

Capturing Islam

On the Photographic Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Dutch Media

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Contents

Prologue		3
Introduction		3
 Theory		
Chapter One:	Colonial Imagery & the Depiction of Islam	5
	1.1 – Describing the Colonies	5
	1.2 – Depicting the Colonies	6
	1.3 – Photography in the Middle East	7
Chapter Two:	Media Portrayal & the Specifics of Photography	10
	2.1 – Images	11
	2.2 – Psychological Influence	12
	2.3 – Visual Elements	14
	2.3.1 – Camera Angles	14
	2.3.2 – Lighting and Focus	15
	2.4 – Media Processes	15
	2.4.1 – Visual Gatekeeping	16
	2.4.2 – Visual Framing	17
	2.4.3 – Captions	17
	2.5 – Islam in the Media	18
 Research		
Chapter Three:	Dutch Photojournalism & Islam	20
	3.1 – Methods and Gathering Data	20
	3.2 – Analysis	21
	3.3 – Conclusions	29
Conclusions		32
Bibliography		35

Prologue

Beginnings are never easy, as most writers know. Capturing such a great subject as the visual representation of Islam in the restricted amount of words that are allowed for a bachelor's thesis, however, has turned out to be both harder and easier at the same time. My long-harbored love of photography, combined with a continuously growing interest in Islam, led to the specific focus on photographic representation of Islam in the Western media. Since research of Islamic representation in the media had mainly focused on either the written word or the moving image, I was about to embark on a path that not many had walked before. Finding interesting and relevant information was easier than I thought, but often, I found myself straying from the main path into fascinating subjects that basically had very little to do with my hypothesis. In the end, I managed to filter out the superfluous information – though not completely throwing it out: to be kept for future projects – and create the thesis that I had in my mind's eye all along.

The following pages will introduce you to my chosen subject and continue to give an historical overview of Orientalist imagery, the depiction of Islam today in the media in general, to be specified in a chapter on photography alone, and then culminate in the results of my small-scale research of the photographic representation of Islam in the Dutch media, from 2000 up to now.

Introduction

The image of Islam that is created in the daily media is something that often gives me a feeling of unease. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Islam has been news-worthy mainly because of negative events. The Al Qaeda attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, followed by bombings in Madrid and London, and more locally for the Dutch: the murders of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, have created an air of negativity around the subject as a whole. Not only are facts often presented wrongly, but they are accompanied by headlines lacking nuance, to say the least, and by stereotypical images that sometimes are not even relevant to the story.

In this thesis, I will focus on two main points. The previously mentioned estranging image, is not something of recent times only. True, with the advent of modern media, it has changed significantly, but such a depiction of Islam and Muslims in the Western world has been

prominently present at least since colonial times. Therefore, first of all, my thesis looks into the way that Islam has been historically portrayed in the Western world, consulting literature and previous findings on this matter. This starts out with a short overview of Orientalist imagery and then continues into the current state of affairs. Narrowing down the chosen subject, I will dive into the more specific portrayal of Islam through photography in the area of present-day media.

My hypothesis for this part is that, in the Western world, Islam has been portrayed mainly in stereotypical terms as the Other, and that this outlook has changed somewhat over time, but has not disappeared. This first part of my thesis will be followed by conclusions and a short discussion of my hypothesis at the end of the whole thesis, combining this with the findings of the second part.

The second part of this thesis and other main focus is my personal research on the photographic portrayal of Islam in the Dutch media, and more specifically, in the daily newspaper the *Volkscrant*. I have chosen the period from 2000 to 2007 to be able to find, besides a general trend in portrayal, changes that might have occurred due to the major, mostly negative, events that concerned Islam. These events have brought Islam to the forefront of discussion, whether relevant or not. My research hypothesis is that Islam has become more prominent in news photography since September 11th of 2001 and that the photographs, combined with captions and headings, have changed in style and terminology. Instead of a focus on ethnicity, religion is mentioned more often and there is a tendency to show angry crowds or close-ups of masked men and veiled women.

First, I will outline my methods, data, results and interpretations, and then try to combine them with the theoretical aspects I have mentioned in the earlier chapters. Then, my conclusions with regard to my hypothesis will be presented, moving on to an integral conclusion for the whole thesis. I will end with my final thoughts and future recommendations.

Chapter One: Colonial Imagery & the Depiction of Islam

The portrayal of Islam in the West has quite a long history, but it was only during colonial times that the subject was truly researched and that the amount of imagery increased. Before that time, ‘(...) efforts were made to understand Muslim thought more clearly, but with the sole objective of countering any influence it might have’¹ on the Christian world. Gradually, the information gathered became more objective due to increased relations on several fronts – such as politics and economics. The interest expanded to incorporate important Islamic thinkers, such as Averroes and Avicenna – although it must be said that some Western writers tried to sever the thinkers’ bonds with Islam by denying their existence and labeling these thinkers as secular. Islam became a source of exotic fascination, which was highly popular during and after the Middle Ages in both literature and art. The publication of Gallands translation of ‘Arabian Nights’, amongst others, challenged the idea of the Islamic world as that of the anti-christ, and instead posed it as a miraculous and exotic world where fantasies could become truth². With the advent of the Renaissance, the previous respect for the Arabic translators and keepers of the Greek tradition started to wither away. The original Greek texts were still held in high esteem, but Arabism became something negative.

1.1 – Describing the Colonies

The era of colonial conquests in general created a distinct interest in other peoples for the Western world. This was not a matter of purely scientific goals, but a matter of finding out more about the colonial subjects and using this information to create or maintain a stronger leadership. The results of research done for this purpose were consequently of a biased nature; as they were only a means to an end, they often disregarded the views of the subjected people themselves and were seen through Western – or Orientalist – eyes. The studies were undertaken by scholars who had started their specializations in their own countries, and had already made up their minds and theories by then: ‘(...) rarely were Orientalists interested in anything except proving the validity of these musty “truths” by applying them, without great success, to uncomprehending, hence degenerate, natives.’³ The former exotic charm that had exuded from the Orient became lost in the all-encompassing colonial expansion and Christian missionary activities. The modern Muslim world was not examined in new ways, but only seen in the light of the old days and what was left

¹ Rodinson, 1980, p. 5.

