Summary Religion, Bridging and Polarization

The present work explores from a religious-studies perspective the responses of leaders of various religious and humanist organizations in the Netherlands, both Islamic and non-Islamic, to criticism of Islam. In particular, it asks what the factors are that shaped those responses. Our focus is on the responses to five expressions that can be seen as critical of Islam and/or anti-Islamic (henceforth, the Islam-critical expressions):

- the film Submission by Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh and Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali (August 2004),
- the Danish Cartoon Affair (September 2005 - 2006),
- the film Fitna by Dutch politician Geert Wilders (March 2008),
- the internet film An Interview with Mohammed by Ehsan Jami (December 2008),
- the Swiss ban on the building of minarets (November 2009).

Two types of responses to these expressions can be distinguished: responses towards the general public and responses towards each other. Our main questions are, first, whether the leaders have responded in public to the Islam-critical expressions, and second, whether these responses have changed their mutual relations.

The concept of ‘social capital’ is important in this regard. According to the American sociologist Robert Putnam, the term ‘social capital’ refers to connections between people (as friends, neighbours, strangers), groups, and organizations, as well as to the standards of mutual trust and engagement which these connections engender. Putnam lucidly distinguishes between two types of social capital, i.e. bonding and bridging social capital. The present study focuses on the bridging type: the social relationship between institutions. Such relationships have at least two dimensions, that is participation and trust. The present study limits itself to the dimension of participation, i.e., contacts and collaboration. We try to establish whether and how the above-mentioned expressions have affected the contacts and cooperation between religious and humanist institutions and to which factors this can be attributed.

The first, introductory chapter presents this study’s aim, main concepts and methods. In selecting the organizations to be examined we used the following criteria:

- operating at the national level
- contacts with the public authorities
- ethnic diversity
- religious diversity
- balance between Muslim and non-Muslim organizations

Using these criteria, we selected twenty-one organizations, ten of which are Muslim, five Christian, three Jewish, one Hindu, one Buddhist, and one Humanist: UMMON (Unie van Marokkaanse Moskeeën in Nederland, ‘Union of Moroccan Mosques in the Netherlands’; respondent Mr. Driss El Boujoufi), ISN (Islamitische Stichting Nederland, ‘Islamic Foundation of the Netherlands’; Dr. Bülent Şenay), SICN (Stichting Islamitisch Centrum Nederland, ‘Islamic Center of the Netherlands Foundation’; Mr. Fikri Demirtaş), NIF (Nederlandse Islamitische Federatie, ‘Netherlands Islamic Federation’; Mr. Mehmet Yaramış), OSV (Overkoepelende Sjiiëtsche Vereniging, ‘Shiite Umbrella Association’; Ms. Zainab al-Touraihi), Al Nisa, ‘National organization of Muslim women in the Netherlands’; Ms. Leyla Çakır), HAK-DER (Federatie van Alevitische Verenigingen in Nederland, ‘Federation of Alevi Associations in the Netherlands’; Mr. Fethi Killi), ULAMON (Unie van Lahore Moslim Organisaties Nederland, ‘Union of Lahore Muslim Organizations in the Netherlands’; Mr. Haroen Badloe), SID Stichting Islam & Dialoog, ‘Islam & Dialogue Foundation’; Mr. Alper Alasag), FION (Federatie Islamitische Organisaties Nederland, ‘Federation of Islamic Organizations in the Netherlands’; Mr. Yahya Bouyafa) RvK (Raad van Kerken in Nederland, ‘Council of Churches in the Netherlands’; Mr. Dr. Kees Boerma).
Within each organization we interviewed either (former) leaders or high-ranking officials well acquainted with their leaders’ responses to the Islam-critical expressions mentioned above. We also collected documents produced by or referring to these organizations and their leaderships. We analysed the documentation as well as the transcriptions of our interviews. Our final analyses of the leaderships’ responses have been presented to our respondents, allowing them to amend possible mistakes. Henceforth, any mention of the organizations should be understood as a reference to their leaderships.

