



OPENING THE ROAD TO DIALOGUE: AN AMALGAMATION OF GÜLEN'S AND SPINOZA'S IDEAS ON TOLERANCE AND DIALOGUE APPLIED TO THE SITUATION OF MUSLIMS IN THE NETHERLANDS

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Abstract

This paper is a demonstration of how perspectives from different times, locations, and worldviews can still find deep resonance and yield points supporting the necessity for dialogue and tolerance. By amalgamating two perspectives on these issues – one rooted in Islam, the other in secular early-Enlightenment – the authors show that although different they can together point to the same goal. The need for and the relationship between tolerance and dialogue are expressed in the writings of both Fethullah Gülen (1941–), an internationally-renowned scholar of Islam and a prominent teacher of peace and practitioner of dialogue, and Benedictus (Baruch) de Spinoza (1632–1677), the son of Portuguese Jew who sought refuge in Amsterdam during the seventeenth century and became the leader of a ‘radical’ philosophic current which divorced philosophy from theology. The merging of these two men’s ideas demonstrates in itself that a dialogue between ‘civilizations’ is possible and thus defies those who believe that Islam and the Judeo-Christian/secular West are destined to clash. Furthermore, their philosophies can inform public debates, policy development and community-building strategies in western European countries, like the Netherlands, with their growing Muslim populations. Islamophobic and anti-Muslim discourses have had a profound impact on recent developments in integration and naturalization policies in the Netherlands. All across western Europe the doctrine of multiculturalism and the welfare state shaped post-War immigrant related policies, but these policies have since been re-examined due to social problems among first and second generation immigrants and the emergence of what is considered to be ‘theologically’ inspired terrorism. In the Netherlands politicians, policy-makers and citizens struggle to deal with these discourses and especially the perceived tensions between the Dutch secular state and society and the increasing number of Muslim citizens. Thus the amalgamation of Gülen’s Islamic and Spinoza’s secular perspectives on tolerance and dialogue have the potential to contribute to the ‘peaceful coexistence’ of secular and Islamic residents.

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The ways to explain things to people without making them hostile and frightened should be sought. For this reason, at whatever cost, the road to dialogue with people must be kept open. (Gülen 2004a:140).

1. Introduction

Throughout its history the Netherlands has been known as one of the most tolerant countries in Europe. Repressed groups, such as Portuguese Jews and French Huguenots, came to the Netherlands during the 16th Century because there they were able to practice their religion without persecution. Similarly philosophers like Descartes came to the Netherlands because he could enjoy greater freedom of speech than in his native France. Dutch tolerance took on its most indurate institutional form during the era of pillarization when Catholics, Protestants, socialists, and liberals lived harmoniously ‘apart-together’ (Vermeij, 2006:19). Currently, homosexuals come to the Netherlands to enjoy the freedom to express their sexuality openly and even marry if they wish to.²⁸⁵ Similarly, post-colonial and labour immigrants who arrived in the Netherlands during the 1960’s and 70’s and the subsequent generation of *alloctonen* (those born in a foreign country or with parents born in a foreign country) were also treated with ‘tolerance’ under multicultural policies. However, during the last several years the Dutch tradition of tolerance seems to many to have encountered Popper’s “paradox of tolerance”. Popper argued that tolerance of the intolerant is ultimately self-defeating because it eventually leads to the abolition of tolerance by the intolerant (Popper 1966 as cited in Rosenfeld 2003:11).

The interethnic and inter-religious climate in the Netherlands has undergone dramatic changes over the past several years. During the 1990’s criticism of multiculturalism and its ‘tolerance’ of Muslim immigrant, primarily of Moroccan and Turkish origin, began to surface: exclusionist opinions and social distance towards ethnic minorities have increased (Dagevos, Gijsberts & van Praag, 2003). Both the structural and political-cultural integration of these groups was said to have failed. We will argue that this failure is due not to excessive ‘tolerance’ but to indifference masked by a ‘tolerant’ façade. Furthermore, current claims to the Dutch tradition of ‘tolerance’ have become part of a nationalistic identity building project that has shaped current integration policies. As both a form of indifference and nationalism ‘tolerance’ loses its power to build a plural liberal democratic society because it closes the “road to dialogue” (Gülen 2004a:140). Thus, we will contend that it is not the ‘paradox of tolerance’ that has strained relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands but the misuse and misunderstanding of the principle.

Dutch politics and society is renowned for its political culture of dialogue: in the “polder model” all parties have to be heard before a decision can be made. However, Dutch dialogues between non-Muslim and Muslim citizens on the role of religion in society and on integration will be empty and counterproductive without a re-conceptualisation of what it means to be tolerant in a plural society and how a meaningful dialogue should be conducted. By using the ideas of Fethullah Gülen [1941]²⁸⁶—an internationally-renowned scholar of Islam and a prominent teacher of peace and practitioner of

²⁸⁵ Dutch tolerance has also led to the integration of liberal attitudes and politics towards prostitution, and the use of soft drugs suggest that the Dutch still take an open and accepting stand towards behaviours that may be condemned as deviant by others.