² Id., 1980, p. 44.

³ Said, 1978, p. 52.

of it. It was seen as the exact opposite of the Western world: static, stuck in ancient times. This was not what scholars encountered in the Orient per se, but a way to define their own world as opposed to the Orient: '(...) we need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate.'⁴ In reality, the colonized societies of course had to adapt to the changes of their times, the biggest being the colonial domination itself, and did so not only by looking back into their own traditions, but by incorporating new ideas from the West, as Sarah Graham-Brown notes⁵.

1.2 – Depicting the Colonies

Besides extensive descriptions through written reports, imagery has also played a role right from the start. The colonial powers that were in control of large parts of the Muslim world, and other visitors, were captivated by the image of 'the Muslim'. There was a certain 'mystique' to this world, in the words of Maxime Rodinson, that was so far and different from home. Although other parts of the world were considered to be quite fascinating, the Islamic Middle East appeared to be the culmination of 'Otherness'. This was a world that, according to the ruling vision of that time, could be explained completely by the belief in Islam. It was considered to be entirely different from the West, and of special interest because of the long history between both worlds.

The popularity of exhibitions of images – and sometimes even living examples – of the various subjected races in several Western European countries reached impressive heights⁶ during the nineteenth century and contributed to the demand of pictures from the Orient. These international exhibitions – the best example of which being the London Great Exhibition of 1851, at the Crystal Palace – were partly organized to create more support for the colonial undertakings and emphasized the superiority of the Western peoples as opposed to the colonized subjects. The rise of photography, which can be seen as to be largely parallel to the enormous expansion of European colonies, created an environment that not only ensured an easier process of making images, but one that could distribute them at will and in every chosen amount. 'Exploration, colonization and the rapid development of science and technology provided the first generations of photographers with ample scope to use their new skills.'⁷ Although photography itself was not used at the exhibitions, it was common to photograph the several displays to capture them for the

⁴ Id., 1978, p. 71.

⁵ Graham-Brown, 1988, p. 24.

⁶ Id., 1988, p. 14.

⁷ Id., 1988, p. 1.

future. The same public that was attracted to the exhibitions also showed an interest in the up-and-coming art of photography, which did not have to stay – but often still did – within the ideological boundaries of the government-funded exhibitions. Photographs of the colonized people were of the utmost importance to stress the essential presence of the Western powers. Images were seen as undeniable truths, and by showing what was happening in the unfamiliar and far colonies, '[c]olonial photography too was in the business of confirming and reproducing the racial theories and stereotypes that assisted European expansion.'⁸

1.3 – Photography in the Middle East

Photography reached the Middle East not long after its original invention, but focused on monuments at first – people came later. When people did appear, they were depicted in highly stereotypical ways – reflecting the fact that photography in the Middle East at that time was largely for profit and therefore followed the trend instigated by other art forms, with studio backgrounds and cliché props. Apart from the interest by the colonizers in the 'mystic' Islamic world, colonies in the Middle East were quickly added to the curriculum of tourist agencies, organizing trips for the 'masses' into Algeria and Egypt, making sure even more photographers traveled to the area. Souvenirs like postcards were in high demand and were often photographed in studios. This was not only done because of stereotypical ideas, but also due to lack of available equipment for outside areas – it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that cameras became lighter in weight and simpler to use. In addition to these complications, people were not easy to capture on film close-up. Most shots were thus shot inside or in outside studios – even though they claimed not to be staged. 'The studio was used as a kind of theatrical set in which to present images of unnamed people whose only identity appears in the (often erroneous) captions which categorize them by racial type, religion, tribe or, occasionally, class.'⁹

The photography of this time had much in common with painted portraits and scenes. Although the technique itself was completely different, the scenes were often quite similar. The studio-setting was an important factor in this similarity, painters as well as photographers used the staged 'real-life' backgrounds and stereotype-enhancing props. Everything was staged, but presented as reality. The illusion of truth that surrounded photography at that time – and often still does – turned these photographs into proof of what the colonies were like for the audience at home. They were supposed to be empirically accurate, which was believed of photography since

⁸ Maxwell, 1999, p. 9.

⁹ Graham-Brown, 1988, p. 39.

the invention of the *camera obscura* in the seventeenth century. No thought was given to the perhaps subjective choice of a subject or something like the staging of a scene, let alone the simple manipulation of looking in a certain direction instead of the other.

Scholars such as anthropologists tried to be objective in portraying the colonized people, even though almost all of them were Western white males, which affected their outlook anyway whether intentional or not. This ideal of objectivity however was lost in the subjective trade of photographs for the tourist industry, which turned out to be the largest part of the photographic business as a whole. ‘Most of the photographs of colonized peoples produced in the late colonial period, however, empowered Europeans by upholding the binary opposition of civility versus savagery’¹⁰ and thus served a colonial goal.

As in other colonies, photographers often depicted the people (semi-)naked. Supposedly for anatomical and other scientific interests, but – maybe subconsciously – also upholding the inequality in power between photographer and subject, colonizer and colonized. The main visual fascination was with women, something that has been extensively researched in the past and is still focused on by many scientists. ‘The Orient as the domain of the ‘other’, as Europe’s cultural and spiritual opposite, was often conceived of as female’¹¹ and the Islamic woman was seen as the embodiment of this ‘otherness’. The mostly completely covered women supposedly sparked in parts of the Western male audience a deep – frequently sexual – fascination with them and what was beneath their covers. ‘As the colonial gaze fixed progressively upon Muslim women between 1870 and 1900, Islam was moved by many French writers from the battlefield into the bedroom’¹², as was done by photographers. The idea of the veil thus lent itself for photographs of women in various stages of veiling. Because the visibility of women in Muslim countries was bound up with the issue of power and control, photographing uncovered women gave an air of even more power to the Western photographer. Women were symbols of fertility and nature, and ‘possessing’ them by capturing them photographically gave the idea of also possessing control of the land’s natural resources. Apart from this, the unclad colonized females gave women in Western Europe a sense of superiority and appealed to their maternal instincts: they could function as a bridge between both countries, offering these ‘poor women’ a better future by mediating for them.

