item 7, 14-03-2019.

5.1.2 Newspapers

'weak schools'

Like the political debate, the quality of education and administrative malpractices at Islamic schools prevailed in the media from 2006. What is striking, is that until 2008, many newspapers try to nuance the negative reputation of Islamic education by stating that a lot of Islamic schools exist without problems that perform well. As *De Volkskrant* emphasizes: 'Most Islamic schools provide good education, the Inspectorate also notes, but incidents with dysfunctional school boards giving the sector a bad name.'²¹⁴ *NRC Handelsblad* states that the situation in the Islamic College of Amsterdam is not typical of Islamic education in the Netherlands in general, and the problems that occur at Islamic schools are partly 'child's diseases', referring to the new character of most Islamic schools.²¹⁵ *Trouw* refers to the negative media attention of incidents at a handful of Islamic schools as a reason that all Islamic schools are under scrutiny. The newspaper states that 'Islamic schools are much more Dutch than outsiders think. There are the same school books used as in other schools, the official language is Dutch.'²¹⁶ *De Volkskrant* acknowledges that poorly functioning school boards give Islamic schools a bad name, and that the umbrella organization ISBO, also fiercely opposes the malfunctioning school boards.²¹⁷

From 2008, the tone of newspapers starts to change, as a new public Inspectorate investigation report into all Islamic schools revealed that nearly half the schools were labeled 'weak' or 'very weak', and that at 86 percent of the schools were involved in fraudulent use of state fees. 10 percent of all very weak schools in the Netherlands were Islamic, while on average, 1,5 percent of all Dutch schools were labeled as such.²¹⁸ The problems at Islamic schools are significantly greater than in non-Muslim schools, *NRC* notes, as in a comparative study of 46 non-Muslim schools only one case of fraud was found. The destructive figures dominate the news reports on Islamic schools. Islamic education is now seen as homogeneously substandard, as the report concerned all Islamic schools. 'Islamic education in the Netherlands has serious problems'²¹⁹, 'Things are going terribly wrong with the Islamic

²¹⁴ Waarom is islamitische vmbo zo ondermaats?, *De Volkskrant* 22-12-2006.

²¹⁵ 'Sluit slechte scholen', *NRC Handelsblad* 06-12-2006.

²¹⁶ Ibidem.

²¹⁷ 'Slechte islamschool steviger aangepakt', *De Volkskrant* 22-03-2007.

²¹⁸ 'Veel fraude islamscholen met rijksgeeld: Ook grote onderwijsproblemen', *NRC Handelsblad* 13-11-2008.

²¹⁹ 'Eén op vier islamitische scholen slecht; Zware kritiek onderwijsinspectie', *Trouw* 30-03-2007

schools in our country'²²⁰, and 'Islamic schools don't have their affairs in order'²²¹ - are statements that appear in the newspapers.

Following to the news about the Inspectorate report, newspapers start to publish more in-depth pieces on the mechanisms behind underperforming Islamic schools.

NRC published an interview in 2008 with an educational sociologist Paul Jungbluth. He attributes the underperformance of Islamic to homogenous disadvantaged background within the Islamic pillar and the fact that market forces in Dutch education have a negative impact on the bottom end of society: Children from the best environments come to the best schools, just like the best teachers. 'The bottom' end up at schools with a bad name. Underperforming Islamic school have difficulties with improving, because children from an Islamic class that gets more socially advantaged, 'flee' to better schools instead of improving the Islamic ones.²²² In 2011, *De Volkskrant* published an interview with another educational sociologist, Jaap Dronkers. Dronkers states that the Islamic schools themselves are not the problem, but rather social class and low education of Islamic parents. According to Dronkers, the low level of education of the parents of Islamic schools also leads to another deficiency of those schools: a greater chance of weak governance. After all, it is difficult to find good administrators among low-educated parents, and the Islamic Dutch lack a highly educated framework to manage their schools. Dronkers also criticized the Inspectorate's methods for measuring weak schools: according to him, it was often because of more old-fashioned teaching methods that Islamic schools were labelled 'weak' more quickly, while the quality of education was fine.²²³

Trouw reports in 2012 that no Islamic school has been described as very weak anymore, and therefore there have been strong improvements since the report in 2008. 'They are no longer outcasts; they have conformed to the requirements of every school. Islamic schools have become 'like normal schools'.', de newspaper states. ²²⁴

This positive image did not last for long. In May 2013, the exam theft at the Ibn Ghaldoun school significantly worsened the image of Islamic schools,

²²⁰ 'Moslimscholen slecht', *De Telegraaf* 12-11-2008.

²²¹ '86 procent van de islamscholen rommelt met geld'. *De Volkskrant* 13-11-2008.

²²² 'Islamitische school ziet slimme moslims weggaan', *NRC Handelsblad* 20-11-2008.