²⁸⁶ Gülen was born in Erzurum, eastern Turkey and has lived in Pennsylvania USA since 1998.



dialogue—in comparison with those of Benedictus (Baruch) de Spinoza [1632-1677]—the son of Portuguese Jew who sought refuge in Amsterdam during the 17th century and became the leader of a ‘radical’ philosophical current which divorced philosophy from theology—we will attempt to make such a re-conceptualisation. The purpose of this amalgamation of philosophic perspectives on tolerance and dialogue is two fold. First, Gülen and Spinoza, respectively, argue that dialogue and tolerance complement each other and together make liberal democratic peaceful coexistence possible. Second, the merging of these two men’s ideas, emerging from very different perspectives—the former religious and the later secular, demonstrates in itself that a dialogue between ‘civilizations’ is possible and thus defies those who believe that Islam and the judo-Christian/secular west are predestined to clash.

The paper will begin with an outline of the historical developments of Dutch integration policies in order to provide the background information needed to understand the position and participation of Muslims in the Netherlands. Thereafter we will discuss the Dutch discourse on Islam and Muslims. We will then outline Spinoza’s and Gülen’s thoughts on discourse and tolerance and conclude by discussing how they can be applied to the Dutch situation.

2. Becoming Dutch: Muslim Citizens and Dutch Integration Policies

The Netherlands has had a long history of contact with the Muslim world thanks to its trading activities. In fact the Ottoman Turks gave the Dutch their first tulips, the famous national flower, in the 1500s (Ireland 2004). However, little of this commercial or cultural contact occurred on Dutch soil until after the Second World War. The Netherlands was, and remains, a very hesitant immigrant land. Nevertheless, at present approximately 11 percent of the Dutch population is foreign born, and, if the second generation is included, that percentage increases to 20 (Entzinger 2007:2). Approximately one million of the 16 million people living in the Netherlands are considered to be Muslims (van der Laan 2007) the majority of whom are of Turkish or Moroccan origin.²⁸⁷ The most ‘visible minorities are Turks, Surinamese and Moroccans.’²⁸⁸ The Surinamese immigrants arrived during the 1970s, as a result of increasing apprehension over the country’s independence from the Netherlands. Their Dutch passports and knowledge of the Dutch language greatly facilitated their integration. Conversely, the Turkish and Moroccan communities—the legacy of ‘guest worker’ policies of the late 1960’s and 1970’s that were followed by generous programs of settlement and family reunification—have come to be seen as problematic due to a lack of integration (Entzinger 2007:2).

Before the 1980s the national government had not devised any clearly articulated policies towards immigrants. Prior to that period it was believed that most of the post-war immigrants would eventually leave the country (van Houtum et al. 2005:626). There was a powerful conviction that the Netherlands should not be an immigration country: immigrant residence was to be temporary because the Netherlands regarded itself to be overpopulated (Entzinger 1975). However after acts of

²⁸⁷ Other Islamic groups in the Netherlands include Hindustani Surinamese, Indonesians, Pakistanis, Tunisians and Moluccans (Shadid and van Koningsveld 1996) as well as newer immigrants/asylum seekers such as Iranians and Iraqis.

²⁸⁸ ‘Visible minorities’ is a Canadian term used to indicate ethnic communities that stand out as a result of their size (Entzinger 2006:2).



violence committed by young Molukan immigrants the Netherlands began to recognize and accept the presence of immigrant communities.²⁸⁹

After the parliament published the *Minderhedennota* (the Minority Memorandum) in 1983 the ‘guest workers’ and post-colonial migrants became known as ‘ethnic minorities’ (van Houtum et al. 2005:626). The policy that followed reflected the belief that if the newly discovered ‘ethnic minorities’ were allowed to “retain their own culture and manage their own affairs they would be better placed to emancipate in Dutch society” (van Houtum et al. 2005:626). The institutional and political structure for these new policies had already been constructed.

Dutch Multiculturalism was the descendent of earlier forms of political accommodation that had served the country well in the past. The Netherlands was remarkably politically stable during the 20th century, despite the constant threat posed by the division of society into four separate ‘pillars’: Catholic, Protestant, liberal, and socialist (Andeweg & Irwin 2005:19). Arend Lijphart explained this extraordinary stability with his concept of ‘consociational democracy’. This theory seeks to demonstrate how stable and effective democracy is possible despite social heterogeneity when there is elite cooperation (Lijphart 1975). In the pillarised Netherlands there was a decentralization of policy making to the ‘corporate’ minorities, whose institutions were subsidised by the central government.

Although the pillars collapsed under the pressure of social mobility and secularisation during the 1960s, “subsidised autonomy” was granted to new immigrant groups and formed the backbone of Dutch multiculturalism. The ‘Ethnic Minorities Policy’ focused on ethnic minorities as collectives: it promoted socio-economic participation, combated discrimination, and supported group emancipation of minority groups through coordination with ethnic elites. These policies had an especially profound impact on the experience of Turkish and Moroccan ‘guest-workers’ and their families (Entzinger 2007:3). These Islamic immigrants were allowed to establish separate facilities based on their community and religious identity. For example subsidies were allocated for ‘mother language’ teaching programs for immigrant children, and welfare benefits were granted to their non-Dutch speaking parents (Entzinger 2007:3).²⁹⁰