¹⁰ Maxwell, 1999, p. 14.

¹¹ Graham-Brown, 1988, p. 7.

¹² Clancy-Smith, 1998, p. 155.

Although colonized women throughout the world were portrayed in an eroticized way, Muslim women were also depicted in the Orientalist trend that had already started in paintings, which was markedly different from photography in other colonies. It focused on scenes thought to be specific for the Middle East of which the harem was the most important. The photographed women in the widely distributed postcards and other images were mainly poor women, the only ones 'available' for these kinds of photographs. Posing in the studio, the women took on roles that the photographer had in mind, while in real-life they were often not even from Muslim communities. The actual Muslim upper- and middleclass women were shielded from foreign eyes, and only portrayed for their own ends and on their own terms: by local photographers and in the fashion of their own level of society.

The colonial era was, altogether, a period of extremes. Fear of and fascination with the Muslim world took turns, both creating a considerable amount of imagery. At its end, the period had created for the Western audiences a largely stereotypical image of 'the Muslim', first through paintings and then through the widespread and easily accessible medium of photography. In the following chapter, I will proceed to the current situation. Focusing on the specifics of photography and media today, I will try to outline how visual imagery can influence human thought and how the media makes use of this when portraying Islam.

Chapter Two: Media Portrayal & the Specifics of Photography

The end of colonial domination did not mean the end of the Orientalist outlook, nor have the decades since then completely erased its influence. Colonialism has been, amongst other things, a way to gather enormous amounts of information – whether accurate or not – on the several countries and people under its governance. The colonies becoming independent did of course not change the way of portraying overnight. Many findings during colonial times were faulty due to a narrow focus on what was necessary for the rulers, but ‘(...) too often it is assumed that decolonization has already eliminated or will soon eliminate all these faults or that a radical anti-colonialist (and even anti-neocolonialist) attitude will protect against their recurrence.’¹³ Habits are hard to overcome and decolonization does not necessarily mean that the formerly colonized peoples are suddenly not ‘the Other’ anymore. The Western world may no longer be in charge of the major part of the world, but the stereotypical image that has so long prevailed is not gone. The Middle East is still an area that most of ‘us’ have never visited, its society being alien to our eyes. Many stereotypes originating in colonial times are therefore still used on a daily basis, even though much has changed since then. For a lot of people, stereotyping makes the world easier to comprehend, and the stereotypes of Islam fit the Western worldview.

Whereas colonial photography had not developed a particular style, aside from the studio-scenery or the erotic atmosphere, during the modern, postcolonial period, this began to change. Photographing people at first mostly meant portraits: the subject looking into the camera, posing, on an equal level. Even the staged scenes were shot from this angle. Developmental changes in the possibilities of cameras and a changing world guided the imagery on Islam to turn away from scenes like the studio-shot postcards. Cameras were now considerably smaller and easier to use, which meant that photographs no longer needed to be shot in the studio and could be taken in any setting. This greatly facilitated the practice of news photography: news could now be recorded while it happened, and did not need to be staged afterwards to resemble what had happened earlier. After most colonies became independent and dealings with the Western world became more distant, the gravity in depiction of the Middle East turned from souvenirs to the area of news photography – also triggered by the whirlwind of violent occurrences in the area since then.

¹³ Rodinson, 1980, p. 115.

The larger part of the images featuring the Islamic world we see today, come to us through the medium of newspapers. They are illustrations to articles, to happenings in the world that tend to be of a negative nature: ‘(...) much of the most dramatic, usually bad, news of the past decade, including not only Iran but the Arab-Israeli conflict, oil, and Afghanistan, has been news of “Islam”’.¹⁴ In the next paragraphs I will discuss images in general and look at the psychological influence they might have on audiences. Then I will move on to the subject of the media, and more in particular, how Islam is represented in all this.

2.1 – Images

In this media-run world where television rules, still images seem to be something of the past. Moving images are thought of as more impressive, to convey more information and tend to be more shocking. But is this actually the case? Photographic images may be more powerful than one might think. If you consider the power of a carefully picked frame, accompanied by a small article, a catchy heading and a defining caption, you certainly think of influence.

A large part of the importance of images is the fact that they still give the inherent impression of being truthful, not doctored, even though most of us are well aware of the possible use of graphic manipulation tools such as Photoshop. The transition to digital photography has made this even easier than before. Where analogue cameras produced negatives, thereby preserving the original shots, digital cameras have no such hardcopy: photographs are now only computer-data.

Although for private use ‘[t]he news that the camera could lie made getting photographed much more popular’¹⁵ and is well remembered, news photography is still considered to be truthful. Photographs have somehow retained the initial awe they inspired when the medium was just invented. Sayings such as ‘I’ll believe it when I see it’ give us a hint of the truth we still ascribe to images. What most people aren’t aware of at all, however, is the even more simple form of manipulation: choosing a scene and picking a frame, ‘[i]t is always the image that someone chose; to photograph is to frame, and to frame is to exclude.’¹⁶ The more natural the image looks, the less likely the viewer is to question the truth of its content. Often, the scene is even staged for a particular story. Famous photographs that have become icons for certain events, like the sailor kissing a girl in the street when World War II was finished, turned out to be staged. Another, more recent and relevant, example is the by now iconic image of the pulled-down statue of

¹⁴ Said, 1997, p. 83.

¹⁵ Sontag, 1977, p. 86.

¹⁶ Id., 2003, p. 41.

Saddam Hussein, representing the ‘positive’ outcome of the Second Gulf War. Though the scene had not been staged as such, the image had been cropped to show only a cheering group, from a relatively close range. In reality, when you would have zoomed out – something that the Al Jazeera channel did choose to do – it would have become obvious that it was only a small crowd and that, at a distance, more people were watching, disapproving, or simply indifferent to what was going on.

