

# THE EFFECT OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ON THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF MUSLIMS IN GRONINGEN



## Abstract

*Recently there has been an increasing body of research regarding the religious experience of Muslims in the West. However, these studies often neglect the individualized character of Islam by investigating only one or two aspects of religion. Consequently, this research applies a qualitative approach to answer the question: "How does international migration influence the religious experience of Muslims in Groningen". By building on Güveli's (2015) three dimensions of religiosity, this study investigates how different aspects of Muslim's religiosity are influenced by migration. First, subjective religiosity increased due to a diminishing social control and an increasing confrontation with diversity in Groningen. This results in what Roy (2004) calls a 'triumph of the religious self'. Secondly, a decreasing individual religiosity was found which is predominantly caused by a weaker religious infrastructure in Groningen. Thirdly, an expected increase in the communal religiosity has not been found. A possible explanation can be that certain selection-methods are present in this research, or the interrelatedness of the subjective- and communal religiosity. Nevertheless, more qualitative research is necessary to better understand the religious experience of Muslims in the West.*

Matthijs Klaas Pieter Smit, s2975815  
Bachelor thesis Human Geography and Planning  
Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen  
Supervisor: Adrien Remund, PhD  
July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Theoretical framework.....	3
2.1. Religiosity .....	3
2.2. Social control and ‘the triumph of the religious self’ .....	4
2.3. Dimensions of religiosity .....	5
3. Methodology .....	6
3.1. Research method .....	6
3.2. Data Collection .....	7
3.3. Data analysis.....	7
3.4. Methodological reflections .....	7
4. Results .....	8
4.1. Subjective religiosity.....	8
4.2. Individual religiosity .....	9
4.3. Communal religiosity.....	10
5. Conclusion .....	11
References.....	12
Appendix 1: Data collection instrument.....	14

## 1. Introduction

Islam in the Netherlands is not a recent phenomenon. Since the 1960's, mainly Turkish and Moroccan guest workers moved to the Netherlands, and with them they brought Islam (SCP, 2018). By natural growth, family unification and further migration, the number of Muslims in the Netherlands increased to around a million (Huijnk, 2018). Migration continues, and especially with the recent refugee crisis, the number of migrants from Syria has increased dramatically. Indeed, in the years building up to the Syrian civil war, only a couple of hundred Syrians migrated to the Netherlands annually. However, between 2014-2017, this increased to an estimated 80.000 documented Syrians migrating to the Netherlands to escape the civil war (Statistics Netherlands, 2020).

This large influx of Muslims into the West resulted in an increasing anti-Islam rhetoric from populist parties (Hamid, 2019). In case of the Netherlands, the most recent example is the rise of a new political party called Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy). In 2017, Forum voor Democratie entered the Dutch House of Representatives, earning two seats in their first ever elections. The party is known for following a strong anti-Islam rhetoric and promoting Dutch nationalism. Less than three years after earning their first seats in the House of Representatives, the party grew to become the largest political party in the Netherlands, with over 40.000 active members (NOS, 2020).

Populist parties like Forum voor Democratie sometimes purposely ignore the dynamics and pluralism within Islam. A prime example is the veiling of Muslim women. In recent years, several countries banned the headscarf in public buildings, arguing that it emphasizes the patriarchy within Islam and contradicts our western, liberal values (Joppke, 2009). However, Lorasdagi (2009) investigated the diverse meanings for wearing the headscarf for women in Amsterdam and found that women often wear it voluntarily. They argue that it is not forced upon by their family or the community. Instead, many Muslim women wear the hijab as an expression of their Muslim identity or as a means to express their devotion (Hopkins and Greenwood, 2013).

In his 2004 book *Globalized Islam*, French political scientist Olivier Roy writes about the developments of Islam in a globalized world, where Muslims live as a minority-population in secular nation-states. Migration to secular countries, or as Roy calls it 'the passage to the West', has a wide-ranging impact on Muslims. In these Western countries, there is no top-down religion, a weaker religious infrastructure and a changing social and religious authority (Roy, 2004). All these developments influence the religious experience of Muslims. New challenges arise after moving to the West, for example the ability to go to the mosque every day, or the availability of *halal* meat. On the other hand, the passage to the West also offers opportunities for Muslims, due to the fact that they might experience more freedom and diversity.

Regarding the impact of international migration on the religiosity of Muslims, a significant body of research has been conducted already. Often using international survey data like the European Social Survey (ESS) and the European Value Survey (EVS), researchers tried to examine how a Muslims' religiosity is impacted by international migration. Güveli (2015) has used indicators such as the frequency of mosque attendance, the frequency of personal prayer and how Muslims rate their own piety. This data was compared to the data of the people at the country of origin and the data of the natives at the country of destination. Van Tubergen et. al. (2010) used different variables to quantitatively measure the impacted religiosity for Belgian Muslims, such as fasting during Ramadan and sacrificing a sheep at the Festival of Sacrifice. Furthermore, the Dutch Institute of Social Research has intensively investigated how Moroccan and Turkish Muslims experience their religion in the Netherlands.