During the 1990’s high unemployment and under-development among first and second generation *allochtonen* opened the flood gates to progressive claims that multiculturalism promoted racial stereotypes and ethnic marginalisation (Steenbergen 2006: 267). Furthermore, criminality and Islamic fundamentalism provoked more conservative critiques—echoing Samuel Huntington (2004, 1998)—against the “tribalisation” of the Netherlands and the assaults on Western democratic ideals by foreigners, particularly Muslims (Philipse 2005; Bolkestein 1997). The political debate over the compatibility between Islam and democratic liberalism, which would mark much of the later political

²⁸⁹ After Indonesian independence was granted in 1949 approximately 300,000 colonizers and colonized fled to the Netherlands, of whom approximately 13,000 were former soldiers from the island of Ambon (Molukans) (Köbben 1979: 147). Both the Molukans and the government considered their residence to be temporary because they had been promised independence by the Dutch. After being housed in a former Nazi concentration camp, and having been considered ‘temporary’ for more than 25 years, unrest led to several terrorist attacks by young Molukans. Finally a kidnapping and two train hijackings sparked the political and social debates that eventually led to the WWR report on the status of Minorities. (Köbben 1979).

²⁹⁰ It is interesting to note that although well meaning these policies often led to mistaken understandings of ethnic group composition. For instance all Moroccans were supposed to have Arabic as their mother language and thus the children of Berber speaking immigrants were also provided with Arabic classes.



debate over integration, was started in 1991 by former liberal party (VVD) leader Frits Bolkestein (Maas 1997). Bolkestein claimed that Islam was a threat to liberal freedom and democracy

After the 1994 elections, the newly elected 'purple' coalition, composed of the three main non-religious parties, replaced 'minority policies' with 'integration policies'; shifting the focus from respecting cultural difference to promoting the immigrant's social and economic participation (Entzinger 2007:5; Ministerie van BiZa 1994). The approach taken by the 'integration policy' was a more citizenship-oriented (or republican) approach than the group-oriented policies of the 1980s. Nevertheless, the 1997 parliamentary report on the multicultural society still stressed the importance of strong group-identity as a means to facilitate self-confident societal participation (Gemeente Utrecht 2004:17).²⁹¹ Thus, the integration of individuals was also combined with the idea of distinct group identity.

The *Inburgering* of new immigrants became the spearhead of Dutch integration policies (Fermin 1999:96). In colloquial Dutch the word *integratie* (integration) is used interchangeably with the word *inburgering*—normally translated as naturalising. However, the root of the term, *burger* (citizen) suggests it can literally be translated as "to become a citizen". This concept arose in 1989 when the WRR advised that basic civic and language education be made a requirement for immigrants. In 1994 the government began to express interest in developing an *inburgering* policy, the purpose of which would be to facilitate the independent functioning of immigrants in Dutch society. Finally, in 1996, non-European Union immigrants, with a right to welfare benefits, were obliged to participate in a 12-month integration course, consisting of 600 hours of Dutch language instruction, civic education and preparation for the labour market (Joppke 2007:13). Then, in 1998, through the enactment of the *Wet inburgering nieuwkomers* (WIN) (Newcomer Integration Law), non-EU immigrants without a temporary reason for residence (such as students), were required to *inburgeren* regardless of welfare rights (Fermin 1999: 96). Furthermore, the relics of multiculturalism, such as 'mother tongue' teaching, were removed from the school curriculum (Entzinger 2007:5).

During the 2002 parliamentary elections campaign, Pim Fortuyn, a flamboyant homosexual sociology professor, challenged the political elite with his populist claims that there was no more room in the Netherlands for foreigners. Furthermore, in his book, *Against the Islamicisation of Our Culture*, he warned that Dutch society was under attack by authoritarian Muslims who, if given the opportunity, would destroy the Dutch tradition of tolerance, and rob homosexuals and women of their rights (Fortuyn 2001). Although assassinated shortly before the elections by a Dutch animal rights activist, his party (LPF, List Pim Fortuyn) was included in the ruling coalition. However, the party's inability to function as part of the government led to the collapse of the coalition, and after new elections were called the LPF lost most of its votes (Andeweg & Irwin 2005: 16). In the end it was Fortuyn's critique of the prevalent political correctness towards immigrants—especially Islamic immigrants—that had the most impact on Dutch political culture.

One of Fortuyn's most enthusiastic supporters, who dubbed him the 'divine baldy' in light of his shaved head, was Theo van Gogh. Van Gogh, a film maker, columnist and television personality, was known for his outrageous and politically incorrect antics. When he was approached by Ayaan Hirsi Ali—a liberal party parliamentarian of Somalian decent—to direct a film she had written called

²⁹¹ In this same report the government wrote that the effort of the entire society, both foreign and native-Dutch was needed for the integration of minorities.



Submission Part I, he agreed.²⁹² In the film the story of the abuse suffered by Islamic women at the hands of male relatives was told by a woman dressed in a transparent 'burka': her naked body was tattooed with Qur'an texts. The film alienated and enraged many Muslims and as revenge a young Dutch Islamic fundamentalist, Mohammed Bouyeri, killed van Gogh. Bouyeri left a note on the body threatening Hirsi Ali.