²²³ 'Islamitische school zelf is niet het probleem', *De Volkskrant* 16-04-2011.

²²⁴ 'Islamitische school hoort er helemaal bij', *Trouw* 08-06-2012.

Newspapers started to publish profiles of the Ibn Ghaldoun school and outlined the array of problems and incidents the school had previously faced.²²⁵ The incident was not seen in isolation but rather as the result of an accumulation of problems within the school. In NRC, former teachers open up about a ‘climate of cheating and fraud’ that had always existed in the school. The teachers claim that test results were regularly adapted by teachers. Moreover, they claim that the school was guilty of indoctrinating students: ‘girls were supposed to meet after school in "homework classes," where they would receive anti-Dutch classes. They were told never to be allowed to marry a Dutchman, or even to get involved with unbelievers.’²²⁶ In *Trouw*, a former chairman and the rector of the school express that the Islamic community in the Netherlands has been severely damaged by the final exam fraud at Ibn Ghaldoun as it has created a stigma of Muslims who typically commit fraud. They believe that the damage after the exam theft had only been made worse, especially by politicians.²²⁷

The Salafist school

Due to the the events regarding the Cornelius Haga lyceum, Islamic education was discussed more than ever in the media. The first days after the AIVDs revelation about the alleged terrorist links the school would have, newspapers inevitably focused on the threatening character of the school. *De Telegraaf* called the school a ‘terrorist-school’ and ‘hotbed of hatred’²²⁸, *De Volkskrant* refers to ISIS-influences and Jihadism at the school.²²⁹ Soon, the debate shifts to Article 23 and the government's inability to intervene in schools like this. A wide variety of opinion pieces and editorials reflect on the freedom of education. Professors, lawyers and other claim makers reflected on the desirability of article 23.²³⁰ Professor Educational sociology Mr. Geling states in *Trouw* that, ‘if we don't want to move towards a future of radicalization of hundreds of pupils with Salafist ideas associated with terrorists, we have to get rid of Article 23 of the Constitution.’²³¹ An editorial in *De*

²²⁵ ‘Sjoemelcultuur op Ibn Ghaldoun’, *NRC Handelsblad* 05-07-2013; Islamitische school altijd al omstreden en zwak geweest: profiel Ibn Ghaldoun, *Trouw* 11-06-2013, Ibn Ghaldoun deed weinig goed, *De Volkskrant* 13-06-2013, Integratie wordt gedwarsboemd, *De Telegraaf* 13-06-2013.

²²⁶ ‘Sjoemelcultuur op Ibn Ghaldoun’, *NRC Handelsblad* 05-07-2013.

²²⁷ ‘Islamitische scholen zijn slachtoffer van examenroof’, *Trouw* 17-02-2014.

²²⁸ ‘Broeinest van haat’ *De Telegraaf* 08-03-2019; Terreurschool, *De Telegraaf* 08-03-2019.

²²⁹ ‘Zorgen over IS-invloeden op school’, *De Volkskrant* 08-03-2019; ‘Jihadisme op school’, *De Volkskrant* 09-03-2019.

²³⁰ ‘Zet bijl in Grondwetsartikel 23 en voorkom zo salafistische scholen’, *Trouw* 19-03-2019; ‘God heeft op school niets te zoeken’, *De Volkskrant* 16-03-2019, ‘Weg met de vrijheid van het onderwijs?’ *Trouw* 27-04-2019, ‘Schaf het bijzonder onderwijs af; Kwestie in kaart’, *NRC Handelsblad* 16-03-2019, ‘Waarom scholen met religie belasten?’ *De Telegraaf* 15-04-2019.

²³¹ ‘Zet bijl in Grondwetsartikel 23 en voorkom zo salafistische scholen’, *Trouw* 19-03-2019.

Volkskrant stated that ‘the crux of the problem lies in article 23’, referring to the idea that freedom of education fosters extremism and prevents integration. *Trouw* published a survey which concluded that 60 percent of Dutch population was in favor of the abolition of education with a religious basis, and 63 percent stated that it is a bad thing that the government subsidized schools such as *Haga*. Although the majority of articles were critical of article 23 in the context of the Haga debacle, supporters of the freedom of education were present in the newspapers as well. Law Professor dr. Lievens, stated that the *Haga* incidents are being abused to restrict the freedom of education. He argues that the core of the Dutch educational freedom is precisely that we have accepted that there is a diversity of views about the best education for our children.’²³²

In June 2019, the news comes out that there were no indications of links with terrorist organizations. No evidence had been found for 'antidemocratic education' or 'Salafist influences', nor were there any indications that there was 'a climate aimed at seclusion from Dutch society or at combating integration', as the AIVD had claimed.²³³