However, most researches use quantitative methods to explore this topic. Although this offers interesting insights for governments and policymakers, it disregards the subjective character of Islam, since every Muslim in the West experiences his beliefs in a different and unique way (Roy, 2004). For this reason, this study investigates how the process of international migration impacts a Muslim's religiosity within the context of the Northern Netherlands, using qualitative methods. By conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews, this study aims to answer the question: *"How does international migration influence a Muslim's religiosity in the city of Groningen"*.

To answer this research question, this study starts by explaining what is meant by religiosity. Next, different processes are discussed that can have an influence on a Muslim's religious experience in the West. Then, three different dimensions of religiosity are described that are relevant to this study. Subsequently, an explanation of the used researched methods is given, followed by an analysis of the results. Finally, some conclusions are given, together with recommendations for future research.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1. Religiosity

Migration, especially when crossing a cultural border, can have several short-term and long-term implications on someone's life. Research has been conducted in a wide variety of fields, for example the impact of migration on mental health (Meyer et al; 2017), fertility (Kulu, 2005), income (Brell et. al; 2020) and education (Arif & Chaudhry; 2015). Another theme that has been researched extensively is the impact on migrants' religion, and more recently, on Muslims settling in the West. However, most studies focus on integration and the economic position of Muslims, while disregarding the impact on their religious experiences (Güveli, 2015). Therefore, surprisingly little is known on how living in secular states affects the religious experience of Muslims.

To get a better understanding of how religiosity is impacted by migration, it is necessary to make a distinction between religion and religiosity. Although some scholars argue that it is difficult and almost impossible to define what religion exactly is (Martin, 2014), we can distinguish certain 'observable' aspects of religion (Indinopulos, 1998). Religion can be seen as a belief-system, manifested in religious communities, rituals, ideas, teachings, institutions, arts and architecture. In case of Islam, this is expressed in the entire system of communal beliefs, values, traditions, historical- and contemporary Islamic thinkers, scripture etc. (Brown, 2017). However, Roy (2004) argues that, especially due to the recent 'passage to the West', religion has become increasingly irrelevant and the emphasis is shifted to religiosity. Religiosity is the personal interpretation of this belief-system, and how an individual implements this in his or her personal life. The focus has shifted away from the beliefs of the community, to the beliefs of the individual.

*"The key question is not what the Koran actually says, but what Muslims say the Koran says."*

Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam* (2004, p.10).

Different theories exist on how religiosity is impacted by international migration (Connor, 2008). Some scholars state that migration has a *theologizing effect*, arguing that it increases the religious participation and spiritual beliefs (Hirschman, 2004). Arguments in favour of the theologizing effect argue that the unstable period following migration might make a migrant more reliant on the supernatural, spiritual world. Also, the religious community offers many benefits to migrants, for example regarding employment, language classes and social services. The community could also serve as a refuge against racism and feelings of exclusion (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012).

The opposing view is that migration has a *secularization* effect, resulting in a decreasing religious participation and spiritual belief. Possible arguments in favour of the secularization effect of migration can be the lack of religious infrastructure in the destination country, or the fact that settling in a new environment is overwhelming and religion is not a priority (Connor, 2008). For example, finding a job or getting accustomed to the new social and physical environment can disrupt a migrant's religious experience. Nevertheless, one thing many do agree on is the fact that migration influences the religious experience of a migrant.

## 2.2. Social control and 'the triumph of the religious self'.

The personal interpretation of the Islamic belief-system is what Roy (2004) calls the objectification of Islam. There are multiple factors that make this objectification of Islam possible. First, in secular societies like the Netherlands, Muslims are confronted with diversity and the 'other' more frequently than in their country of origin. People in the destination country might ask them about their religion and the things they believe in. This results in a reflection on their own beliefs, where it offers the opportunity to identify what is important to them and what is not (Van Tuberegen, 2006; Güveli & Platt, 2011). Furthermore, events like the attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001 also have a reflective effect on Muslims. (Emilsen, 2012; Roy, 2004). By constantly having to define what they do and don't believe in, Muslims in the West are objectifying their beliefs.

Another important factor that contributes to this objectification of Islam, is a weaker social control and religious authority in the West. The concept of social control finds its origin in classical sociological theories, like Durkheim's (1893) 'Mechanical and Organic Solidarity' and Tönnies' (1887) 'Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft'. These theories sought to explain how social relationships originate in a society, but also how these relationships are maintained (Wardak, 2002). In turn, American sociologist Edward Alsworth Ross (1901) built on the theories by Tönnies and Durkheim, and described social control as 'intended social ascendancy'. Social ascendancy is a mechanism where the society as a whole has a superordinate position over the individuals in that society. The main purpose of this ascendancy is to create a society with a certain cultural homogeneity, and where this homogeneity can be maintained.