Iconic images such as the one mentioned above, but also ones of war itself, or of riots, can create and inspire opinions on the subject photographed and its influence should consequently not be overlooked. ‘Photographs cannot create a moral position, but they can reinforce one – and can help build a nascent one’¹⁷, making them not the largest part in influencing people’s opinions, but by interacting with all the other factors at hand a substantial one nonetheless.

2.2 – Psychological Influence

At the beginning of this chapter, I argued that photographic images still have an important role to play, even though moving images, accompanied by sound, appear to be taking over the news. In general, ‘(...) research asserts that news content helps construct and reinforce conceptions of the other’¹⁸, and printed media more specifically ‘(...) allows for more thorough information processing as it allows more focused concentration.’¹⁹ Hence, a photograph can be processed better without accompanying sounds and movements, which is what television is mainly about. The rapid pacing of video contributes to passive processing, which could also be the reason why televised media leaves more stereotypical impressions behind than news photographs do.

Psychologically, research has shown that images can have quite an impact. When looking at print media such as newspapers more closely, the first form of impact that images might have is through acting as a tool for understanding. Combined with the explanatory but often simplifying captions and headings, photographs can function as a heuristic device that helps viewers choose which parts to focus more clearly on, and which ones to ignore. It does this by giving visual cues on what information to expect in the accompanying article. This superficial processing²⁰ is guided

¹⁷ Id., 1977, p. 17.

¹⁸ Fahmy & Wanta, 2007, p. 21.

¹⁹ Fahmy, 2006, p. 9.

²⁰ Smith and Mackie, 2000, p. 594: superficial processing can be understood as relying on accessible information to make inferences or judgments, while expending little effort in processing.

by the choices that have been made by photographers, journalists, and, most importantly, by the editors – the ones that put the cues²¹ in place.

Secondly, images may help with retaining the information it has just helped you select. Also, memory of text in general is improved when it is combined with a visual representation. It is then not only recorded as a word, or several words, but is also retained in the memory space for visual memories.²² This combination makes sure that memories are better stored and, in the end, better recalled when the image functions as a prime. ‘Priming can activate concepts and ideas that express the joint meaning of several concepts together,’²³ for instance a news article. A photo may condense the information of the article it accompanies – when the image is shown – the prime, the text and content of the article – the target – are recalled and made redundant by it.

Despite that this is something that may be very efficient in conveying information, my feeling is that something is lost in this process as well. If the focus is only on one carefully manipulated and picked photograph, instead of the complete article that – hopefully – contains both sides of the story and elaborates on the framed visual elements, the capacity to judge with all the necessary information present is lost. Especially when you consider that many photographs shown are not directly related to articles, or give ambiguous or stereotypical information. However, comparing this to the televised media that only gives split seconds to form opinions, before moving on to the next item, news photography is somewhat better. It at least allows for an extended period of focused time, and it presents the choice to deepen understanding by offering – most of the time – an accompanying article. As Susan Sontag sums up, ‘[t]elevision is a stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor. Each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again.’²⁴

Concrete evidence of the actual influence of images on people’s ideas and opinions are hard to come by, not only in literature, but in life: measuring such a thing is almost impossible. Theories, on the other hand, are everywhere. Like memories can be triggered by an image, so can information with regard to news be triggered with an image. As Domke et al. observe, ‘(...) individuals’ processing of news coverage and subsequent evaluations and judgments regarding

²¹ Smith and Mackie, 2000, p. 67: cues have no meaning in themselves. Instead, they are interpreted in the light of our stored knowledge about people, behaviors, traits, and social situations. Stored knowledge that is linked to the cue itself or is easy to bring to mind is most likely to be used in interpreting cues.

²² Ashcraft, 2002, p. 227.

²³ Id., 2002, p. 276.

²⁴ Sontag, 1977, p. 18.

one's social and political environments may be significantly influenced by the visual, although obviously language plays either a separate or an integratory role.'²⁵ This is especially so when it elicited a strong emotion, which with the negativity surrounding Islam is often the case when contemplating a news photograph. The difference of influence between images that evoke these kinds of emotions and those that do not, theory says, is mainly that they are retained in memory for a longer time and might therefore influence on their part the subsequent images that the viewer beholds.

2.3 – Visual Elements

The surroundings of news photographs, how and where they are placed and what this does to the audience, are the more obvious factor of influence. In addition to what I have discussed, the sheer size of photographs alone can attract attention to accompanying stories. Though '[p]hotographic images are marked by metonymy, the reduction of complex situations into simpler visual abstractions,'²⁶ a closer analysis is warranted.

Observing images on a deeper level, the specific visual elements inside the image are of a less obvious, but significant value. The subject chosen, first of all, is of vital importance. What kind of image do you choose for an article that has something to do with Islam? Most of the time, choices are based on what is usually done. 'The prototypical image conveyed in photographs of men masked with 'Palestinian' scarves, using the visual grammar familiar from international images of the Middle East – in extreme close-up, deadly and interchangeable.'²⁷ But what is this visual grammar exactly?

2.3.1 – Camera Angles

Besides position and number of photographs, specific techniques used are also influential to the impression left with the audience. This influence may be subconscious, but existent nonetheless. Different angles convey a certain relationship between the subject and the photographer, but also between the subject and the viewer. When a subject is photographed from a low angle, a certain respect is showed. Photographing from higher up, on the other hand, displays the subject as less than the photographer and viewer. We look down on the subject, so to speak. Photographed from an equal height, as a third option, suggest an equality that is mostly used when a photograph is

²⁵ Domke et al, 2002, pp. 135-136.

²⁶ Cloud, 2004, p. 289.

²⁷ Baderoon, 2003, p. 16.

meant to elicit sympathy: we can best relate and sympathize with people we consider our equals.²⁸

Apart from difference in height, choosing to portray a specific side of the subject can also alter impressions. Side or profile-shots and shots from the back are more distancing than a frontal image, because it does not give the option of looking at the face, which is basically how we make connections with others. By creating a distance visually, we are also literally distanced from the subject. Furthermore, it creates a feeling of a marginal position for the person or persons depicted: showing them upfront would have looked like a more challenging and in control position.