The lives and deaths of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, the media spectacle that was Hirsi Ali, along with international events like September 11th and the Madrid bombings, set the stage for the formulation of 'Integration Policy New Style'. Furthermore, a 2004 parliamentary investigation into the state of integration in the Netherlands, known as the Blok Commission, concluded that integration in the Netherlands had failed, especially in regard to education (Tijdelijke Commissie Onderzoek Integratiebelied; Commissie Blok, 2004). Steered by the former heavy-handed Minister of Integration, Rita Verdonk, the Netherlands enacted increasingly restrictive migration and more rigorous integration policies, including the requirement of 'civic integration' or *inburgering* classes for religious leaders like Imams.²⁹³

3. Anti-Muslimism in the Netherlands

Dutch Islamophobia is marked by what Halliday (1995) calls 'anti-Muslimism' because it encompassed racist, xenophobic and, stereotypical element : it is part of a larger anti-immigrant sentiment (as cited in Koningsveld 2002:175). 'Muslim' is an ethnic political identity, that along with socio-economic deprivation and spatial segregation, is used to draw clear lines between Dutch and Islamic culture, the native Dutch and Muslims. This kind of differentiation does not allow for engagement and cooperation but instead fear and feeling of moral superiority born of ignorance.

Initially the aforementioned legacy of pillarization, provide for a conception of ethnic minorities that was based on social, economic, cultural and religious characteristics: the end goal was a cohesive yet pluralistic society made up of ethnically distinct yet settled groups (Ireland 2004:122). Muslim movements were just part of the mix: the problematic history of Catholic emancipation and the eventual acquiesce of humanist beliefs and Jewish practices helped to clear the way for Islam (Ireland 2004:122). Although the so called 'silver cord' between the Dutch state and churches was cut in 1983 local governments still had the authority to disperse subsidies for social and cultural work, including those performed by mosque associations (Ireland 2004:122). Thus, although most of the Dutch were leaving their pillars the state helped to construct a new Muslim one: they introduced subsidies for prayers rooms and eventually mosques, sanctioned and regulated the ritual slaughtering of animals, initiated the Islamic Broadcasting Foundation, and made imams legally equal to other spiritual leaders (Shadid & Van Koningsveld 1996). It was believed that Muslim organizations could help to

²⁹² Hirsi Ali made it her political mission to emancipate women from Islam. She herself came to the Netherlands as a refugee after escaping an arranged marriage. In 2006 a controversy over her citizenship arose after the Minister of Integration -a fellow liberal party member- made an issue of lies Hirsi Ali had told on her original asylum request. In the end she was allowed to keep her citizenship but she voluntarily resigned from the parliament and moved to the United States.

²⁹³ In Dec 2006 integration was removed from Verdonk's portfolio after a struggle between the cabinet and the parliament over the pardoning of 2600 asylum seekers who asked for asylum longer than five years before and who had asylum applications turned down under the previous cabinet and in the justice system. In Feb. 2007 she stood down as minister when the new cabinet was installed and is now a member of parliament (Valk 2006:3).



implement the minority policies and emancipate their members. However, efforts to create a unified Dutch Islam failed and the organizations remained nationality-based and most Mosques had an ethnic affiliation (Ireland 2004:123). Thus references to “the Islam” or “Muslims” are miss-leading generalizations, for there are many different interpretations of the Qur’an and differences in religious cultural practices.

This focus on political-cultural integration based on ethnic identities and the lack of structural-integration in the labour market, housing, schools and vocational training policies eventually blew up in the faces of Dutch policy makers. As Christopher Cadwell writes: “The Dutch talked themselves into believing that valuelessness was a perennial feature of their society. So they could build a Muslim pillar and then let it collapse into post-modern individualism, following the same historic route that Protestantism and Catholicism had taken, as if that route were the product of an iron historical law” (Cadwell 2004 as cited in Carle 2006). The economic stagnation and restructuring of the late 1980s hit immigrant groups very hard—in 1987 unemployment rates had soared to 42 percent among Moroccans, 44 percent among Turks and 27 percent among Surinamese, compared to just 13 percent among the native population (Pennix & Groenendijk as cited in Ireland 2004:123). Drop out rates among *alloctonous* students were very high and many of the first generation immigrants who had lived in the Netherlands for decades did not speak any Dutch (Engbersen, Hemerijck & Bakker 1994 as cited in Ireland 2004: 123).

In January of 2000 Paul Scheffer, a historian and prominent Dutch Labour Party (PVdA) member, wrote an article that appeared in the *NRC Handelsblad*, a Dutch daily newspaper, entitled “The Multicultural Drama”. Herein Scheffer argued that an “ethnic underclass” consisted of people who do not feel attached to Dutch culture and society and who are unwilling and unable to integrate, had been formed as the result of cultural relativism. From his view point the illiberal idea of Muslims could undermine the social cohesion and the functioning of liberal democracy (Scheffer 2000). The solution he suggested was a ‘civilization offensive’ which would force immigrants to adhere to the principles on which the Dutch state had been created and that they should have a comprehensive knowledge of Dutch history and culture. Tolerance, he claimed, “can only survive within clear limits: without shared norms and values about the rule of law, we cannot productively have differences of opinion” (Scheffer 2000). The success of Scheffer’s critique of the indifference of Dutch multicultural ‘tolerance’ was that it sparked the expression of classical nationalist sentiments such as the defences of Dutch language and culture and the need for a shared understanding of history. Thus criticism from the left that “the very idea of a multicultural society was too conservative because it denies the fact that migration changes people” (Scheffer 2000) started to ricochet across the political spectrum.