When looking at societies with a Muslim majority, a similar process can be identified, which manifests itself in different levels of society. First, 27 countries in predominantly the Middle East and North Africa still have Islam as their official state-religion, with some countries having implemented elements of *sharia*. When hearing *sharia*, people in the West misleadingly think of a certain kind of Islamic penal law (Siddiqui, 2008), but *sharia* can best be described as 'the totality of God's requirements for human behaviour' (Brown, 2017). This means that governments could implement religious based laws on a national level, affecting the entire society. Nevertheless, religious social control mainly exists in lower levels within society. Social control starts at home, where children are often raised by the religious ideals of their parents. Furthermore, social control happens in the neighbourhood, in schools, at work and of course at religious institutions like the mosque (Thue, L. A; 1998).

However, with the recent passage to the West, Roy (2004) argues that social control disappears. Muslims live as a minority population in societies with freedom of religion. The result is the ability to create an Islam that fits the individual best, where they are not judged on their choices by the religious community, the neighbourhood or their family. They are the ones to decide whether or not they want to attend the mosque every day, or to drink alcohol. This is what he calls 'the triumph of the religious self', the ability to construct a personal interpretation of Islam.

Although there is a certain truth in Roy's argument, in reality it is more complicated. Several scholars have examined the role of the mosque in different European and American cities. For example, Wardak (2002) explored the role of the main Sunni mosque in Edinburgh. He found that as a result of alienation and social exclusion, the community revived traditional social and religious institutions. Furthermore, social control was exerted through the ritualistic Friday prayer. More recently, Es (2016) concluded that Turkish-Dutch mosques are places where mainly children and adolescents are exposed to Turkish morality and communal social control.

In conclusion, although social control does not fully disappear with the passage to the West, it is clear that the scale of social control diminishes. This phenomenon, together with the confrontation with diversity and 'other', results in a 'triumph of the religious self', the ability for a Muslim to construct an Islam that is most preferable to them.

### 2.3. Dimensions of religiosity

To analyse how a Muslim's religiosity is impacted by international migration, it is important to make a distinction between the different dimensions of religiosity. Within Christianity, there is a long tradition of defining the various dimensions of religiosity. For example, Fukuyama's (1961) distinction between the cognitive, cultic, creedal and devotional dimension. However, according to Güveli (2015), such a distinction did not exist within Islam yet. Consequently, she distinguishes three different dimensions of religiosity to investigate how the religiosity of first- and second-generation Turkish migrants is impacted.

First, *subjective* religiosity, reflects the judgement of a Muslim's own piety. Aspects of this dimension are the way an individual feels connected with the divine and how he or she evaluates his or her own beliefs. Secondly, *individual* religiosity, reflects the individual's religious duties. For example, the frequency of personal prayer, fasting during Ramadan and whether or not they eat *halal*. Thirdly, *communal* religiosity, is how an individual Muslim publicly manifests his or her beliefs. This could be attendance at the Friday prayer or the involvement within the religious community. Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that there is some overlap between these dimensions, and they are often interrelated. The increase in one dimension could result in the increase or decrease of the other. For example, when a Muslim might feel more religious (subjective), there is an increasing probability that he or she will act on it (individual or communal).

Güveli (2015) found that subjective and communal religiosity increased after migration, while the individual religiosity saw a decrease. First, the increase in subjective religiosity could be explained by Roy's (2004) 'triumph of the religious self'. Muslim migrants are able to construct their personal Islam that reflects their own religious desires, thus creating an opportunity to truthfully believe. Secondly, the increase in communal religiosity can be explained by the fact that religious communities offer a place of refuge against discrimination, and also offer a place of cultural- and religious reproduction (Es, 2016; Güveli, 2015). Furthermore, the religious community also offers social services and entertainment activities for migrants (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). All these factors create a theologizing effect on the subjective and communal religiosity.

In contrast to subjective and communal religiosity, individual religiosity is most susceptible to secularization effects. This could be explained by the weaker religious infrastructure in the West, compared to their countries of origin. It is more difficult to attend the mosque every day, and in addition, eating *halal* or fasting during Ramadan could be a bigger challenge in the West (Buitelaar, 2006).

Consequently, this research builds on the existing literature discussed above. Like Güveli (2015), this study investigates how the subjective, individual and communal religiosity for Muslims are influenced by international migration. As shown in Figure 1, I expect to find certain theologizing- and secularizing effects. Theologizing effects will mainly be related to the subjective and communal religiosity. Possible causes are the increasing religious freedom in the West, and the opportunities the religious community offers for migrants. Regarding the decreasing individual religiosity, disruptive effects such as the lack of a proper religious infrastructure and other restraints cause this dimension to decrease after migration.