2.3.2 – *Lighting and Focus*

In close relation to the profile and back shots is the use of lighting. Dark images as opposed to light ones create mystery, in the negative sense of the word. Silhouettes are the most relevant example regarding the link between camera angle and lighting. Also, light is symbolic for knowledge, the enlightenment. By using pictures about Islam that are often dark, the media symbolizes the superiority of the West over Islam. As Dana Cloud so accurately puts it, ‘(...) images of modernity, aligned with light, in contrast to the darkness of chaos and backwardness.’²⁹

Focus and distance are another item in visual depiction. Photographing someone up close – or cropping an image to the same effect – conveys a personal touch: you can see the individual and relate to that particular person. Seeing the same person from a distance creates a divide between that person and the viewer. Especially when the person is amongst a large group of others, which ensures only a generalized idea about the whole group. ‘The assumption underlying all uses of photography, that each photograph is a piece of the world, means that we don’t know how to react to a photograph (if the image is visually ambiguous: say, too closely seen or too distant) until we know *what* piece of the world it is’³⁰, let alone to relate emotionally to it.

2.4 - *Media Processes*

In the words of Pierre Bourdieu: ‘the world of images is dominated by words. Photos are nothing without words.’³¹ Images themselves do tell a story, but it is a story that needs explanation and

²⁸ Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001, cited in Fahmy, 2005.

²⁹ Cloud, 2004, p. 291.

³⁰ Sontag, 1977, p. 93.

³¹ Bourdieu, quoted in Baderoon, 2003, p. 12.

interpretation. Print media combines these two factors alongside their written articles: not only do photographs accompany stories, the subjects featured in the images are emphasized by the – explanatory – captions. Journalism looks to photography for proof, for backing up their stories by illustrating them. It depends on its audience to accept images as truth. It then emphasizes its content by adding captions.

Not only images, but newspapers themselves are seen as trustworthy, even though through various inside stories³² we know how even the free Western press is subjected to censorship in the form of the largest press agencies and control of the military in war-situations. On a smaller scale, decisions are made for the audience in terms of what to report and what not to. This means that ‘(...) “news” does not just happen, pictures and ideas do not merely spring from reality into our eyes and minds, truth is not directly available, we do not have unrestrained variety at our disposal’³³ as some of us might think. News goes through various stages of a complicated process, as do news photographs as an extension of that.

2.4.1 - Visual Gatekeeping

Preceding the final moment of a finished and printed newspaper, the media pass through a long and complicated process. For imagery, the most important part of this process is the one of visual gatekeeping. ‘In deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects’³⁴, which is just the beginning of the so-called mediated process of visual gatekeeping: a process through which every news photograph travels before it reaches the final stage in print. ‘Visual gatekeeping is often defined as a series of decision points at which images are either continued or halted as they pass along news channels from source to photojournalist to a series of photo editors,’³⁵ Shahira Fahmy explains. Not only does the photographer make a choice when taking the shot, the selection continues when choosing which shots are suitable to send in. Arriving at the editor’s table, an even narrower selection is made. ‘As every photojournalism student quickly learns, news organizations emphasize pictures with simple and immediate ‘impact’; they desire photographs that can be ‘read quickly and easily’, and that symbolically support the verbal text, often as a prompt or lead-in for the reader’s eye.’³⁶

³² For example, Joris Luyendijk in ‘Het zijn net mensen’, 2006.

³³ Said, 1997, p. 48.

³⁴ Sontag, 1977, p. 6.

³⁵ Fahmy, 2005, p. 150.

³⁶ Griffin, 2004, p. 384.

2.4.2 - *Visual Framing*

This all can be linked to visual framing. Not only is framing a shot of vital importance in this process but it is also including photographs or not – thereby framing only the desired shots and leaving the others out of the equation: ‘(...) the selection process of choosing which images to include or to exclude in the final presentation of a news report.’³⁷ It sets the agenda of what is important and what people should be paying attention to. To do this, framing uses the psychological technique of priming, which I discussed earlier.

In general, ‘[f]rames are seen as patterns of interpretation through which people classify information in order to handle it efficiently’³⁸, and in these frames only aspects of all the information are highlighted. Framing is the active part of this, on the sides of both the audience and the media who already do part of the framing for us by creating access to information that they have chosen. Not only by picking what subjects are important, but also by choosing which parts of the chosen subjects are important – or, to give an example for the visual: not only choosing which pictures we see, but by cropping them and retouching them, choosing which parts we see. These are the agenda-setting effects (what) and the attribute-setting effects (how).³⁹ Especially when you look at photographs, ‘(...) all borders (“framing”) seem arbitrary. Anything can be separated, can be made discontinuous, from anything else: all that is necessary is to frame the subject differently.’⁴⁰ With images, this is almost too easy.

2.4.3 – *Captions*

When these processes have been completed, captions are added. In general, the beauty of images is that it can be a language that needs no translation. Photography is universal. This being the case, to decipher specific meaning behind it, explanation is needed – for newspapers this is done in the form of captions. Without them, images are not as well understood and cannot function as scanning or heuristic devices. Creating them is a difficult process, if only because of the importance we ascribe to it. ‘The caption is the missing voice, and it is expected to speak for truth. But even an entirely accurate caption is only one interpretation, necessarily a limited one, of the photograph to which it is attached.’⁴¹ Sometimes captions function to try and give a different meaning to what is portrayed, hoping to influence the assumptions that are drawn from the image

³⁷ Fahmy & Wanta, 2007, p. 17.

³⁸ Scheufele, 2004, p. 402.

³⁹ Id., 2004, p. 406.

⁴⁰ Sontag, 1977, p. 22.