The second chapter examines the Dutch contexts within which the Islam-critical expressions occurred and were received, thus putting our research questions into perspective and highlighting their relevance. We argue that the social context is characterized by double polarization (both in the higher and the lower layers of society) in relation to Islam and Muslims. The religious context displays tendencies towards secularism, individualism, increasing diversity, and Islamic presence. The second section of this chapter includes a presentation and analysis of the Islam-critical expressions. The third section comprises a survey of literature on religion, conflict, violence, polemics, social movements, organizations, and framing, yielding a number of factors that may have shaped the responses to the Islam-critical expressions. From these factors, a model is constructed in which the concept of framing is of critical importance.

The third chapter focuses on the responses of the ten selected Muslim organizations. Eight of these participate in one of the two liaison organizations between the Dutch authorities and the Muslim communities – CMO (Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid, ‘The Muslims and the Government Liaison Committee’, recognized 2004); and CGI (Contact Groep Islam, ‘Contact Group Islam’, recognized 2005). Al Nisa has links with CMO, but is not a member; SID is not linked to either CMO or CGI. Relations between CMO and CGI are strained. In 2004, some of CMO’s member organizations ruled out any cooperation with Ahmadiyya Muslims and their umbrella organization ULAMON; hence the establishment of the second body, CGI. There are cases of personal overlap between Muslim and migrant organizations and we have observed the complexities of the mutual communications between these groups concerning the Islam-critical expressions.

UMMON, an organization of Moroccan mosques, and a CMO member, internally regarded the Islam-critical expressions as deliberately offensive acts, aimed at stirring up polarization. In its public responses, UMMON focused on the film *Fitna*, but was keen to avoid further polarization by refraining from confrontational and denunciative language. UMMON’s internal and public responses stressed the organization’s and its constituency’s identification with the Netherlands, took the anxieties underlying the Islam-critical expressions seriously and expressed a willingness to work on behalf of all members of Dutch society, both towards the organization’s own constituency and the Muslim world at large. As UMMON’s leadership saw it, Turkish-based ISN was unwilling to take such
necessary actions. In the aftermath of the release of *Fitna*, UMMON cooperated with Jewish and Christian organizations to form the so-called ‘Cairo Consultation Group’. Immediately after the film’s release in 2008, UMMON had helped to organize a mission to Cairo, aimed at preventing anti-Dutch measures such as a trade boycott. A further aim of this trip was to clarify the situation in the Netherlands generally and of Dutch Muslims in particular, and to explain the Dutch government’s view of the matter.

*ISN* interpreted the Islam-critical expressions as one of politico-ideological anti-Islamism, with the exception of the film *Submission*, which was mainly seen as a work of art. ISN held the view that it was not up to believers to respond to political insinuations. However, it encouraged any citizen to file complaints, to notify the authorities, or to join human rights organizations. On *Fitna* it issued a press release. By its handling of the Islam-critical expressions, ISN showed itself to be abiding by the laws of the member states of the European Union, and demonstrated its respect for human rights. Implicitly, it urged Islam-critics to acknowledge and respect its attitude. The line of action taken by ISN conforms to the general policy of its mother organization, the Turkish Diyanet network, which is reluctant to interfere with national politics in Europe. It is likely that ISN acted in consultation with the Diyanet network. *ISN*’s responses caused the existing internal frictions within CMO to intensify, particularly between ISN and UMMON, which wished to address the religious authorities in the Middle-East on behalf of Dutch Muslims and Christians by ostensibly participating in the Cairo trip. During the period under investigation, ISN intensified its relations with other religious organizations. It is not clear whether this was due to the Islam-critical expressions; actually we believe other factors may have played a role here.

*SICN* appears to represent a self-organized community, in which the leadership stays in close touch with its constituency. It fosters contacts with organizations on the local district level as well as with religious institutions locally, nationally and internationally. SICN showed itself not particularly affected by the Islam-critical expressions, and it has refrained from any public response. In SICN’s view, criticism of Islam addresses aspects of that religion which are unknown or irrelevant to its constituency. This is a community of people keen on living a good life in harmony with others. Critics of Islam are pushing the limits of decency, as they are entitled to do under the law, but Muslims should not allow themselves to be drawn into the controversy. Likewise, the government should not let itself be guided by fear of Islam and of Muslims.