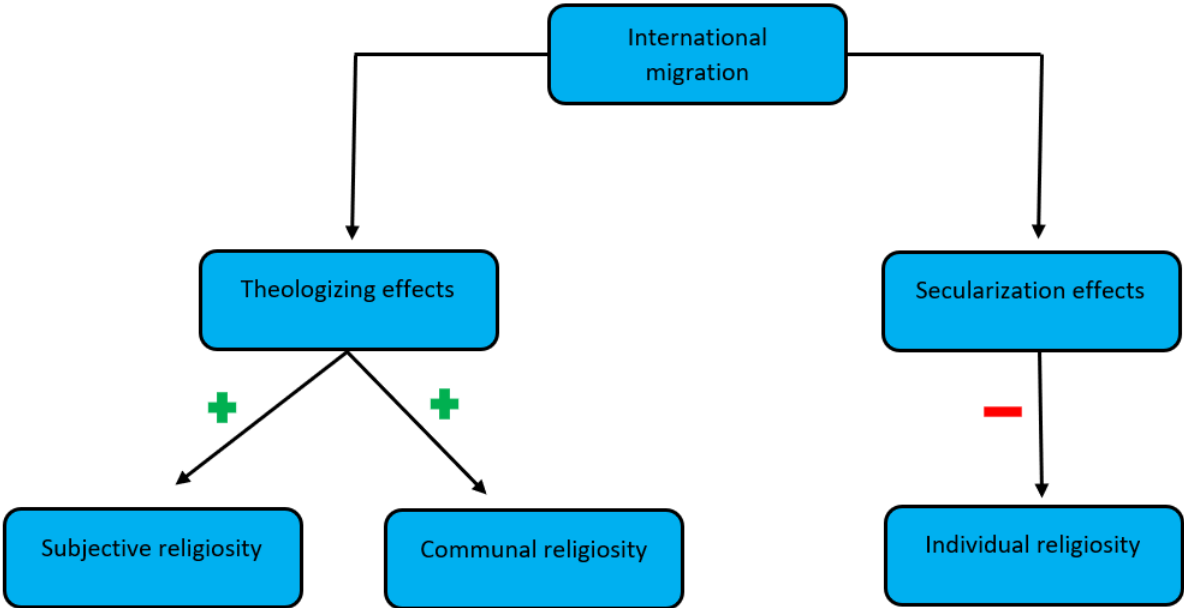


Figure 1

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research method

In this research, qualitative methods have been applied to answer the question: “How does international migration influence a Muslim’s religiosity in the city of Groningen.” There are several reasons why a qualitative approach would help me answer this research question. First, there is a deficiency of qualitative research examining Muslim’s religious experiences in the West. Although several scholars have studied the influence of international migration on Muslim’s religiosity (Güveli, 2015; Van Tubergen, 2010; Huijnk, 2018), the majority of them used quantitative methods. Although this offers interesting insights, it only sheds light on a very small segment of the entire religious experience of migrants. Secondly, Islam in the West has an increasingly subjective character (Roy, 2004). Every Muslim experiences his or her religion in their own unique way. By following a qualitative approach, it offers more insight in the everyday experiences and obstacles of Muslim’s in the West (Clifford & Valentine, 2016). It also provides me with the opportunity to explore the underlying processes that affect this religious experience.

### 3.2. Data Collection

To obtain the required data, semi-structured, in-depth interviews have been conducted. The interview guide is designed to cover all three of Güveli's dimensions of religiosity, but the respondents were given the ability to steer the conversation in a specific way if they wanted to.

In order to gather respondents, a non-random recruitment approach has been applied (Hennink et. al; 2011). First, several Dutch NGO's active in Groningen have been approached, like the foodbank and Humanitas, a community building organisation. However, neither of them were able to help. Secondly, Groningen is home to a Moroccan mosque and a Turkish mosque. These institutions were asked if they could provide respondents, but argued that they did not want to participate. Thirdly, the Islamic student association in Groningen was asked for help, but they were not willing to assist either. This reluctance to help could be explained by the increasing social scrutiny and hostility Muslim's experience in the West (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012). Even though each institution was informed about the purpose of this research, they were still unwilling to participate.

In the end, using personal contacts and snowball sampling, four respondents were interviewed. The average duration of the interviews was approximately 45 minutes. Three respondents originate from Syria and one respondent from Egypt. Their ages are between 23 and 34, and they are all males. This latter part is important because men and women have notably different religious experiences. A consistent finding in regard to religious research is that woman have a stronger connection to religion than men (Huijnk, 2018). A possible explanation is a woman's dominant role in raising children, thus being the ones transmitting rituals and duties.

Next, all respondents have been living in the Netherlands between five and seven years. Out of these four respondents, three argued to be practicing Muslim and one being secular, meaning he did not actively engage in his religion.

### 3.3. Data analysis

Each interview was recorded after obtaining the respondent's consent, and transcribed shortly after the interview was conducted. Each transcript has been read thoroughly to get a full understanding of the respondent's answers. Next, the transcriptions were uploaded to ATLAS.TI, a software package designed for systematic, qualitative data analysis.

In order to code the transcripts, two approaches have been applied. The first approach is what Clifford et. al. (2016) call *descriptive coding*. Descriptive codes appear in text and are mainly the respondent's own words. Each transcript has been read scrupulously and important or interesting segments were coded. These codes are called *in vivo codes*. However, even though this offers a better understanding of the interviews, I was stuck with over 300 unique codes after analysing the four interviews. To make more sense of the data and to create a better connection with the literature, a second approach has been applied. This approach is what the authors call *analytic coding*.