⁴¹ Id., 1977, pp. 108-109

itself, and '[c]aptions do tend to override the evidence of our eyes; but no caption can permanently restrict or secure a picture's meaning.'⁴²

2.5 – Islam in the Media

After all these stages, culminating in being printed, the news reaches the people. For Western audiences, mass media are relied upon to provide accurate information on peoples and cultures that are half-way around the world, information that the audience cannot verify itself. Domestic news is something that can be covered by 'our' own reporters, and can be checked on veracity. Since it is entwined with our own lives, reporting tends to be more balanced as well – the consequences are of a bigger importance. On the other hand, '(...) foreign news is generally provided by international news agencies and often published without much editorial processing, without trying to interpret the deeper meaning of the news item in question.'⁴³ Photographers are mainly Western photographers – views might be better balanced when photographers local to the place that is portrayed get published in the Western media as well. The effects of this unbalanced view of foreign countries could be devastating. 'Because mass media outlets are heavily used to acquire information on and understanding about specific groups of people, any mediated misconceptions may result in misunderstanding of the reality of an environment, especially a distant one. The news photographs that depict geographically remote subjects are almost exclusively the most important frames of reference.'⁴⁴ This is quite a heavy burden for the media, because they are ethically required to be objective – which in actuality is hardly ever possible, but striving for objectivity should at least be a priority – and provide a balanced view of every newsworthy occasion and situation. If journalists are careless, whole populations can have faulty ideas about other populations. At the same time, the media have to think about their own feasibility. When publishing unpopular opinions and stories, the targeted audience may be displeased and sales might go down: people often don't like to be challenged in their beliefs and values, and thus avoid the sources that put them in such a position. Even though '(...) we expect a 'news' photograph to convey 'facts''⁴⁵, at the same time we do not want these facts to contradict our own ideas of the world.

Our own ideas of the world tend to be stereotypical. 'The Muslim veil's potency as a magnet for discussions about Islam and women's position arises from its capacity to evoke mixed emotions

⁴² Id., 1977, p. 108.

⁴³ d'Haenens & Bink, 2007, p. 144.

⁴⁴ Fahmy, 2004, p.7.

⁴⁵ Graham-Brown, 1988, p. 2.

of fear, hostility, derision, curiosity, and fascination: a capacity already in evidence in colonial discourses.⁴⁶ Media today still have the habit of showing Islam by referring to the veil, which for a long time has been the way of portraying its ‘Otherness’ and its oppressiveness all in one neat package. The veil is used as a general symbol for Islam, but more importantly, as a symbol for what is wrong with Islam. No mention is made of a possible choice in wearing any form of veil, all Western viewers see a woman that is covered up, which in ‘our’ eyes means being oppressed. This feeling is enhanced when women are completely veiled: lack of eye contact makes sure that there is no possible way to build an emotional bond between the subject and the audience, as is normally reached when photographing up close – as discussed in the paragraph on visual elements in general.

Muslim women in Western societies have at times successfully tried to place the focus on the veil’s other meanings, like a symbol of identity, a statement of rebellion – historically as in colonized Algeria – or even as a form of fashion, but when the eye is turned towards the foreign Muslim women, those without voices, the link between veil and oppression is far from severed. The extensive use of veiled women in news photography also hints at the continuing combination of indignation and fascination.

⁴⁶ MacDonald, 2006, p. 8.

Chapter Three: Dutch Photojournalism & Islam

Wanting to make this thesis more than just a review of the available literature, and to have some practical examples of the theories I encountered, I decided to examine the subject in practice. The portrayal of Islam has been researched extensively in general, but focused mainly on either written media or television. Photography has been largely ignored. As the previous chapters show, this is still a medium that is able to influence readers and viewers in a very powerful way, and it does so in its own particular manner. Furthermore, photography is one of my own personal interests, which makes researching it all the more interesting for me. With regard to Islam, I wondered how one of the most relevant topics since the turn of the century was brought to audiences in the form of photographs.

3.1 – Methods and Gathering Data

To gain an actual insight in the current trend of the visual representation of Islam, and after some unsuccessful attempts to use the sources of several press bureaus, I decided to focus on the Dutch media, and the daily newspaper the *Volkskrant* in particular. Access to these papers was unrestricted, in the form of microfiches at the University Library in Amsterdam. An added bonus was the possibility to also make prints of several captivating images that I came across and which I can now add to this thesis.

I have worked through issues over a period of eight years, from 2000 to 2007, studying the front page, and the pages that focused on domestic and foreign news. This particular period was interesting to me not only because of it being so recent, but also because it encompasses several major newsworthy events that had to do with Islam in one way or another. Foreign events included the September 11th attacks, as well as the subsequent attacks in Madrid and London. Domestically, the assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh and the rising popularity of both Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders could be considered as influences on the portrayal of Islam and Muslims. I was especially curious to see if and how these events influenced the depiction of Islam.

In my research, I have left out coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict for the sake of clarity. This matter has been going on for years and is reported on frequently. However, it does not immediately seem to be subject to the changes we have experienced over the last couple of years;

the conflict seems to be an entire category on its own, which is not surprising, considering its complexity. Photographs of the situation have dominated papers for a long time. Captions summarizing the content of photographs, as well as the headings supporting the articles next to them, usually speak of ethnicity instead of religiosity, or they mention Jews, but not Muslims. Hence, my decision to leave it out of this equation.

By looking at all these photographic images of Islam, I aimed to find a trend in the way of portrayal and besides that, I expected to find changes on several factors. These factors included the amount of images used, the specific wordings of captions, and the techniques of the photographs, like the ones I discussed when talking about visual elements. Since this particular thesis cannot be very lengthy, I have not done research in concrete numbers, but focused instead on getting a rough, overall impression.

Over a period of several weeks, I spent three days a week for a number of hours in the University Library at the microfiche computer, scanning the fiches for the images I was looking for. What I was looking for was, as I mentioned before, an overall feeling for trends that might have developed over the period I had selected. Scanning the papers was hampered somewhat by the faltering machine itself and the fact that the printer connected to it often blackened the view – making distinguishing features hard. What I found out was not as clear cut as I had expected, but interesting nonetheless. Next, I will summarize my findings and connect them with the research I have done. I have included a few of the most remarkable images and image-caption combination, to give a more accurate impression of the research I have conducted.