In response to this news, the role of the AIVD and the Inspectorate are scrutinized and criticized by the press. Dr. Abels, Professor Intelligence Studies professor and former executive at the AIVD, stated in *De Volkskrant* that the AIVD had operated 'manipulatively', i.e. using its information to try to influence the behavior of others.²³⁴ ‘Is that the behavior we expect from our intelligence and terrorism services: to unnecessarily spread fear and unrest?’, he noted. In *Trouw*, several Muslim organizations complained about ‘stigmatization of Islamic education’ by the AIVD.²³⁵ Sociologist dr. De Koning argued that this stigmatization of Muslims is part of the policy: Muslims are by definition suspect and their religion acts as a risk factor and as an alarm bell. This creates a racial profiling of Muslims: ideas about their origins, their ideological views and about marginalization come together in a constant distrust.²³⁶

²³² ‘Haga-saga wordt misbruikt om vrijheid van onderwijs in te perken’, *Trouw* 22-03-2019.

²³³ ‘Haga: opnieuw een beschuldiging ontkracht’, *De Volkskrant* 15-06-2019.

²³⁴ ‘AIVD en NCTV opereren manipulatief’, *De Volkskrant* 08-07-2019.

²³⁵ ‘Haga-casus bewijst dat stigmatiseren van moslims beleid is’, *Trouw* 11-07-2019.

²³⁶ Ibidem.

5.2 The local debate

Vlaardingen

After the second Islamic school, Ababil, was established in the Nieuwland neighborhood in Schiedam in 2007, the debate in Islamic education had settled. Rather, the discussion had shifted to neighboring city Vlaardingen. The two Islamic schools in Schiedam functioned as regional schools and attracted many pupils from Vlaardingen. When the popularity of the schools increased, the SIC wanted to establish a new Islamic school in Vlaardingen for this reason, and the first application was filed in 2004.²³⁷ The executive board had rejected the application on ‘substantive grounds’, referring to their prognosis that indicated insufficient pupils for the school to be viable.²³⁸ SIC appealed to the Ministry of Education, who ruled that the application should not have been rejected because the figures that provided by the school to show indicated that the school was viable. This was determined by comparing the municipality with Schiedam, where an Islamic school already existed. Vlaardingen objected to this comparison: in Schiedam the percentage of immigrants was considerably higher than in Vlaardingen. It led to a conflict between Vlaardingen and the ministry that had to be fought before the Council of State, which was eventually won by the municipality.²³⁹

However, SIC did not fall silent on the issue. In 2012, a new application was filed, which was extensively discussed in the council in June 2012. Although several parties emphasize that this discussion should not be about the desirability of Islamic schools, as it cannot be weighed in the decision to approve or reject a school, some parties do reveal their opinions. SP expresses concerns about integration, *Leefbaar Vlaardingen* (Liveable Vlaardingen, a right-wing local party) is worried about the quality of education. CDA welcomes the schools and states that ‘religion never has to stand in the way of integration’, and PvdA states that there is no link between weak schools and Islamic schools. However, the discussion in Vlaardingen is mainly about the ‘founding standard’ of 307 pupils that should ensure the viability of the school.

Alderman Hoekstra (SP) reminded the council that the law does not allow any consideration other than the foundation standard of 307, and that the application of SIC complies on the basis of the prognosis. The major point of discussion in the debate turns out to be the emergency rooms of El Furkan in Schiedam. If these were to be included in the prognosis,

²³⁷ ‘Vlaardingen en Delft bevechten komst Islamitische school’, *Rotterdams Dagblad* 12-01-2005.

²³⁸ Notulen Vergadering Raadscommissie voor Sociale en Maatschappelijke Aangelegenheden, Gemeenteraad Vlaardingen 24-01-2005.

²³⁹ ‘Vlaardingen vecht tegen islamschool’, *De Telegraaf* 12-01-2005.

this would mean that there would be sufficient space in Schiedam for pupils. If this would be subtracted from the prognosis, the school would no longer meet the foundation standard.²⁴⁰ According to the Alderman, who is of the opinion that the school has the right to exist, this argumentation is 'too legal': from a perspective of honesty, it would not be reasonable to involve the emergency classrooms. However, the majority of the municipal council does not agree with Hoekstra and argues that the law should be complied to, and according to the law, the emergency rooms have to be taken into account. CDA member Mr. Van der Zwan, proponent of the school, states in an emotional speech that the city council should not be allowed to consider whether it is in favor of the school or not, as there is no reason to doubt the application. He states that the emergency rooms in Schiedam were clearly of a temporary character: Schiedam had announced to remove the building on short notice. It might therefore not be weighed in the prognosis. The parties opposed to the school react strongly to Van der Zwan as he would accuse parties who want to follow the law of being against Islamic schools. Ultimately, the majority of the council, except for CDA, PvdA, D66 and GroenLinks, vote against the coming of an Islamic school in Vlaardingen.²⁴¹ In 2017 and 2019, the same practices are repeated: the school would again have failed to meet the foundation standard and the applications are again rejected by the municipal council.²⁴²