Analytic codes are, in contrast to descriptive codes, connected to the existing literature. It offers the ability to find reoccurring themes throughout the different interviews. The transcripts transform from chaotic pieces of text, to understandable and structured documents. This allows me to understand the influence of international migration on the religiosity of Muslims.

### 3.4. Methodological reflections

Many restraints came to light regarding the data collection. First, the current global pandemic required me to find respondents from a distance, which resulted in a lot of non-response from organizations. Next, interviews had to be conducted digitally using videoconference-software. Even though this was not an issue most of the time, it had some drawbacks. For example, by conducting



interviews digitally, it is rather difficult to make the respondent feel comfortable and safe. This might have caused the respondents to not open up completely and share their true experiences. Furthermore, only four interviews were conducted, which is a rather small number. However, the conversations with the respondents were fruitful and interesting topics were discussed.

Additionally, three out of four interviews were conducted in Dutch to make the interviews more comfortable for the respondents. The quotes extracted from those interviews are translated to English. Some quotes are also slightly adjusted for readability. Also, the respondents were asked for permission to record the interviews before recording had started. Consequently, there is no written or recorded consent from the respondents. Lastly, all names used in this study are fictional in order to guarantee the privacy of the respondents.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Subjective religiosity

During the interviews, three out of four respondents told me about their experiences with social control in their respective countries of origin. This social control was predominantly exerted within the religious communities and by their families. They argued that the communities were very close, and everyone in the community knew if you didn't show up at, for example, Friday prayer. Additionally, one respondent mentioned that he felt like his beliefs were forced upon him by his environment. This aligns with Ross's (1901) idea about social ascendancy, where social control is exerted to create and maintain a culturally homogenous society. Instead of his faith and beliefs genuinely coming from inside of him, he argued that religion was taught to him by his environment:

*“Let's put it this way, religion for me was basically coming from the outside in. So, the environment was teaching me and informing me. Be like that, be like us.” (Ahmed, 32).*

However, after moving to the West, all respondents argued that this social control disappeared. Even though some scholars documented that social control is still exerted in the West (Wardak, 2002; Es, 2016), predominantly around religious institutions, my respondents did not experience this in Groningen. They explained that they felt a sense of religious freedom after they migrated, which corresponds with Roy's (2004) argument about 'the triumph of the religious self'. This can be explained by the fact that three respondents came to the Netherlands without family, while one respondent came with his brother. This was especially an important factor for Jamal, who argued that back in Syria, his mother would remind him to visit the mosque every day:

*“Over here, no one asks if you go to the mosque or not or tell you to pray. Because in Syria, with my mother and my brothers, not going to the mosque is not an option. My mother would tell me: 'you hear the call to prayer; you need to go to the mosque'. But over here, there is no control, there is no duty. I am my own boss.” (Jamal, 33).*

Especially the last part of Jamal's argument is very interesting. It implies that back in his country of origin, he wasn't in control of his own beliefs. Rather, his family strongly influenced his experience by reminding him to fulfil his religious duties. However, after moving to the Netherlands, he calls himself 'his own boss', implying that he is in charge now. It demonstrates how Muslims in the West are indeed able to construct their own Islam, due to a significantly lower social control.

Additionally, this 'triumph of the religious self' is reinforced by the confrontation with diversity. All respondents mentioned that the confrontation with people from different cultural backgrounds was a positive phenomenon. This confrontation had the effect of a mirror, in which they can look at themselves and shape their own beliefs. This aligns with what Van Tubergen (2006) found in his study among migrant's religiosity in eight different countries. He found that in destination countries with more religious diversity, religious affiliation and participation is higher among migrants than in countries with a religious homogeneity. As for my research, it is best described by Ahmed:

*"You know, you can form your ideology properly among difference. Because you can only be who you are inside if you can compare yourself to 'the other'. This difference makes you know yourself, and become yourself more."* (Ahmed, 32).

In conclusion, a clear theologizing effect has been found related to the subjective religiosity. The respondents felt a certain religious liberation in Groningen through the disappearance of social control. Also, the confrontation with more cultural and religious diversity in Groningen is seen as a positive phenomenon. This allowed the respondents to shape their religion more to their personal desires, which created a more personal connection with their beliefs.

#### 4.2. Individual religiosity

During each interview, a reoccurring topic was the experience of Ramadan in both the Middle East and Groningen. Three out of four respondents still participated in Ramadan in Groningen, while the fourth one explained that he did not always participate in Syria either. When talking about Ramadan, the respondents consistently compared the experience in Groningen to that in their country of origin. For example, they told me that in the Middle East, Ramadan is a lot more than just fasting between sunrise and sunset. During this period, there is also an increasing emphasis on the importance of the community. Not only because the majority of the population is fasting at the same time, but also because it brings the community closer together. For example, *iftar*, the break of fast, is traditionally done with family and friends. Indeed, this sense of community makes Ramadan a lot easier:

*"So why I was fasting? Well, because everyone is fasting. Because the atmosphere in the entire country changes during this month. There are traditional dishes everywhere and restaurants sell traditional dishes. Yeah, a different atmosphere."* (Hassan, 23).

