

## TRACES OF ISLAM IN MINORITY LANDS: THE HISTORICAL JOURNEY OF MUSLIM CIVILIZATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

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### Abstract

*This article explores the history and dynamics of the Dutch Muslim minority community in relation to the broader context of Islam. The introduction of Islam into the Netherlands can be traced back to various historical events and waves of migration. Initially, Arab traders played a pivotal role in introducing Islam to the region through their commercial activities. Subsequently, the Ottoman Turks contributed to the spread of Islam in the Netherlands, particularly during periods of trade and diplomacy. However, one of the most significant chapters in this narrative unfolded after World War II, when a new wave of immigrants sought asylum and refuge in the Netherlands. These immigrants brought with them their diverse cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs, including Islam. This era marked a transformative period in Dutch society, shaping its multicultural landscape and religious composition. It's noteworthy that the Netherlands is recognized as one of the most secular countries in Europe. This secular ethos is enshrined in the country's governance and policies, which prioritize individual freedom of religion and belief. Unlike some other nations, the Dutch state upholds the principle of religious freedom, allowing its citizens to choose their faith without coercion or compulsion. In conducting this study, the literature research method was employed. This approach involves a comprehensive review and analysis of various scholarly works, publications, and primary sources available in libraries. The researcher leverages a wide array of resources, such as books, academic journals, newspapers, and archival materials, to gain insights into the historical context and contemporary dynamics of Islam and its practitioners within the Dutch context.*

*Keywords: History of civilization; Dutch; Islam.*

### INTRODUCTION

The Netherlands is one of the countries in Western Europe that has the largest Muslim population. Currently, it is estimated that the Muslim population in the Netherlands reaches around 900,000 people or about 5.8% of the total population of about 17.6 million people (Azhari & Zalnur, 2024). Although the existence of a large Muslim population can bring benefits, on the contrary, it poses challenges to both the Dutch government and the Muslim community in the country (Suwasono, 2019).

The arrival of Muslims in Western countries is nothing new. This is in contrast to medieval confluences where Muslims engaged in strengthening the pillars of rationalism, secularism, and modernity of Western thought. The presence of Muslims in Western countries today varies widely in terms of importance and uncertainty of social status, with the majority of European Muslims being immigrants from Africa, Turkey, India, and Pakistan while the Netherlands itself is experiencing such (Bakker, 2015).

The benefit for the Dutch government is that Muslim citizens can be a valuable human resource to fill labor shortages within the country, especially in the manual or menial labor sector. Human resources have been a limitation for many years. The advantage for the Muslim community living in the Netherlands is that they can play a role in the development of the country and improve their economic well-being to provide for their families (Muslih, 2017).

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The Netherlands has a parliamentary monarchy system of government, with a government headed by a prime minister and parliament as the highest body or (DPR) but the head of state in the Netherlands is still headed by a king (Lura, 2018). The Netherlands is a country that accepts immigrants from different parts of the country. In recent decades the Netherlands has developed into a country with a multicultural society. As a country that is very tolerant of migrant arrivals, the Dutch government allows these immigrants to maintain their language, religion, and culture (Muslih, 2017).

With so many immigrants coming to the Netherlands, it is not surprising that Islam developed in the windmill country, even though the majority of the population is Christian and Catholic. It can be said that before World War II there was no Islamic state in the Netherlands or even if there were very few and insignificant numbers. However, after World War II the Dutch government encouraged development and transformed its economy and Many things have changed (Veer, 2002).

Because the Netherlands has a large Muslim population, they live in a society that no longer takes inspiration or rule from their religion. That's why Dutch Muslims sought a redefinition of their religion in a new society in the Land of Windmills. With that goal in mind they believe that if they make Europe their home, then it is important to raise their children with Islamic values so that they will recognize themselves when they are.