In 2008, *NIF* was among the few religious organizations to start summary proceedings against Geert Wilders MP, prior to and shortly after the release of his film *Fitna*. For NIF, this lawsuit was not just about winning or losing a case; its intention was to channel its constituency’s emotions so as to avoid an escalation of the conflict. NIF’s framework is provided by the politico-religious Milli Görüs movement, which has always opposed Turkish state secularism as instituted by Atatürk. We have found no evidence that the Islam-critical expressions have caused NIF to review its relations with non-Muslim organizations. Even if initiatives such as *In Vrijheid Verbonden* (‘United in Freedom’) are appreciated, interreligious dialogue plays no significant role at grassroots level. The religious and political domains are kept distinct: NIF rejects the insulting and criticism of religious symbols, whereas it accepts political criticism and conflict.

*OSV*, the Shiite umbrella organization, has only publicly commented on *Fitna*. It disapproved of criticism of Islam while at the same time accepting it as an ingredient of freedom of expression and religion. OSV greatly appreciates this freedom, and stressed its importance by participating in the 2008 mission to Cairo. Further public statements were coordinated with the other – Sunni – CMO members, which OSV regards as favoured partners. During the past years, OSV has highly valued any contacts within and between religious communities. However, the Islam-critical expressions do not seem to have caused a significant rise in the number of these contacts, even if OSV has increasingly reached out to society at large over the years. It has evaluated the Islam-critical expressions mainly in terms of possible consequences for the Dutch Shiite community.

*Al Nisa*, the Muslim women’s organization, actively participated in the public debate on Islam and the Islam-critical expressions during the years 2004-2010. Its aim was to counteract the negative
image of Islam. It did not reject all criticism but sought to prove there need to be no tension between Dutch society and Islam, if Muslims transform existing patriarchal traditions and structures. Al Nisa has always been in favour of working with other religious and social organizations that share its emancipatory aims. It is likely that Al Nisa intensified these relations once it started to publicly express its views on the issue of Islam criticism.

SID is part of the transnational Gülen movement. It has not issued any statement in response to the Islam-critical expressions. It regarded Submission as an undesirable form of interreligious communication, even if people are free to produce such films. While taking these expressions seriously, SID wished to pay as little attention to them as possible. Within Dutch society, SID intends to address the current problems of interreligious dialogue, including the Islam-critical expressions. It takes a constructive and positive stance, aimed at improving interreligious relations.

Turning now to the CGI member organizations, we may observe, first, that Alevites throughout history have seen much suppression of their religious and cultural identity. This troubled past affects the way HAK-DER, the Federation of Alevi Associations in the Netherlands, positions itself in the current debate in the Netherlands. Alevite beliefs, norms and values differ from those of Sunnite Muslims. HAK-DER hardly made any response to the Islam-critical expressions, because they were partly sympathetic with their content. Yet HAK-DER did not wish to offend Sunnite Muslim organizations. Only to Fitna did HAK-DER respond, not through CGI but through the Inspraak Orgaan Turken ('Consultative Council of Turks in the Netherlands') of which it is also a member. One of HAK-DER's main concerns in the current debate on Islam has been to safeguard the interests of the Alevite minority.

FION is a federation of reformist Sunni organizations, inspired by ideas current in circles of the international Muslim Brotherhood. It left CGI after 2009. FION's aims are the consolidation of Islam and its recognition as a rightful element of Dutch society. In the cases of Fitna and the Danish Cartoon Affair, FION has tried to improve national and international relations, by contacting international religious authorities and by trying to instil moderation in its supporters. In the case of Submission, FION started summary proceedings, but lost the case. FION is not opposed to interreligious cooperation, but has doubts as to its usefulness at the institutional level. FION advocates a number of concrete measures in the fields of religion, law and public life generally, to improve the position of Islam and of Muslims.

The (Lahore) Ahmadiyya, represented by ULAMON, is a movement which is seen as non-Muslim by many other Muslim organizations. Many Dutch Ahmadiyya Muslims have a Surinam ethnic background. Ahmadiyya Muslims generally regard themselves as modernist and enlightened, both in social and religious matters. In its public response to the Islam-critical expressions, ULAMON has kept a low profile. The general feeling was that these expressions did not address the Ahmadiyya movement. ULAMON has conspicuously taken its own religious (and ethnic) perspective in this matter, and has stressed the community's religious identity. There is no evidence that the Islam-critical expressions have caused ULAMON to step up its interreligious contacts.