In addition, Buitelaar (2006) writes about her experiences of Ramadan in Morocco, where she lived with a group of women for two years. She also describes that the physical landscape of the city changes during Ramadan. For example, banners with Quran-verses are spread throughout the city and vendors selling Quran's instead of old magazines. Also, streets are rather quiet during the day and the smell of food disappears.

However, this experience is different in Groningen, where according to the respondents, Ramadan is more of a challenge. First, the physical environment does not change like it does in the Middle East. During the day, you still see and smell food all across the city and see people eating. Secondly, there is less involvement with family, friends and the community. For example, Jamal told me that until last year, he would break the fast alone. Thirdly, unlike in Egypt and Syria, everyday life continues in Groningen. The respondents argued that working or studying on an empty stomach is

difficult and made them feel less productive. Finally, fasting in Groningen is a bigger challenge because it simply lasts longer than in Egypt and Syria due to longer days:

*“You go to work, you study and there are few social moments. But Ramadan in Syria or any other Islamic country, it is very different. There is lots of contact with your family and friends. You go to the mosque and read Quran. Yeah, you cannot compare it. Ramadan here is no Ramadan.” (Farid, 34).*

Another reoccurring theme was a diminishing mosque attendance for personal prayer in Groningen. Three out of four respondents mentioned that in their countries of origin, they would visit the mosque at least once or twice per week, while one out of these three visited the mosque daily. However, in Groningen, three respondents told me they would only visit the mosque during Friday prayer, and not throughout the week. This phenomenon can be explained by the weaker religious infrastructure in Groningen. Even though Groningen has two mosques, they are located outside the city centre. However, the recent opening of a *meditation room* in the university made it easier for the respondents to pray. Nevertheless, this did not change the decreasing mosque attendance in Groningen:

*“Look, in Syria, the mosque was part of my daily life, daily, not weekly. Because in my small village, the distance between my house and the mosque is approximately a 100 meters. So, I almost go to the mosque every day, and sometimes even 5 times a day.” (Jamal, 33).*

In conclusion, a secularization effect was found in relation to individual religiosity, which aligns with Güveli’s (2015) findings. Indeed, all respondents still participate in Ramadan, but the respondents explained how it is more of a challenge in Groningen. Also, disruptive side-effects of migration such as the lower accessibility to prayer rooms are responsible for a decreasing individual religiosity. However, the University of Groningen is helping Islamic students by the recent opening of a *meditation studio*. Lastly, the respondents told me that the abundance of Turkish butchers in Groningen makes it easy for a respondents to have access to *halal* meat.

#### 4.3. Communal religiosity

In Groningen, three out of four respondents still attempt to visit the mosque weekly for Friday prayer, while the fourth one mentioned he wouldn’t visit the mosque in Syria either. However, they also mentioned that in their countries of origin, they sometimes felt compelled to go every Friday, mainly due to social control exerted by family and the community. Indeed, in Islam it is required for men to attend the communal Friday prayer (Horrie & Chippindale, 2007).

As mentioned in the previous section, this social control disappeared after moving to Groningen. Consequently, this offered the opportunity to miss the Friday prayer if the respondents couldn’t make it due to their studies for example:

*“Yes, to the Friday prayer, so once a week. But sometimes I can’t make, or I don’t have time. I don’t feel obliged to go if I can’t. Other times when I do have time, then I go” (Farid, 34).*

The respondents were also asked why they would attend the mosque in Groningen. Ahmed explained to me that he would particularly visit the mosque to worship God and not for any social purposes. He argued that he felt like a stranger at both the Turkish and the Moroccan mosque. The

reason is that both mosques had established communities, where he sometimes felt like an outsider. Indeed, the language of the service at the Turkish mosque is Turkish and Arabic for the Moroccan mosque. However, Farid for example explained that he simply did not like going to the Moroccan mosque because the service took too long. Again, this also demonstrates the individualised character of Islam, where individuals can choose whether or not they attend Friday prayer or choose what mosque to visit. Lastly, Jamal argued that he would visit the mosque both for social purposes and to worship. Still, he missed certain communal practices in Groningen, such as the ability to read Quran with friends, or talk to them about Islam.