3.2 – Analysis

The increasing pile of prints I made while studying the news photographs on microfiche mainly show a trend in both style and numbers. In total, I printed out almost 200 images for closer analysis, though I was not able to print everything I found and had to make a selection. The numbers mentioned in the rest of the chapter are therefore only an indication. For further analysis, I have used the visual elements from chapter two to see if there is any particular trend to be deciphered. I have also taken into account headings and captions, and how they relate to the depicted scenes. These different analytical measures are discussed together, in a chronological order, thereby giving an idea of the atmospheres of the different periods.

In the first period, from the beginning of 2000 until September 2001, hardly any mention is made of religion. This period was relatively calm – or maybe just calm in hindsight – with regard to reports on Islam. Something that struck me as interesting, was the amount of photographic images used: a lot less than I’ve gotten used to over the last couple of years. I passed through whole weeks of visual silence on Islam. The number of prints I made during the year 2000 was, after selection for specific relevance, nineteen. In the months of 2001 before September 11th, I encountered eleven. Of course the smaller amount of photographs does not mean that articles on the subject were featured less per se, but the overall impression changes considerably due to the lack of illustration. Captions stick to ethnicity instead of religiosity, but are hardly needed anyway: Israel-Palestine plays the biggest role in news photography. Muslims are not mentioned often, and when they are, it is usually in an informative manner at religious holidays, sometimes even combined with other religious institutions. The demonstrations that are covered usually show angry men close-up. Articles and pictures on Iraq that today are often tied up with Islam, focus on Saddam Hussein himself and make no reference of Islam. Portrayed Muslims are referred to as *nieuwkomers*, *allochtonen* or *migranten*⁴⁷. No reference of extremism is made, except sometimes with regard to Indonesian Muslims.

Getting near the September issues of the *Volkskrant*, I was expecting to see a significant change on several levels. The change did not happen overnight, however, and was not as significant as I thought. There was mostly general talk about terrorism at first. Photographically also, the impact of the attacks didn’t follow immediately. Only in October more pictures on Islam popped up, with captions and headings referring to Allah and Muslims. The three and a half months left of 2001 provided a total of sixteen extra pictures that were relevant for this study, amounting to a total of 27 for the whole year. The first large photograph was the silhouette of a Taliban warrior. Indonesian Muslims, for some reason, were again one of the first shown and are claimed to have sympathy with the attackers. The article is accompanied by a picture of fighting Muslims⁴⁸ – printed below – who turn out to be giving a demonstration of martial arts – something that, in my opinion, has nothing to do with the article. The visual techniques used are not particularly stereotypical, though the shot is taken from a close range, which is often done when portraying violent scenes of some sort.

⁴⁷ Roughly translated as: newcomers, foreigners or migrants.

⁴⁸ Translation of caption: ‘Radical Indonesian Muslims give a demonstration of martial arts during a demonstrative gathering in Jakarta, April last year.’ Small heading: ‘We hope that America loses its arrogance now’, moderate Muslims say’. Heading: ‘Indonesians show understanding for attacks’.



Published on September 20th, 2001.

Gradually it seems that more and more masses are portrayed, usually cheering. Faces cannot be seen very clearly and everyone pictured is covered – women and men as well. Women appear as mere blots in the pictures, completely covered by black veiling. Silhouettes are depicted more frequently, and darkness in general is very heavily used. After a little while, the initial commotion dies down. Operations like the war in Afghanistan do not change the reports on Islam in general. Personally, I think that this might have something to do with the fact that although the aim was to remove the extremist Taliban-regime, since the overall Afghani-population is Muslim – but moderate compared to the Taliban – as well, the war could not be considered as a war on Islam.

From 2002 onwards, Muslim women are suddenly called *moslima's*⁴⁹ in the accompanying captions, which does not necessarily mean anything, but was a marked change with the earlier period where the term was not used at all in combination with pictures. For me, it creates a feeling of stressing the importance of religion and down-playing other factors. Negative articles on Islam are often combined with pictures of angry Muslim men, where Muslim women are commonly symbols for either positive ideas or at least hope – or help needed – for the future. Portraits of Muslims and Western people together often show a distance within the photograph itself between these people. Informative pictures on religious holidays continue to be featured,

⁴⁹ The more specific female equivalent of the word Muslim.

and though numbers in general have increased, changes do not seem striking to me in comparison to the period before September 2001. In 2002 and 2003, the numbers of images are 26 and 24 respectively.

Another example of headings that give a skewed impression of the picture, even though no stereotypical visual elements are used, is the one below:



Published on October 28th, 2003.

It was published in October 2003, under a heading that says: ‘Fundamentalist houdt ook van democratie’, which in English means: ‘Fundamentalist also loves democracy’. The caption reads: ‘Jonge Marokkaanse vrouwen moedigen in Amsterdam voorbijgangers aan te gaan stemmen’, or in English: ‘Young Moroccan women in Amsterdam encourage passers by to vote’. Though a specific mistake is not made, the combination of all factors give the impression that the pictured girls are fundamentalists or have something to do with them.

Characteristics of the photographs I have studied are mainly the darkness or blurry images of women. Photographs are frequently taken from a distance and high up. Completely veiled women, on the other hand, and sometimes covered men, are pictured up close, again often in silhouettes. Mosques are featured prominently also.

Reaching November 2004, Islam is in the news in a negative way due to a, for the Dutch, more local situation. The murder of Theo van Gogh does not change anything significantly, other than fueling a heavy discussion on moral values and a brief period of a larger number of photographs. The ten months of 2004 prior to the murder of Theo van Gogh leave behind a number of fifteen images, while the two months left add twelve more, coming to a total of 27. The event and others after it – such as the happenings with Ayaan Hirsi Ali in general, the rise of Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders – mainly provoke peaks at first and an added amount of written articles and even those not very heavily. The peaks that I've encountered coincide with those in verbal reporting, as the study of the *Algemeen Dagblad* by d'Haenens and Bink shows.⁵⁰ The year 2005 managed to provide for 31 images.