The fourth chapter discusses Christian organizations. We have detected two types of responses to the Islam-critical expressions. RvK, RKK, and PKN strengthened their ties with several Muslim organizations, such as those represented in CMO and CGI, expressed their support, and stepped up the dialogue. By contrast, CGK, SEM, and SKIN did not publicly respond. CGK and SEM believe that taking position vis-à-vis Islam-critical expressions is not up to religious organizations but rather to political and communal institutions. Furthermore, the orthodox Calvinist and pietist believers within these churches have little inclination towards civic involvement. Consequently, there is hardly any outreach towards Muslim organizations. SKIN's leaders, for their part, do not consider it their responsibility to respond in public to the Islam-critical expressions. Their aim is to help migrant churches "find their way in Dutch society", and to foster these churches' interests. The member churches of SKIN hold widely diverging opinions on Islam and on criticism of Islam.
RvK, RKK, and PKN have expressed concerns about the negative climate around Muslims and Islam in the Netherlands. To counteract this, but also in order to address Islam-related issues, they have argued in favour of more interaction with Muslims. They have initiated dialogue with several Muslim organizations on religious and social issues, for instance within the framework of the so-called Cairo Consultation Group. These organizations believe that important results can be achieved through dialogue and cooperation. Local parishes and communities are encouraged to start dialogue with local mosque organisations.

Freedom of expression is dear to these three mainstream Christian institutions. Still, they disapprove of mocking, insulting, and hurting the feelings of Muslims, as such actions not only conflict with important notions such as ‘respect’ and ‘tolerance’, but also hamper the desired dialogue. They are aware of the considerable doctrinal differences between Islam and Christianity; nevertheless, they realize that Christian and Muslim organizations share some vital social interests, such as the maintenance of freedom of religion and its public expression. In all, contacts between these institutions and Muslim organizations are relatively numerous.

The fifth chapter focuses on the remaining religious and humanist organizations and discusses their widely divergent responses to the Islam-critical expressions. The leaders of Jewish organisations have intensified their contacts and civic dialogue with Muslim organizations, partly in response to the Islam-critical expressions, while HV expressed its support for the critics of Islam, especially since these critics came under threat, and did not intensify its contacts.

NIK, NVPJ, and CJO have expressed themselves in terms of ‘human rights’, ‘tolerance’, and ‘respect’, but they are also aware of the ‘Jewish interests’ that are at stake in this matter. As leaders of an often stigmatized minority, rabbis are sensitive to the prejudices against the Muslim community. There are common interests in the areas of freedom of religion, the legislation on blasphemy, and freedom of education. However, relations between the communities are burdened by supposed Islamic anti-Semitism, supposed Jewish anti-Islamism, as well as by the conflict in the Middle-East.

For HV, freedom of expression is the primary frame of reference in this matter. It is critical about religion in general, including Islam, and wishes to reserve the right for itself to freely voice this criticism. Contacts between HV and Muslim organizations are scarce, due to what is perceived as the incompatibility between their respective world-views.

The Buddhist BUN and the Hindu HRN have not publicly responded to the Islam-critical expressions. Their priorities are not with participating in this debate, but rather with building and strengthening their own communities. Since the days of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, the Hindu community seems to have developed certain sympathy to criticism of Islam. However, it has come to realize that anti-multiculturalist policies may affect Hindus as much as Muslims, through recent experiences with Geert Wilders’ populist PVV party in the city council of The Hague. Contacts between BUN and HRN on the one hand, and Muslim organizations on the other, are scarce due to what is felt to be the distance between these religions. Yet, within the Surinamese-Hindustani community, there are many personal contacts between Hindus and Muslims, a fact which is deeply rooted in the history of Surinam.

NHR, BUN, HV, and the Jewish organizations regularly take part in initiatives, i.e. the ceremony on Prinsjesdag (the opening of the parliamentary year) and In Vrijheid Verbonden, which aim to express and promote relationships between religious and humanistic communities in the Netherlands.