These anti-multiculturalism sentiments were most clearly articulated by the rightist populists like Pim Fortuyn and later Geert Wilders and Liberal Party (VVD) members like former leader Frit Bolkestein, parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali and the former minister of Integration, Rita Verdonk. What all these politicians have in common is the idea that Islam is fundamentally incompatible with democracy and that Western values are superior. The status of homosexuality and the position of women in society have become markers of the difference between ‘Dutch values’ and Islam.

Fortuyn in particular expressed the importance of protecting the rights of homosexuals from Muslim, although he openly bragged about sleeping with many Moroccan men (Burma 2006). During a recent political controversy sparked after Prime minister Balkenende told a group of students at the Islamic Indonesian State University that he had voted against gay marriage as a parliamentarian Boris van der Ham (D66) stated “as prime minister representing *all the Dutch* he must explain that gay marriage is



based on deeply rooted norms and values” (Krietiek op uitspraken Balkenende over homohuwelijk 2007). However, what van der Ham and Fortuyn before him have failed to explicate is that the right to gay marriage is not a fundamental Dutch value but the result of a democratic decision that many, including native Dutch Christians like Balkenende opposed.

The supposed suppression and abuse of Islamic women has been repeatedly used as an example of the threat of Muslims to Dutch society and the ‘backwardness’ of Islam. Islamic women and their own definitions of themselves are often excluded from this discourse, based on presumption and not on dialogue. Ayaan Hirsi Ali—who has mistakenly been called the heiress of Spinoza²⁹⁴—made it her mission to free women from the edicts of Islam that had decreed her own circumcision, and an arranged marriage from which she had fled.²⁹⁵ Through the language of the European Enlightenment, and with the justification of her own Islamic African past, she has declared war on Islam from inside liberal Dutch political circles. However it is not skin colour or background that matter here but the nature of the arguments. Hirsi Ali’s position clearly comes from an elite, secular, western perspective. Feminist scholar Halleh Ghorashi captures the anomaly of Hirsi Ali’s politics in her assessment that: “Hirsi Ali is sincere but also dogmatic, she is brave but also one-sided, she is black but thinks white” (Ghorashi 2005:2). Although her intentions are good, by allying herself with an ideology that objectifies the Islamic woman as part of a postcolonial nationalistic discourse instead of engaging in dialogue, she has failed in her emancipatory mission.

Just as in France and the UK, woman clad in hijab in the Netherlands have become walking symbols of an Islamic threat. In December of 2005 Geert Wilders, the leader of the populist anti-immigrant ‘Party for Freedom’, proposed a motion to ban the Burka, a garment worn by orthodox Muslim woman with only a screened opening around the eyes. In regard to the motion Wilders stated:

The Burka is unfriendly to women and actually medieval. It is an insult to everyone who believes in equal rights to have completely unrecognizable women on the streets. Thus, in the Netherlands there is no place for a burka. The motion also gives support to moderate Muslims in the Netherlands. The burka ban contributes to integration in the Netherlands. Furthermore, in light of security issues it is unacceptable that people are unrecognizable. It is for this reason that the burka was earlier forbidden in certain Belgian cities.^{296,297}

Although such a ban was found to be unconstitutional on the grounds of religious freedom, the motion may still be passed in light of security issues surrounding unidentifiable people. Wilders was given wide support by the Christian Democrats (CDA), the Liberal Party (VVD) and the party founded by the late Pim Fortuyn (LPF). The parliamentary fuss over the issue puzzled many because only about 100 women, out of a population 16 million, actually wear the burka. However, within the context of Dutch anti-Muslimism it is entirely understandable because the burka is a glaring example of the Islamic other violating perceived pillars of the Dutch state.

²⁹⁴ Buurma 2006; 24. This was a statement made by Jonathan Israel quoted by Yoram Stein in Trouw, May 6, 2005.

²⁹⁵ Hirsi Ali has resigned from her parliamentary position and moved to America due to a controversy surrounding her citizenship and security issues.

²⁹⁶ Groep Wilders. 20 Dec. 2005. “Burka verboden in Nederland – Kamer stemt voor motie van Wilders.

http://www.geertwilders.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=364&Itemid=71 (8 Oct 2006).

²⁹⁷ This is the author’s own translation from Dutch to English.



During an interview in July 2007 the minister of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration, Ella Vogelaar, made the prediction that in several decades the Dutch would have a 'Jewish-Christian-Islamic tradition'. Furthermore she stated that she "would like to help Muslims to feel at home. Islam and Muslim must be able to root themselves here, specifically because Muslims are also citizens of this country" (Laan 2007). These statements were immediately met with disapproval by the leaders of the PVV, VVD and members of one of the government coalition parties the Christen Union (CU). Wilders was quoted as saying: "I fell off my chair when I read it [the interview with Vogelaar] ...the Islam is opposed to very important norms and values in our culture. We must not just throw these away" ("Nederland krijgt joods-christelijke-islamitische traditie" 19 juli 2007). VVD leader Mark Rutte echoed Wilders saying: "the Netherlands doesn't have an Islamic tradition. Of course not, we have to be clear over that. People who come to our country have to accept our core values like the equality between men and women and the democratic state" (ibid 19 July 2007). CU parliamentarian Ed Anker stated that the ministers remarks misrepresented "fundamental differences between two religions" and expressed worries that the ministers opinions on the compatibility between different religious cultures would find its way into the cabinets integration policy (ibid 19 July 2007).