Local newspapers mainly report about state of affairs in the local politics of Vlaardingen regarding the ongoing struggle for the Islamic school. However, in 2017, *Waterweg* publishes a reaction of the head of SIC. He states to be surprised and highly disappointed about the rejection of the Islamic school, as according to him, the SIC had submitted all the necessary documents on time. 'Do they actually want the school?', is what he asked himself, as he argues it seems like the municipality is doing everything to thwart the coming of the school and nothing to accommodate or help the SIC to start a new school.²⁴³

The discussion in Vlaardingen illustrates well how the majority of the municipal council was holding on to formal laws and regulations in order to stop the coming of an Islamic school. Parties often referred to the fact that article 23 was uncontestable, and therefore no one expressed to be against Islamic schools in general. But the prognoses

²⁴⁰ Raadsvergadering Gemeente Vlaardingen 28-6-2012.

²⁴¹ Ibidem.

²⁴² Inhoudelijke beoordeling verzoek Stichting Islamitisch College (SIC), Gemeenteraad Vlaardingen 29-06-2017.

²⁴³ 'Verbazing na besluit afwijzen islamschool', *Waterweg* 27-02-2017.

provided by the SIC that indicated that an Islamic school would be viable, were tried to be disproved by the council by laws and regulations over and over again.

This is in line with the article in NRC, discussed in chapter 4, which stresses how many municipalities had been ‘hiding’ behind formal laws and regulations to combat Islamic schools since 2004.²⁴⁴

Conclusion

The political debate from 2006 to 2013 was focused on the quality of Islamic schools, and Islamic schools being connected to weak schools. The malfunctioning and fraud of school boards and the exam theft was placed in the context of weak schools. From 2014 to 2019, the absolute focus was on suspected terrorist links and Salafism within Islamic schools, due to ‘signals’ that were picked up by security services. This led to a revival of the discussion about the undesirability of article 23.

The public debate correlates with the political debate, and newspapers mainly focused on in-depth profiles of controversial Islamic schools. Political responses triggered newspapers rather than the other way around. Newspapers often shifted in the way they portrayed Islamic schools, in accordance with Inspectorate reports and incidents regarding Islamic schools. From 2019, the public debate has been focused on the freedom of education and the stigmatization of Islamic schools by the government.

The local debate, that had shifted from Schiedam to Vlaardingen, significantly differed from the national debate, as the municipal council of Vlaardingen focused on the number of pupils that would not be sufficient for an Islamic school to be viable. However, the council meeting reports suggest that formal laws and regulations were sought to stop the coming of an Islamic school for more ideological reasons.

²⁴⁴ ‘Verstopperij spelen met procedures en wetten: Gemeenten werken volgens koepel islamitische scholen tegen’, *NRC Handelsblad* 23-11-2004.

Conclusion

This thesis aims to answer the question ‘*How and why have political and public debates on Islamic schools in the Netherlands changed from 1988 to 2019?*’ One of the objectives of this research was to provide a complete overview of the way in which the debate on Islamic schools in the Netherlands changed by analyzing debates at different levels: the national political debate, the public debate, and the local debate.

At all different levels, the debate on Islamic schools has intensified throughout the years. The focus of the political debate has shifted several times. The first decade of Islamic schools, school segregation was the main concern: it was feared that Islamic schools would not contribute to integration. From 2002, influences from foreign controversial organizations and anti-democratic tendencies during religious classes were the focus of the debate, and it led to certain supervision policies which restricted the freedom of schools. From 2006 to 2014, worries about the poor quality of education as well as administration at the school where the major concern. It even led to the closure of several schools. In 2019, the topic was discussed more than ever due suspected links with terrorism that an Islamic primary school in Amsterdam would have. The freedom of education came to be under scrutiny.

The public debate mostly corresponded with the political debate. The public debate was either a reaction to incidents that happened around Islamic schools, critical reactions to the parliamentary debate.

The problems identified at the local level (Schiedam and Vlaardingen) that were related to Islamic schools were two-fold: hindrance to integration and fear for existing schools to lose pupils. These problems were mentioned throughout the years. However, the arguments given in the municipal council to reject the coming of an Islamic school, were mainly related to either spatial or accommodation problems, or to the foundation standard: the amount of pupils the school should have to be viable. Municipalities did not have the instruments to stop the coming of Islamic schools, as they had to comply to the law. What they could do, is trying to delay the coming of Islamic schools and finding legal possibilities to challenge the viability of the school, as happened in Schiedam and Vlaardingen.

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