In addition, Muslims believe in the importance of cultivating Islamic cultural values and teachings and passing them on to the younger generation. The transformation of religious and cultural values occurs through various means of education, including non-formal education at home, non-formal education in mosques, and formal education in schools (Aslan, 2013). As part of their formal education, Dutch Muslims are given the opportunity to choose schools that provide Islamic religious education for their children. Some major cities in the Netherlands have Islamic primary schools funded by the government, similar to public schools and other schools in the Netherlands (Driessen & Merry, 2006).

## RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this article is a historical research method ranging from heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Daliman, 2012). The historical method is combined using literature study techniques. This approach allows researchers to investigate and analyze information from a variety of written sources, such as books, articles, and documents relating to Muslim minority countries in the Netherlands. The first stage is heuristics, in which the researcher conducts a thorough search of relevant literature related to the history of Islamic civilization in the Netherlands. The collection of these sources forms the basis for a more in-depth analysis. The second stage is Source Criticism, where researchers evaluate the authenticity, reliability, and relevance of the sources that have been found (Abdurahman, 2007). The next stage is interpretation, where the facts and information gathered are analyzed in depth. Researchers group and associate information from various sources to form a holistic understanding of the research topic. This interpretation includes a comprehensive analysis of the data that has been found. Finally, the results of the analysis and interpretation are arranged in the form of historical writing called Historiography, where relevant data are selected, the structure of the article is arranged systematically, and the writing is carried out with a clear and coherent narrative, in this case about Muslims in the Netherlands.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### History of the Entry of Islam in the Netherlands

The Netherlands is also known as the Lowlands. The Netherlands is called lowland because almost a quarter of the country's territory is actually equivalent to sea level. Most of the population in the Netherlands are descendants of Germans who settled in this country. The Netherlands has an area of 41,160 km<sup>2</sup> and is astronomically located between 50°N to 53°N and between 3°E to 7°E.

Geographically, the southern border is bordered by Belgium, the east is bordered by Germany, the north is directly bordered by the North Sea and the west is directly bordered by the North Sea (Veer, 2002).

The Netherlands is the 66th most populous region in the World. In 2017 the population of the Netherlands reached 17.6 million people which is comparable to an average annual population growth of 0.6%. The average life expectancy in the Netherlands reaches 78.3 years. The most populous areas are North Holland, South Holland and Uthreh (Suwasono, 2019). The growth of Muslims in the Netherlands is a significant change for the Muslim population, because in 1991 the number of Muslims was still around 360,000 (Shadid & Koningsveld, 1991).

The Netherlands is a kingdom located in mainland Europe with the capital city Amsterdam. Its seat of government is located in The Hague (Hadi & Rosa, 2020). Bahasa resmi Belanda adalah Bahasa Belanda, namun penduduknya juga using English as the language of communication, especially with foreigners. The climate in the Netherlands is moderate, and although the temperature is hot, it feels cool for people who come from tropical countries like Indonesia. In summer the highest temperatures range from 20 to 25 degrees Celsius, while in winter temperatures can reach -20 degrees Celsius. Almost every year it blows fast in this country, which is due to its location below sea level. Like other European countries, the Netherlands has four seasons: spring from March to May, summer from June to August, autumn from September to November, and winter from December to February (Ida, Diany, Pita, Dedek, 2013).

In the Netherlands there are 3 ethnic groups, the first Friz tribe inhabits the Northwest Netherlands, the second Sacsis tribe is found in the northeast and north of the Netherlands, the third is the Frankish tribe found in the southern part of the Netherlands.

Islam first entered the Netherlands in the 16th century. In this century Ottoman and Persian traders settled in various Dutch trading cities. At the time, the Dutch government allowed Turks and Persians to practice their respective religions, although most of them belonged to the Sultan's Jewish or Greek Orthodox communities. In the 17th century, dozens of Dutch sailors converted to Islam joining barbarian pirates in North African ports and some reportedly became admirals in the Ottoman navy. Many Dutch sailors converted of their own accord and they were the ones who spread Islam in their own country (Ii, Dan, Islam, & Belanda, 1945).