Vogelaar stressed that in her role as minister she would like to put an end to the negative image and fear of Islam precisely because they are Dutch citizens and in the country stay (van der Laan 2007). Not only does she have to fight against the fear that Muslims will override so called 'deeply rooted Dutch norms and values' but also the fear of terrorism and anarchism. Around the world the difference between Islam in general and jihadism is often confused and Muslim has become a synonym with terror. Jihad is an element of Islam which is primarily defined as the inner struggle of a believer against all that stands between the believer and God.²⁹⁸ For the last decade or so terms like Muslim terrorists, Islamic violence, jihadists, Muslim suicide bombers rank among the most frequently used jargon in the press and TV broadcasts. Regardless of how one defines global Islamic revival, theological and political debate makes its presence felt on a global scale. Contrarily, Fethullah Gülen (2004:261; Caban 2005) argues: 'there is no such thing as a Muslim terrorist; a terrorist cannot be Muslim; a Muslim cannot be a terrorist.' He declares that from the point of view of Islamic criteria nobody can justify or permit suicide attacks.

According to Robert Carle approximately 80 percent of the Dutch population believes that the state has been too tolerant towards Muslims who do not respect the right of homosexuals and women and are willing to use violence to further their assault against the democratic state (Carle 2006:68). Until recently, students of Dutch interethnic attitudes have agreed that a strong norm against blatant racism prevailed among native Dutch, but that more subtle forms of racism were equally prevalent in the Netherlands as in other countries (Essed 1991; Pettigrew & Meertens 1996). However, it is important to note that this 'tolerance' first led to indifference to the economic and social problems in an Islamic pillar tucked away in crumbling inner-city and then to a tit-for-tat tolerance: "we are only tolerant if you are then tolerant" based on nationalistic cries for the protection of Dutch 'core' norms and values. True tolerance and the dialogue it can promote are needed because there are a million

²⁹⁸ Jihad occurs on two fronts, the internal and the external. The internal struggle (the greater jihad) is the effort to attain one's essence; the external struggle (the lesser jihad) is the process of enabling someone else to attain his or her essence. The first is conducted on the spiritual front, and is based on overcoming obstacles between oneself and one's essence, and the soul's reaching knowledge, eventually divine knowledge, divine love, and spiritual bliss. The second is, however, material and based on removing obstacles between people and faith so that people can choose freely between belief and disbelief. (see Gülen, 1998a,b).



Muslims in the Netherlands, there are mosques and even *halal* meat in the supermarkets: Muslims are nested in the Netherlands and are there to stay.

4. Dialogue and Tolerance: Spinoza and Gülen

Islamophobia and anti-Muslimism in the Netherlands are often buttressed on the national claims to a tradition that is not Judaeo-Christian but Enlightened. What Jonathan Israel calls the “radical” or early enlightenment, which began in the Netherlands during its ‘golden’ 17th century (Israel 2001), is often referenced by the likes of Hirsi Ali and Bolkestein. This nostalgia is reminiscence is what Vamik Volkan calls a ‘chosen glory’: a historical story of greatness woven into nationalist narratives and used to rally people around an imagined collective identity (Volkan 1994). What made the radical enlightenment so radical, a movement in which Spinoza played a key role, is that it was the first time that philosophy was divorced from theology (Israel 2001). Israel claims that Spinoza was the first to see all the key elements that made up the modern, progressive values that mark the secular Dutch society today (Hartmans 2007:24). Spinoza’s philosophy, instead of being the brawn behind nationalist anti-Muslimism, can be used to advocate religious tolerance from a secular position.

In his writings and speeches, Gülen highlights the tension between Islamophobia and the reality of Muslims in the West that needs to be addressed in order to make sustainable peaceful coexistence possible. Gülen’s ‘alliance of civilizations’—as apposed to the ‘clash of civilizations’—offers a perspective from which this peaceful coexistence is possible. Gülen’s perspective shows that through dialogue groups can come to see that they share common virtues and ideas not simply incompatible differences (Ünal & Williams 2000; Carroll 2007). Gülen, a contemporary theologian, clearly comes from an Islamic perspective: the Qur’an, the *Sunnah*, *ijtihad* (independent reasoning, see Yilmaz 2003), and Islamic piety are his reference points, just as reason was the basis of Spinoza’s philosophy. He like Spinoza tries to conceptualize modern peaceful coexistence by conjoining tolerance and dialogue.

Spinoza, a vehement critic of religious superstition called for religious tolerance in the name of reason and Gülen, a devote Muslim, calls for tolerance in the name of God. This is not to say that either Spinoza or Gülen is a relativist, however both do believe that differences are inevitable in society and we must thus learn ways of living together in harmony. Gülen states, “tolerance does not mean being influenced by others and joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them (Gülen 2004a:157). Spinoza insisted that a philosophy of reason was necessary to unmask the evils produced by theology, but if it was believed that a philosophy could do way with faith and religion, it would ultimately become yet another dangerous dogma (Rosenfeld 2003:34). Thus, adherents to both a philosophy of reason and to Islam do not have to let their own belief falter by tolerating others and accepting that there are other ‘conceptions of the good’.