The sixth chapter comprises an analysis of our data. The first two sections examine whether the responses to the Islam-critical expressions can be grouped into clearly discernible types, and which factors have shaped those types. The third section discusses the case of Fitna. Of all the Islam-critical expressions, this film caused the greatest upheaval in the Netherlands. In particular, we ask how Dutch authorities acted towards religious and humanist organizations. Section four assesses the
extent to which these institutions contributed to the polarization over Islam in Dutch society during the years 2004-2010 (cf. Chapter 2). The final section considers the future role that religious and humanist organizations might play in possible situations of polarization over Islam.

In our analysis, we distinguish between Muslim and non-Muslim organizations. Muslim organizations are uniquely tackled in this matter over the religion that crucially shapes their identity. One might therefore view the critics as ‘prosecutors’, which assigns Muslim organizations the role of the ‘accused’. Non-Muslim organizations in this metaphor become ‘bystanders’ or ‘spectators’. These different positions within the ‘system’ of Islam-criticism yield correspondingly different types of responses.

Three types are discernible in the responses by Muslim organizations: resignation/avoidance, defensiveness/disapproval, and offensive/counteracting. One of these types is prevalent in each organization’s responses, even if there is always a certain variance, depending on the topic to which a specific response applies.

- **Resignation/avoidance**: These responses show certain indifference. The leaders feel that the criticism does not apply to their organization, and can safely be ignored: “this isn’t about us. It’s about other Muslims.” Reaching out to the critics or to other religious or humanist organizations is no priority in this type of response, which was found with SICN, ULAMON, and HAK-DER.

- **Defensiveness/disapproval**: In this case, the leaders do take the criticism to heart, but they refrain from taking public action, either because they feel incapable of doing so or because they do not see it as part of their responsibility. This type of response was found with ISN, SID, and OSV.

- **Offensive/counteracting**: This type of response is characterized by active involvement. The leaders respond to the Islam-critical expressions in whichever way they find suitable, such as filing law-suits, issuing public statements, launching poster campaigns, or strengthening their ties with non-Muslim organizations. This type of response was found with UMMON, NIF, Al Nisa, and FION.

The responses by non-Muslim organizations can be characterized as: supportive, cooperative, non-committal, and critical. Again, allowing for some variance, one of these types is prevalent in each organization’s responses.

- **Supportive**: These responses express support for the ‘accused’, i.e., Muslims and Muslim organizations generally. It may be limited to issuing public statements, but may also encourage more dialogue and cooperation. This type of response was found with Christian RvK, RKK, and PKN.

- **Cooperative**: The leaders make a public response to the Islam-critical expressions, revive old contacts with Muslim organizations and try to establish new ones. The underlying motivation is an awareness of the community’s own interests in this matter. This type of response was found with the Jewish organizations.

- **Non-committal**: In this case there is virtually no public response to the Islam-critical expressions. The organization’s leadership may feel these expressions are none of its business, or may be faced with internal division. Contacts with Muslim organizations are scarce or lacking. This type of response was found with Christian CGK, SEM, and SKIN, as well as Hindu HRN, and Buddhist BUN.

- **Critical**: Responses of this type are positive about most of the content of the Islam-critical expressions, even if their form may not win approval. These responses take side with the critics if and when they are under threat because of what they said. This type of response was found with Humanist HV.

From our investigation it has become apparent that framing is a critically important factor. Framing – i.e., the way the leaders view and define themselves, their own situation, the Islam-critical expressions, their own and other groups – has immense bearing on the responses. We distinguish two types of framing, to which correspond two types of religious and humanist organizations: interest-driven and value-driven organizations. Interest-driven organizations tend to interpret their situation primarily in terms of their own and their members’ interests, whereas value-driven
organizations take their value system as their frame of reference. The two types are actually the extremes of a continuum, since organizations typically present elements of both.