In 1602, the Aceh Sultanate sent several envoys to the Netherlands with the first diplomatic mission from an Asian country to Europe. The Acehnese delegation to the United Republic consisted of ambassadors, admirals, and cousins of the Sultan, accompanied by courtiers of the Aceh Sultanate. The Aceh Sultanate envoy delivered a letter to the Dutch Prince explaining his foreign affairs and the gifts the envoy had brought to the prince. The special envoy of the Aceh Sultanate was treated with respect and invited to visit important cities in the Netherlands and meet with local authorities. This was a successful strategy for forging cooperation between Asian rulers and important trading partners. Among the envoys from the Aceh Sultanate there were those who settled in the Netherlands and it turned out that there were residents who were interested in the Islamic teachings they brought so that many residents converted to Islam (Ii et al., 1945)

Muslims began to arrive in large numbers in the Netherlands in the 1960s to 1970s, at which time the Dutch government needed manual workers to reconstruct the country and drive the country's economy. Most native Dutch are reluctant to do menial work. Thus, the Dutch government invited workers from abroad to come and work in the country. These foreign workers are placed in tasks such as assembly, waste management, yarn spinning, and weaving in the textile industry sector (Duyvendak, Hurenkamp, & Tonkens, 2010).

During this time, the Dutch government conducted recruitment deals in several European countries such as Turkey and Morocco, where the immigrants recruited were Muslims. This can be seen as a sign of the entry of Islam into the Netherlands. There are economic reasons for Muslim immigrants to come to the Netherlands. They originally came with the intention of working locally, After raising sufficient funds to build a house and start a small business they intend to finish their work and return home. However, some returned to their hometowns, some stayed and married local Dutch men (Duyvendak et al., 2010).

The influx of immigrants to the Netherlands has continued since the 17th century. At that time the Dutch received people who wanted to leave their homeland. At that time most of the immigrants to the Netherlands were Jews from Spain and Portugal along with Huguenots from France. Since the Middle Ages, the appeal of Dutch freedom and wealth has led many immigrants to come to the country. It is estimated that between 1590 and 1800 more than 5% of the Dutch population had foreign ancestry, with immigrants at the time consisting mostly of Protestant Huguenots from France and Jews from part of Europe. Most of them leave their home countries for reasons of poor security, they want to freely embrace their religion. The Netherlands is a very culturally and religiously tolerant country for immigrants who come (Driessen & Merry, 2006).

The situation later changed during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, many Dutch citizens decided to leave their homeland to escape Nazi oppression and genocide. Most of the population emigrated to the Americas, Australia, and colonies such as South Africa and the archipelago then called (Indonesia). After World War II, the Netherlands sought to restore its devastated country. This effort was carried out between 1945 and 1960 by repairing damaged infrastructure such as bridges, roads, railroads, housing, factories, and other buildings. In 1950 most of the migrants to the Netherlands came from its former colonies, namely Indonesia and South Africa. The migration process in the post-colonial period was less driven by the needs of migrants and more forced migration. This migration was based on the interests of colonial countries and foreign investment (Muslih, 2017).

In the 1960s when the globalized world entered the era of free trade, transportation options became increasingly smooth, making it easier for international workers to move. At that time the Netherlands was responsible for controlling immigrants from Italy, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Greece, Morocco, and Yugoslavia. The Netherlands began recruiting Tunisian and Pakistani workers to meet the labor needs of the country. These imported workers are usually not subject to immigration regulations. Labor theory is driven by disparities in job opportunities and a growing recognition that there is pressure to move to areas that promise better job opportunities.