Furthermore, the involvement and connection with the religious community increased during special occasions like Ramadan and Hajj. Indeed, Islamic holidays are times with an increasing emphasis on the community (Buitelaar, 2006). Additionally, in the West this is intensified by the fact that the community is a refuge for “feelings of loss and separation” (Voas & Fleischmann, 2012, p.529). For example, Jamal explained that he would sometimes contact his family in Syria during Ramadan, or Ahmed who told me he always tries to invite people to his house to break the fast together, even though he also said he normally is not much involved in the community. However, during the Ramadan there is an increasing need for a sense of belonging:

*“Yes! We have to do it (break of fast) as a community, because without the community it doesn’t have a meaning at all. So, we have this collective prayer, even the people who don’t usually go to the mosque, because they need to have this feeling of belonging.” (Ahmed, 32).*

In conclusion, from the interviews I did not find a clear theologizing effect on communal religiosity. Indeed, during holidays like Ramadan and Hajj, the respondents would be more involved with the religious community because of an increasing need for belonging. However, during the rest of the year, only two respondents argued they were socially involved with the religious community. Furthermore, although three respondents tried to attend the mosque every week for Friday prayer, not being able to go does not feel like a problem in Groningen.

## 5. Conclusion

By applying a qualitative approach, this study aims to understand how migration to the West influences the religious experience of first-generation Muslims in Groningen. Building on Güveli’s (2015) three dimensions of religiosity, I expected to see an increase in subjective and communal religiosity, while seeing a decrease in individual religiosity.

First, a theologizing effect was found in relation to subjective religiosity. After moving to Groningen, respondents explained how social control exerted by their families and the religious community disappeared, which allowed them to be in charge of their own beliefs. This is in line with Roy’s (2004) idea of the triumph of the religious self. In addition, this was strengthened by the confrontation with diversity in Groningen. This mirror-effect allows migrants to better construct their own personalized version of Islam.

Secondly, a secularization effect was found regarding the individual religiosity. The disruptive effect of international migration obstructs the ability for migrants to pray every day. Despite the recent instalment of a meditation studio at the University of Groningen, time restraints also interfere with the ability to pray. Moreover, even though three respondents still participate in Ramadan every year, the experience has become more arduous. This is caused by both the immutable physical environment in Groningen, as well as the decreasing sense of community compared to their countries of origin.

Thirdly, a theologizing effect in relation to the communal religiosity has not been found. Neither attendance at the Friday prayer, nor involvement with the religious community has increased in Groningen. This unexpected outcome can possibly be explained by the fact that subjective religiosity has a negative relationship with communal religiosity. Güveli only used one indicator to measure subjective religiosity instead of an in-depth analysis like this research. Again, this highlights the importance of qualitative research to explore the current topic.

Furthermore, there is a possibility there are certain selection-methods at play regarding this research. Two out of four respondents are currently studying at the University of Groningen, while one is also affiliated with higher education. Consequently, this can explain why the respondents did not feel the need to connect with the religious community. For example, Van Tubergen (2007) found that obtaining a post-migration educational degree has a secularization effect due to the confrontation with secular-attitudes.

This research underlines the wide-ranging impact of international migration on the religious experience of Muslims. As this study has shown, migration has certain disruptive, secularization effects, as well as it has theologizing effects. However, the current study is not elaborate enough to fully understand the influence of migration in regard to the religious experience of Muslims. For example, for this research, only men have been interviewed while women will probably have a different experience. In conclusion, large-scale qualitative research is necessary to better understand this group of people, which is still often misunderstood.

## References

- Arif, R. & Chaudry, A. (2015). The effects of external migration on enrolments, accumulated schooling and dropouts in Punjab. *Applied Economics*, 47(16), 1607-1632.
- Brell, C. & Dustmann, C. & Preston, I. (2020). The Labor Market Integration of Refugee Migrants in High-Income Countries. *The Journal of economic Perspectives*, 34(1), 94-121.
- Brown, D. W. (2017). *A New Introduction to Islam*. Third edition. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.
- Buitelaar, M. W. (2006). *Islam en het dagelijkse leven*. First edition: Amsterdam: Atlas Contact.
- Clifford, N. & French, S. & Valentine, G. (2016). *Key Methods in Geography*. Third edition. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Connor, P. (2008). Increase or Decrease? The Impact of the International Migratory Event on Immigrant Religious Participation. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 47(2), 243-257.
- Durkheim, E. (1893) [1984]. *The Division of Labour in Society*. First edition. London: Macmillan Education
- Emilsen, W. W. (2012). The new atheism and Islam. *Expository Times*, 123(11), 521-528.
- Es, M. (2016). Turkish–Dutch mosques and the formation of moral subjects. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 17(7), 825-848.
- Güveli, A. & Platt, L. (2011). Understanding the Religious Behaviour of Muslims in the Netherlands and the UK. *Sociology*, 45(6), 1008-1027.
- Güveli, A. (2015). Are Movers More Religious than Stayers? Religiosity of European Majority, Turks in Europe and Turkey. *Review of Religious Research*, 47(1), 43-62.