Among the ten Muslim organizations we studied, four can be characterized as interest-driven: SICN, ULAMON, HAK-DER, and OSV. The remaining six are predominantly value-driven: UMMON, ISN, NIF, Al Nisa, FION, and SID. Among the non-Muslim organizations, SKIN, BUN, and HRN are primarily interest-driven, whereas RvK, RKK, PKN, CGK, SEM, and HV are value-driven organizations. The Jewish organizations are somewhere in the middle of the continuum, particularly NIK and NVPJ. The umbrella organization CJO explicitly aims at fostering the interests of the Jewish organizations it represents as well as those of the Jewish communities in the Netherlands in general.

Almost all interest-driven organizations did conspicuously not respond to the Islam-critical expressions. The Muslim organizations within this group held that the criticism did not apply to ‘their’ Islam, whereas the non-Muslim organizations felt it was not up to them to respond. ‘It’s none of our business.’ Accordingly, they have hardly invested in strengthening their interreligious contacts in the aftermath of the Islam-critical expressions. Even if BUN has taken a slightly more active stance in the interreligious dialogue under the leadership of Varamitra, contacts between SKIN, HRN, and BUN on the one hand, and Muslim organizations on the other are scarce, which is due at least in part to what is perceived as the incompatibility between respective religious traditions.

We have noticed two exceptions to this pattern. Of the interest-driven Muslim organizations, the Shiite OSV did respond – to Fitna in particular. As a newcomer among the CMO member organizations one of its motives was a desire to demonstrate its solidarity with the Sunni majority. The second exception is the Jewish CJO, which was the only non-Muslim interest-driven organization to respond – again to Fitna – as it felt Jewish interests were at stake there.

Among the Muslim value-driven organizations, we find two types of framing: religious and political-ideological. Some organizations define the Islam-critical expressions primarily as offensive to the key symbols of Islam (UMMON, NIF, SID), others see them mainly as expressions of anti-Islamic or racist ideologies (ISN, Al Nisa, FION). Among the non-Muslim value-driven organizations we also found two types of framing: societal and constitutional. The Christian RvK, RKK, PKN, as well as the Jewish NIK and NVPJ responded to Fitna primarily from the perspective of the cohesion of Dutch society, qualifying the film as provocative and a source of polarization. The Humanist HV, for its part, stressed the legitimacy of the Islam-critical expressions, viewing them from the perspective of constitutional freedom of expression, stepping in for the critics if and when they were under threat.

This being said, we found that it is not simply diagnostic framings but rather the combined diagnostic and strategic framings that crucially shape the responses. The societal frame of reference of the mainstream Christian organizations caused them to speak out in favour of interreligious and cultural dialogue. The orthodox CGK, even though it shared the diagnosis as put forward by the mainstream organizations, did not respond in the same way, as its different strategic framing prevented it from publicly speaking out. According to this church, it is up to civic and political organizations to take a public stance in the matter. Likewise, some of the Muslim organizations felt it was up to the government (ISN) or to non-Muslim organizations (SID) to respond to insults to Islam or expressions of anti-Islamism. However, organizations such as UMMON, FION, and Al Nisa did actively respond, in accordance with their strategic vision.

As far as the strengthening of ties between Muslim and non-Muslim organizations is concerned, the data suggest that the perceived similarity or dissimilarity of world-views was an important factor. If leaders could somehow relate to other organizations’ ‘doctrines’, they would be more inclined to invest in contact and cooperation, in response to the Islam-critical expressions. Such contacts are scarce between, e.g., CGK, SEM, and HV on the one hand and Muslim organizations on the other, which is due in part to the perceived dissimilarity of world-views. In mainstream Christian churches and organizations, such dissimilarity is less strongly perceived, and contacts are correspondingly stronger. The humanist HV does have relations specifically with HAK-DER through the Humanist
Alliance (Humanistische Alliantie), and considers it to be of kindred humanist spirit. In the aftermath of the Islam-critical expressions, FION has invested less in interreligious cooperation than other Muslim value-driven organizations, due in part to this factor of ‘perceived distance’.