In 1973, the Netherlands experienced a financial crisis and unemployment soared. The crisis caused the Netherlands to stop importing workers. Some of these workers chose to return to their home countries, but immigrants from Turkey and Morocco still live in the country because they face an unpleasant political and economic situation in their home countries. Unlike France and Germany, the Dutch government has never made major efforts to return the worker to his home country, Although the government attempted to give bonuses to migrants who voluntarily wanted to return home, the effort was stopped by the immigrants. This is the forerunner of a surge in illegal immigration in the Netherlands. Initially, immigrants who came only wanted temporary work and were not required to use formal immigration procedures. The migrants from Turkey and Morocco have begun family reunions after they had officially extended their stay in the Netherlands. Reunification involves immigrants choosing to stay in the Netherlands while bringing family members from their home countries to live together in the Netherlands (Eduardo Kukika Aji, 2010).

The process of family reunification in the Netherlands initially met resistance from the government and society, due to the significant increase in immigrants from Turkey and Morocco as a result of family reunification. In 1979, Hans Wiegel (in office 1977-1981), based on the recommendation of the Dutch Political Council began implementing policies towards ethnic minorities together with Interior Minister Van Binenlanse Zaaken. In 1981, the Dutch Ministry of State announced a new policy called "Verzuiling". The purpose of this policy is to promote equality for ethnic minorities and provide them with opportunities to grow by focusing on preserving their distinctive language, religion, and culture. With this, immigrants have the right to freedom to organize, defend their culture and language, profess their religion, and reunite with their families (Bakker, 2015).

Family reunions of immigrants who arrived in the 1960s were on the rise and a new face was beginning to form in the Netherlands. The immigrants who arrived in the 1980s were no longer just contract workers, but also asylum seekers. Because of the humanitarian tolerance that exists in the Netherlands, these asylum seekers are openly accepted. The migration process of asylum seekers

occurs in response to various differences between locations including various factors such as economic, political, and social factors related to the environment, both at the individual and community levels. Social and political factors play an important role in influencing migration decisions to seek asylum. This is in line with the reasons asylum seekers leave their homeland to seek refuge in the Netherlands (Eduardo Kukika Aji, 2010).

The first group to seek refuge came from Poland. They emerged in the early 1980s as a result of the political crisis that occurred in the country. In the mid-1980s, the number of those seeking asylum increased significantly. Asylum seekers from Turkey also came to the Netherlands to escape the fallout from the coup in their country in 1985-1986.

### **The Development of Islamic Civilization in the Netherlands**

The Netherlands has a prosperous and open economy that is heavily dependent on international trade characterized by stable employment relations, relatively low unemployment, and low inflation rates. Rotterdam is the largest port in Europe and Amsterdam is one of the largest ports in the world. Industrial activities are dominated by food processing, chemicals, oil refining, high-tech such as shipyards, motor vehicles, financial services, creative sectors, and electrical machinery. In agriculture, the Dutch managed to become experts in increasing food productivity per hectare. The largest agricultural sector in the Netherlands consists of flowers, ornamental plants, vegetables, sugar beets, grains, spices, horticultural crops cultivated in greenhouses and butter. In the livestock sector the Netherlands also managed to export milk, skin, meat and fish caught in the North Sea (Muslih, 2017).

Education in the Netherlands has differences with the education system that is generally applied in Asia, America, and parts of Europe. The Dutch education system contains core subjects introduced from the primary school level, taking into account students' interests and academic abilities (Miller, 2011). Overall, its main systems can be classified as follows:

**Primary and secondary education:** In the Netherlands primary and secondary education is compulsory for approximately 8 years (including 7 years of compulsory education) starting at the age of 5. In the final year students are encouraged to choose further education preferences. Further education begins at age 12, is compulsory until age 16, and is offered at several levels. VMBO 4-Year Program It is a combination of vocational and general education that allows graduates to pursue secondary vocational education. Currently, there are two levels of education that provide direct access to the higher education system, namely HAVO (5 years) and VWO (6 years) which are educational options. This major allows you to choose one of the following four majors: 1) Natural Sciences and Technology (Fisics), 2) Natural Sciences and Health (Health Sciences), 3) Economics and Society (Socio Economic), 4) Culture and Society (Social and Cultural).