- Hamid, S. (2019). *The role of Islam in European populism: How refugee flows and fear of Muslims drive right-wing support*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution.
- Hennink, M. & Hutter, I. & Bailey, A. (2011). *Qualitative Research Methods*. First edition. London: Sage Publications.
- Hirschman, C. (2004). The role of religion in the origins and adaptation of immigrant groups in the United States. *International Migration Review*, 38(3), 1206-1234.
- Hopkins, N. & Greenwood, R. M. (2013). Hijab, visibility and the performance of identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43(5), 438-447.
- Horrie, C. & Chippindale, P. (2007). *What is Islam?* Second edition. London: Allen & Co
- Huijnk, W. (2018). *De religieuze beleving van Moslims in Nederland: Diversiteit en verandering in beeld*. ISBN 978 90 377 0868 4. Den Haag: Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau.
- Idinopulos, T. A. (1998). What is religion? *CrossCurrents*, 48(3), 366-380.
- Joppke, C. (2009). *Veil: Mirror of Identity*. First edition. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Kulu, H. (2005). Migration and Fertility: Competing Hypotheses Re-Examined. *European Journal of Population*, 21(1), 51-87.
- Lorasdag, B. K. 2009. The headscarf and “Resistance identity-building”: A case study on headscarf wearing in Amsterdam. *Women’s Studies International Forum*, 32(6), 453–462.
- Martin, C. (2014). What is religion? *Political Theology*, 15(6), 503-508.
- Meyer, S. R. & Lasater, M. & Tol, W. A. (2017). Migration and Mental Health in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Systematic Review. *Psychiatry*, 80(4), 374-381.
- NOS (2020). *Forum voor Democratie partij met meeste leden*. Retrieved on 25/02/2020 from: <https://nos.nl/artikel/2320523-forum-voor-democratie-partij-met-meeste-leden.html>
- Ross, E.A. (1901). *Social Control: A Survey of The Foundations of Social Order*. First edition. New York: Macmillan Publishing.
- Roy, O. (2004). *Globalized Islam: The Search For a New Ummah*. First edition. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Schmeets, H. (2018). *Wie is religieus, en wie niet?* Den Haag: Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek.
- Siddiqui, M. (2008). Sharia and the Public Debate. *Political Theology*, 9(3), 261-264.
- Statistics Netherlands (2020). *Immi- en emigratie; per maand, migratieachtergrond, geslacht*. Retrieved on 25/02/2020 from: <https://opendata.cbs.nl/statline/#/CBS/nl/dataset/83518NED/table?dl=236B0>
- Thue, L. A. (1998). Ideology, law, and social control: The case of Islamic fundamentalism in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Comparative and Applied Criminal Justice*, 22(1), 61-70.
- Tonnies, F. (1887). *Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*. First edition. Leipzig: Fues’s Verlag. .

Van Tubergen, F. (2006). Religious Affiliation and Attendance among Immigrants in Eight Western Countries: Individual and Contextual Effects. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 45(1), 1-22.

Van Tubergen, F. (2007). Religious affiliation and participation among immigrants in a secular society: A study of immigrants in the Netherlands. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(5), 747-765.

Van Tubergen, F. & Smits, F. & Ruiters, S. (2010). Religious Practices Among Islamic Immigrants: Moroccan and Turkish Men in Belgium. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 49(2), 247-263.

Voas, D. & Fleischmann, F. (2012). Islam Moves West: Religious Change in the First and Second Generations. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 38(1), 525-545.

Wardak, A. (2002). The mosque and social control in Edinburgh's Muslim community. *Culture and Religion*, 3(2), 201-219.

## Appendix 1: Data collection instrument

### Primary questions and probing questions in parentheses:

1. Tell me something about yourself. (what does an average day look like for you? Hobby's, work, study, social contacts etc.)
2. When did you arrive in the Netherlands? (Can you tell me something about those first months? Who came with you?)
3. Can you tell me something about your life back in [place of origin]? (Daily life etc.)
4. What kind of role did religion play in your life back there? (Explain. Part of the everyday routine?)
5. Did you participate in personal prayer? (Explain. How often?)
6. Did you participate in the Ramadan? (Explain. What kind of memories or feelings does it give you?)
7. Did you go to a mosque? (Why yes/no? If yes, how often? Can you tell your experience within that community?)
8. Did you participate in any of the Islamic holidays over there? (If so, which ones? How did you experience those? What kind of feelings did they bring you?/If not, explain?)
9. You have been living here for [answer for question 2] years now. Do you experience religion differently in Groningen? (Can you elaborate on that? Which factors contribute to this?)
10. You mentioned that you did/did not pray back in [country of origin], has that changed since you came to Groningen? (Explain. What contributed to this?)
11. Do you participate in the Ramadan in Groningen? (Explain. Is it a different experience compared to [country of origin]? Why yes/no?)
12. Do you go to a mosque in Groningen? (Explain. What are your motivations to (not) go to a mosque? Religious/community/friends? What meaning does this place have for you?)
13. Do you participate in any of the Islamic holidays over here? (Which ones? How is this experience in Groningen compared to [country of origin]?)
14. Are you ever confronted by people with the fact that you are a Muslim in Groningen? (When? How did this make you feel? Did this impact your beliefs? Do you know other people who have?)
15. Do you feel like you have become more or less religious since you came to Groningen? (Explain).
16. Are there other things you want to talk about which haven't come up during this interview?