For Spinoza virtue can be created by acting in accordance with reason and for Gülen virtue comes from acting in accordance with a love of God however both men come to the conclusion that it is both a public and a private virtue to be tolerance: tolerance is necessary for dialogue, which in turn leads to a understand that can facilitate peaceful coexistence. It is noteworthy to mention that both Spinoza and Gülen reject the Cartesian divide between faith and reason, both find that faith and true religion can be part of the realm of reason.



These men, coming for very different time periods, assert that a plurality of ideas of ‘the good’ exist and thus must be dealt with. Gülen states: “at a time when the world has become like a big village and at a point when our society is on the verge of great change and transformation, if we are talking about dialogue with other nations...[then] tolerance is a matter that needs to be rewarded and for this reason it must permeate the whole society”(Gülen 2004a:57). Spinoza lived in a diverse and thus fragile Dutch republic when democracy was trying to establish a firm footing amidst vehement religious and political conflict (Rosenfeld 2003:3). Both thinkers oppose government efforts to stamp out what is considered “false belief”. Spinoza insisted that the state is tyrannical if it attempts to force a person to abandon his or her beliefs (Rosenfeld 2003:42). Similarly, Gülen (2004b:34) observes that “in countries programmed for corruption, intolerance and mercilessness, such things as freedom of thought, polite criticism and exchange of ideas according to norms of equity and fair-minded debate, it would be meaningless to speak of products of logic and inspiration.”

Spinoza held that democracy was the best form of government because he believed that the rule of the majority would lead to political decisions based on reason (Rosenfeld 2003:65).²⁹⁹ Correspondingly, Gülen considers democracy to be a necessary requirement for the continuation of Islamic thought and belief. According to Gülen, human rights, freedom of thought and the rule of law provide the ideal circumstance in which Islam is best understood and can flourish. That is why, Gülen states, that Islam is better practiced and appreciated in Europe and United States than it is in some Muslim countries. Likewise, Gülen argues that Islam necessitates support for human rights and freedom (Saritoprak & Ünal 2005:447-456). In terms of democracy vis-à-vis Islam, Gülen claims that Islam does not propose a specific form of governance but that it sets some certain underlying fundamental principles that should be adhered to, such as justice, tolerance, equality, freedom from oppression and persecution; freedom from despotism, freedom of worship (Yilmaz 2003:208-237). Thus, according to him, there is no such thing as an “Islamic state” or “Islamic regime”. Every form of governance can be “Islamic” if the aforementioned principles are followed. Hence, according to Gülen Western states that protect and promote human rights, democracy, equality and justice are more ‘Islamic’ than some so-called “Islamic states” that do not uphold such principles and values. Therefore, Islam leaves the choice of governance to the people which will inevitably be dictated and affected by the prevailing circumstances of the time. Gülen calls the determination of this choice a “social contract” between the people and the governors. He does not see a contradiction between ‘Islamic administration’ and democracy (Yilmaz 2005:396) and strongly states that a democratic state ruled by law depends on the idea of a social contract.

As Islam holds individuals and societies responsible for their own fate, people must be responsible for governing themselves. The Qur’an addresses society with such phrases as: “O people!” and “O believers!” The duties entrusted to modern democratic systems are those that Islam refers to society and classifies, in order of importance, as “absolutely necessary, relatively necessary, and commendable to carry out.” People cooperate with one another in sharing these duties and establishing the essential foundations necessary to perform them. The government is composed of all of these foundations. Thus, Islam recommends a government based on a social contract. People elect the administrators, and

²⁹⁹ Spinoza envisaged elite democracy instead of mass democracy, which as the democratic election of Adolf Hitler shows can lead an end to reason and tolerance.



establish a council to debate common issues. Also, the society as a whole participates in auditing the administration. (Gülen 2001:135-136).

Tolerance as both a public and private virtue opens the door to dialogue. Spinoza's thoughts on tolerance can best be understood from a dialectical approach (Rosenfeld 2003:14). Thus, his ideas on tolerance are based a dialogue of sorts for he used a method of reasoning and to reach a conclusion by considering theories and ideas together with ones that contradict them: thus in his quest for reason he considered religious doctrines that he considered superstitious. Dialogue is part and parcel of democracy, which Spinoza found to be the best form of government because it promoted reason. Gülen is very explicit over the inter-relationship between dialogue and tolerance (de Bolt 2005:38-52). Spinoza conceptualized tolerance as a combination of self-constraint with greater openness towards others, under these conditions dialogue is then possible. Gülen defines dialogue as "two or more people coming together to talk and meet on certain subjects and by means of this, to draw closer together to one another (Gülen 2004a:171). For both men consent is not the ultimate goal of dialogue but instead a means to deal with the contradictory view-points in pluralistic society. Both believe that the discourse is a logical process that can lead to a reasonable outcome because there is a commonly shared core of identity that permeates through difference, and that is reason. Gülen believes—as aforementioned—that "tolerance does not mean being influenced by others or joining them; it means accepting others as they are and knowing how to get along with them" (Gülen 2004b:52).