**Senior Secondary Vocational Education and Training:** This level of education is known as the MBO level (4 years) and is offered in several fields of study, such as business, engineering, health, personal care, human services, and agriculture. The MBO program is available in four levels (1-4 years) and can only be followed by those who have passed Level 4. Only MBO graduates are eligible to continue to the HBO program.

**Higher Education:** This training consists of two parts: HBO and WO. This course provides ready-made training for students who want to put it into practice right away. Today the university offers specialized training (main subjects) based on pure science. The first year of HBO and WO involved a review called the Propedue period. Students must complete their first-year program within two years. If a student does not succeed in the exam, he or she will be removed from the major.

**Netherlands** In the Dutch Constitution it is stated that Dutch citizens have the right to profess and freely practice their respective religions (Scharbrodt, Akgönül, Alibašić, Nielsen, & Racijs, 2016). Therefore Muslims are legally free to carry out their religious activities. Legal equality by the government also applies to Muslims in the field of education, so Muslims can open Islamic schools in the Netherlands in accordance with government regulations. Under constitutional protection, facilities available to Christians must also be reserved for Muslims. However, freedom

of religion, freedom of expression and equality for all individuals regardless of ethnicity, religion or race are the cornerstones of the Dutch Constitution (Driessen & Merry, 2006).

The establishment of Islamic schools in the Netherlands was originally an attempt to preserve the identity of Muslim immigrants who in the 1990s had been allowed to maintain their own identity as part of society in the Netherlands and Europe in general (Boven, 2014). There are two Islamic schools in the Netherlands founded in 1988. One is Tareik Iboet Ziyad in Eindhoven and the other is Al Ghazali in Rotterdam. An educational institution founded by Moroccan immigrants applying the basic principles of Islam and is believed to have had a major influence on the process of merging and separating Muslim immigrants. The fundamental teachings of Islam taught in these schools will increase racial inequality in the Dutch education system. The need to provide education based on Islamic values and protect children from the negative influence of Western society has prompted the establishment of Islamic schools and an increase in the number of Islamic domes in such educational institutions (Ritonga, 2022).

Muslims influence all aspects of life, including religion, law, and culture, thus facilitating the entry of Muslim immigrants into politics and having an impact on the rapid increase of Islamic political currents in the land of Windmills. Many Muslim immigrants arriving in the Netherlands come from Islamic countries affected by the political system of their home country. For example, immigrants from Morocco have experience with authoritarian Islamic rule, as happened in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Iraq. Some immigrants who come from secular Islamic political systems are influenced by Islamic political systems that are democratic in their home countries. A vivid example of the Islamic democratic model of governance is the democratic governance movement in Turkey. Because of this, the community of Turkish descent in the Netherlands has become very familiar with this model of governance (Noor, 2017).

The legal requirements for the establishment of an Islamic school are that the school must have a minimum of 200 students, use Dutch as the language of instruction, teachers must meet the requirements set, and the curriculum must be in accordance with legal provisions. Due to the obligation to study which has been expressly stipulated in the Basic Law on Education in the Constitution, local governments do not have the authority to hinder the establishment of madrasas (Hass, 2020).

Many Islamic organizations were established in the Netherlands. This is closely related to the government policy implemented to give freedom to immigrants that occurred in the decade of the 1970s to maintain their identity. This well-established organization has different tasks, ranging from preserving Dutch culture to fighting for minority rights. The Dutch government provided support to the formation of this Islamic organization with a view to accelerating the integration of the Dutch state. With the existence of Islamic organizations, Muslims have a place to organize (van Hooft et al., 2019).

There are several Islamic organizations in the Netherlands as follows:

Contactorgaan Muslim and Overheid (CMO), This organization was officially established in 2004 by the Dutch government. The aim of the organisation is to become the government's official partner in discussing issues relating to Dutch society and Islamic relations.