Besides framing there are other factors that have shaped the responses to the Islam-critical expressions. Internal differences of opinion may in some cases have prevented organizations from firmly responding. Externally, the government appear to have played a significant role. Particularly in the case of Fitna, Muslim organizations felt bolstered by the public authorities. This may have been especially true for Moroccan organizations, which were stigmatized as prone to radicalization because of the Moroccan background of the man who murdered Theo van Gogh. Several non-Muslim organizations likewise expressed their satisfaction with the government’s attitude. International and transnational relations are important external factors as far as Muslim organizations are concerned. Particularly in the tension between CMO members ISN and UMMON during the Fitna affair, their respective transnational relations may have played a part. The responses by FION also appear to have been influenced by its international context. As far as the Christian RvK and PKN are concerned, their responses to Fitna appear to have been partly prompted by contacts with the Community of Churches in Indonesia.

Surveying the background factors, we found that interest-driven religious and humanist organizations are to be found exclusively among small religious minorities, Muslim and non-Muslim. As fringe groups, they primarily seek to foster the interests of their own member organizations and their own people, keeping aloof from social and political debates that do not seem to affect those interests. As for the value-driven organizations, their framings are partially determined by their world-views, and by their social positions. Ethnicity is an important factor in all Muslim organizations, with the sole exception of the inter-ethnic women’s organization Al Nisa. Structure is a major ‘internal factor’ with any organization: a democratic structure forces the leadership to take its members’ views into account. Finally, in the case of the Christian RvK, RKK, and PKN, pre-existing ties with Muslim organizations constituted a solid base for more intense cooperation in response to the Islam-critical manifestations.

The third section examines the public authorities’ approach towards religious and humanist organizations, particularly in the case of Fitna. It turns out that a number of Muslim organizations were quite pleased with the government’s policies, particularly its ‘Fitna Consultations’. They felt encouraged not only to urge their constituencies to respond ‘with calm and dignity’ to the Islam-critical expressions, but also to advocate the Dutch interests in the Muslim world.

Some organizations, e.g., Al Nisa, were less content. They felt that the authorities held a negative view of Islam and kept silent as Muslims actually responded to the Islam-critical expressions with calm and dignity. Possibly, this negative appreciation was caused by the authorities’ failure to follow up on their initial intervention.

Fitna positively affected the relations between various Muslim and Christian organizations. The Cairo Consultation Group is evidence of this. Mutual relations between Muslim organizations were affected both positively and negatively. On the positive side, CMO and CGI came closer to each other and worked together in the mission to Cairo. On the negative side, tensions emerged and were possibly deepened. FION and ISN, for instance, were opposed to UMMON’s commitment to the Cairo mission. Different strategic and diagnostic framings caused the gap between these organizations to widen.

The fourth section tries to assess whether the responses effectively escalated or de-escalated the polarization in Dutch society over Islam and Muslims. To this end, we used four parameters, formulated by sociologist Kees Schuyt. As it turns out, we found no positive scores on any of these parameters. There were no attempts to curtail internal diversity so as to appear stronger in
confronting the critics. There was a general tendency to discourage confrontational thinking, both with Muslims and non-Muslims. Several Muslim leaders have stressed their solidarity with Dutch society. There has been no ridiculing or vilifying of the critics. Some of our respondents have signalled a conflict of values or of world-views between Muslims and the critics, but no-one saw this conflict as unsolvable. All respondents acknowledged the importance of the rule of law, and came up with ways of dealing with the existing tensions in a peaceful manner. Several respondents were aware of the emotions that play a role on either side of the divide: feelings of anxiety and discontent on the part of the indigenous population, anger and a sense of being discriminated against and hurt on the part of the Muslim population. They said their aim was to prevent their constituencies from being guided by those emotions.

We finally take a brief look ahead. What role are the religious and humanist organizations likely to play in future situations of polarization over Islam and Muslims in Dutch society? Recent studies predict a religious landscape in the Netherlands in which a plethora of self-conscious and dedicated minorities find themselves in a context of individualism, religious indifference, atheism, and ‘free floating spirituality’. Possibly, religious and humanist groups will behave strategically towards each other, each stressing their own uniqueness, while seeking cooperation with others on issues of common interest. The challenge will be for all those groups to not just cultivate their own communities and identities, but also to reach out respectfully towards each other, i.e., to join bridging and bonding. The extent to which they live up to this challenge will determine their role in a possible situation of continued polarization over Islam, and, more generally, in a situation of religious diversity in the Netherlands.