Celik and Valkenberg (2007) explain that Gülen proposes dialogue as a method used in building and establishing a culture of peace among co-religionists, people of different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds. He sees dialogue as a framework of mutual acceptance and respect of each other's identity. They describe this as the first stage of Gülen's dialogue concept: accepting the others in their own position. The second stage involves respecting the position of the other(s), and the third stage is the concept of sharing values in the context of the other(s). Gülen conviction's is that humanity ultimately will be led to peace and unity by recognizing and accepting social, cultural, and religious diversity, an exchange of mutual values and union in collaboration. Gülen sees diversity and pluralism as a natural fact. He wants those differences to be admitted and to be explicitly professed. Accepting everyone as they are, which is broader and deeper than tolerance, is his normal practice (Ünal & Williams 2000:256-8).

The Prophet (Mohammed) says that all people are as equal as the teeth of a comb. Islam does not discriminate based on race, colour, age, nationality, or physical traits. The Prophet declared "You are all from Adam, and Adam is from earth. O servants of God, be brothers (and sisters)". Gülen, 2001a:134). Those who close the road of tolerance are beasts who have lost their humanity. . . forgiveness and tolerance will heal most of our wounds, but only if this divine instrument is in the hands of those who understand its language. Otherwise, the incorrect treatment we have used until now will create many complications and continue to confuse us (Gülen 2000:4-5).

Gülen (2000:4-5) believes that "interfaith dialogue is a must today, and that the first step in establishing it is forgetting the past, ignoring polemical arguments, and giving precedence to common points, which far outnumber polemical ones." In his opinion, a believer does not hesitate to communicate with any kind of thought and system. Islam does not reject interaction with diverse cultures and change as long as what is to be appropriated does not contradict with the main pillars of Islam.



...different beliefs, races, customs and traditions will continue to cohabit in this village. Each individual is like a unique realm unto themselves; therefore the desire for all humanity to be similar to one another is nothing more than wishing for the impossible. For this reason, the peace of this (global) village lies in respecting all these differences, considering these differences to be part of our nature and in ensuring that people appreciate these differences. Otherwise, it is unavoidable that the world will devour itself in a web of conflicts, disputes, fights, and the bloodiest of wars, thus preparing the way for its own end (Gülen 2004:249-250). If one were to seek the true face of Islam in its own sources, history, and true representatives, then one would discover that it contains no harshness, cruelty, or fanaticism. It is a religion of forgiveness, pardon, and tolerance as such saints and princes of love and tolerance as Rumi, Yunus Emre, Ahmed Yesevi, Bediüzzaman and many others have so beautifully expressed. (Gülen 2004b:58-59).

Gülen envisions a twenty-first century in which human beings shall witness the birth of a spiritual dynamic that will revitalise long-dormant moral values; an age of tolerance, understanding, and international cooperation that will ultimately lead, through inter-cultural dialog and a sharing of values, to greater understanding and peace. Gülen believes the road to justice for all is dependent on the provision of an adequate and appropriate universal education. Only then, will there be sufficient understanding and tolerance to secure respect for the rights of others.

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Initial Dutch 'tolerance' of Muslims was not true tolerance because instead of leading the way to dialogue is lead to the division of society through pillarization and current claims to 'tolerance' by rightist politicians close off the way to dialogue pinning one extreme inflexible 'core' of beliefs against another. The fear of losing Dutch traditions to Muslims is based on a fear and a lack of insight into historical and democratic processes: homosexual and women's rights were created as a result of a socio-economic changes and dialogue. Gülen's interpretation of the Qur'an shows that Islam does not require its followers destroy beliefs they don't agree with but instead to tolerate and engage in dialogue with those who have seemingly contradictory values. Similarly, Spinoza insists that the state should not try to force people to desert their beliefs. Thus Scheffers 'civilization defensive' is not conducive to true democracy and lasting peace.

A re-evaluation of the Dutch tolerance is necessary! Before he was killed Theo van Gogh said to Mohammed Bouyeri, "can we discuss this" (Spruyt 2007) but no discussion was possible because Bouyeri was not tolerance of van Gogh's ideas and van Gogh himself had also not been tolerant of Muslims. The situation is a microcosm for what has been happening in Dutch society as a whole. Those afraid of losing their ideals fail to tolerate positions they see as threatening and thus do not engage in dialogue. The problem with this fear is that it breeds intolerance in a society that is and will inevitably remain diverse: Gülen writes "people with different ideals and thoughts are either going to seek ways of getting along by means of reconciliation or they will constantly fight with one another. There have always people who thought differently to one another and there always will be" (Gülen 2004b:52). In the post-9/11 world of real and perceived 'clashes', the millions participating in the



Gülen movement continue to provide people with both spiritual and practical guidance towards peace and tolerance of others.

This paper is a demonstration of how perspectives from different times, locations, and worldviews can still find deep resonance and yield points on which to engage in dialogue and tolerance. By amalgamating the perspectives on tolerance and dialogue, one Islamic, the other enlightenment secular, it shows that although different they can together arrive at one truth. This is only possible when political and social positions are developed in dialectic, and not a fundamentalist, context. Respecting others, listening to others in dialogue, and considering their perspectives when drawing conclusions can lead to peaceful coexistence between Muslims and non-Muslim in the Netherlands.