Islam dan Burgerschap (I & B), The organization was formed in 1996 with the intention to foster conversation between Muslims and other communities. The main mission of the organization is to oversee the development of the integration of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands. Islamitische Stichting Nederland (ISN), ISN is an organization for all people of Turkish descent living in the Netherlands. The organization was founded in 1982 in Dean Hague. The purpose of this organization is to support the integration of people of Turkish descent in the Netherlands (Wiegers, 2012).

Unie Van Lahore Ahmadiyya Moslims Organisaties Nederland (ULAMON), it is a federation of Dutch Ahmadiyya Islamic organizations or Moroccan mosque organizations. The

purpose of this organization is to initiate dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims (Vellenga, 2015).

Another Islamic organization is the Arabisch-Europese League (AEL). It was founded in 1993 in Antwerp, Belgium, by Lebanese-Belgian Diab Abu Jadja. The main objectives of this organization are to protect the interests of Arab and Islamic communities in Europe, strengthen the socio-economic position of Islamic societies and improve good relations with other societies based on mutual respect and tolerance between religious communities (de Koning, Becker, & Roex, 2020).

Religion in the Netherlands has historically been predominantly Christian as in other European regions where Christianity plays an important role (Fridiyanto, 2015). By the end of the 19th century, there were 36 different Catholic denominations. As Christianity and Catholicism experienced a significant decline, Protestantism also experienced a significant decline and Catholicism became the main form of Christianity. According to Dutch statistics in 2018, 50.1% of the population stated no religion, 43.8% stated that they were Christians, Catholics 23.7%, Protestants 15.5%, Muslims 4.9%, Hindus 0.6%, Buddhists 0.4%, Jews 0.1%. The Dutch believe that religion does not play an important role in politics or education. Religion is considered a private matter and should not be discussed openly (Suwasono, 2019).

The Netherlands is known for its famous windmills that can almost be seen in all corners of the country from a distance. But it turns out that windmills can not only be seen in various cities in the Netherlands and can also be seen from all over the country, this country is also famous for its tulips. Finding a mosque to pray is not difficult for Muslims who want to visit this country. There are many mosques in almost every region and province in the Netherlands, including mosques with old buildings, mosques this mosque was once a place of worship for Christians, namely churches that were converted into mosques. As we know Muslims in the Netherlands mostly live among immigrants from colonial countries. Therefore, it is not surprising that many residents of colonial countries immigrated to the Netherlands (Stockemer, 2022).

In the Netherlands immigrants from Islamic countries who chose to settle in this country have built an extensive Islamic infrastructure in the Netherlands, with the construction of approximately 430 mosques and the call to prayer in the Netherlands being new to Dutch society. Mosques in the Netherlands are the largest Islamic institutions because they not only act as places of worship, but also as meeting places that strengthen family relations among Muslims (Maussen, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

The Netherlands, also known as the Lowlands, has unique geographical characteristics with most of its area equivalent to sea level. The history of the entry of Islam in the Netherlands began in the 16th century with the presence of Ottoman and Persian traders. Muslim migration to the Netherlands increased in 1960-1970 to meet the need for manual laborers and begin the process of family reunification. The development of Islam in the Netherlands was reflected in the establishment of Islamic schools and Islamic organizations that supported the integration of Muslim communities. Although Islam influences many aspects of life in the Netherlands, its society is still dominated by Christianity, despite the growing number of mosques and the development of Islam in the country. With its ethnic and religious diversity, the Netherlands has a policy of tolerance and equality, as reflected in its constitution and education policy. Despite the increase in racial inequality in the education system as a result of Islamic schools, the government continued to defend the principles of religious freedom. Economically, the Netherlands has a prosperous and open economy, with dependence on international trade. Education in the Netherlands has a unique system with diverse higher education options. In addition, cultural diversity is reflected in the development of industry, agriculture, and the creative sector. With an increasingly diverse population and an influx of immigrants, the Netherlands continues to face challenges in the integration and diversity of its society. Nonetheless, the efforts of the government and Islamic organizations are instrumental in creating an inclusive and tolerant environment in the country.

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