The aforementioned pictures that I have included show to me that '(...) photographs that do not complement stories might distract from information processing of unrelated stories.'⁵¹ Another example is something I came across in a December issue in 2005. An article on discussing the various forms of veiling that was accompanied by a photograph of heavily veiled women, captioned: 'Burqa in de openbare ruimte', or 'Burqa in public space', its picture used again in April 2006. This time a different caption was used: 'Vriendinnen van jongens van de Hofstadgroep, februari 2005', or in English, 'Friends of the boys of the Hofstadgroup',⁵² – a group that is thought to be behind the murder of Theo van Gogh and several planned attacks on government buildings. Making the choice to include the picture with the first article is questionable, in my opinion, considering that there must be other veiled women that have nothing to do with this group. The second article, discussing orthodox Muslim women, is not about the women, either, nor about the *Hofstadgroep*. To portray them here is, again, questionable. The women are shot from their sides, and due to the backlight, creating mysterious silhouettes that are hardly distinguishable as human figures. Both images are pictured below the next paragraph, with headings and captions.

Finally, ending my analysis of eight years, in both 2006 and 2007, the amount of images of Islam specifically drops to twenty and nineteen, respectively. To end my overview, I have some more examples. To begin with, two stereotypical images of Muslims whose techniques have been used over and over.

⁵⁰ d'Haenens & Bink, 2007, pp. 138-139.

⁵¹ Fahmy, 2006, p. 7.

⁵² Published in the *Volkskrant* on December 22nd of 2005 and then again on April 19th, 2006.



Published December 22nd, 2005, and April 19th, 2006, respectively.

The first of the stereotypical images is the one pictured below, a female silhouette unfocused in the foreground, and in the center a man walking, focused, well-lit in the middle.



Published January 16th, 2006.

Second, a crying child surrounded by praying women on their knees, again hardly recognizable anymore as human beings, as was the case with the silhouettes of the veiled women. Then, a few more examples of strange combinations of articles with photographs.



Published October 15th, 2007.



Published January 8th, 2005.

For the second picture above, heading and subheading: ‘Moslimjeugd voert religieus schrikbewind. Veel Marokkaanse ouders weten zich geen raad met radicaliseringsproces van hun kinderen.’ In English: ‘Muslim youth employs religious reign of terror. Many Moroccan parents don’t know what to do about the radicalization process of their children’. Contrasting caption: ‘Drie moslims maken gebruik van de gebedsruimte in een moskee.’ In English: ‘Three Muslims use the prayer room of a mosque.’



Published July 22nd, 2005.

Caption: ‘Een politiemans loopt door Warren Street waar een station van de ondergrondse ligt dat donderdag ontruimd werd na explosies’. In English: ‘A policeman walks through Warren Street where a subway station is located that had to be evacuated after explosions on Thursday.’ The picture not only portrays the policeman, but also a heavily veiled woman happening to walk by and most likely having nothing to do with the incidents. The visual techniques do not add to the manipulation, though the choice of including the woman does enough already.

Looking at the whole period, trends can be discovered in that the larger part of the news-photographs I’ve studied use high angles, tend to photograph either in twilight or against the light, thus creating silhouettes – total darkness is also chosen often. Both these techniques enhance the feeling of distance and thereby add to the ‘Othered’ image and are used consistently

throughout the eight years researched. Focus, as expected, also plays its part: when women are portrayed, they are often only in the background or unfocused, moving the importance to men and emphasizing the lower position that women usually have in Islamic societies. Since women make up a larger part of the subjects photographed for illustrations of articles on Islam, this is especially relevant. Captions at first mention ethnic groups only, they do not refer to religious backgrounds. Later on, they play a role mostly because in my opinion their combination with both picture and heading create confusion – articles and headings are printed with pictures and captions that have nothing to do with each other, other than having the overlapping main subject of Islam. Their influence helps create contradictory ideas about the world of Islam, while we discussed earlier that journalists are relied upon to provide information that is as accurate as possible since they function as windows into the world not everyone can see or visit. Michael Griffin notes that ‘(...) a photograph of the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina with two featured articles on ‘The Muslim Wars’, a photograph of a Palestinian boy throwing a stone (accompanied by the caption ‘Young Warriors’) is juxtaposed with a photo of the World Trade Center exploding in flames. Such stories and pictures visually stereotype Islam and its ‘threat’ in emblematic ways, fitting the stereotypes of the Islamic world that many have observed and Said (1978, 1997) has theorized.’⁵³

3.5 – Conclusions

To conclude this chapter, what my research has mainly done is show that, photographically, the events of the last eight years have not changed depictions significantly. Against my expectations, the World Trade Center attacks in 2001 did not create a turn around in imagery of Islam in the Dutch media. Textual reporting might have been different, as d’Haenens and Bink are saying that when ‘[e]xploring the contents of articles, we find that the short and factual ones generally portray Islam as an ‘extremist’ religion. Islam is contrasted with the (civilized) Christian norms and values of the West.’⁵⁴ In a study on the migration debate in the Netherlands, Roggeband and Vliegthart have also shown that most Dutch newspapers reported more and more on Islam since September 2002, peaking after the attacks with the salient frame of ‘Islam-as-Threat’.⁵⁵ The study unfortunately does not include the period after the assassination of Theo van Gogh, but does speak of peaks of interest again around Pim Fortuyn and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. My impression is that along with written newspaper articles, television has also changed in some ways at least, but

⁵³ Griffin, 2004, pp. 392-393.

⁵⁴ d’Haenens & Bink, 2007, p. 142.

⁵⁵ Roggeband & Vliegthart, 2007, which focused not only on the *Algemeen Dagblad* and the *Volkscrant*, but included *NRC Handelsblad*, the *Telegraaf* and *Trouw* as well.

photojournalism in newspapers only showed changes immediately around the events. In numbers, the September 11th attacks and the murder of Theo van Gogh, evoked the biggest responses. In the long run, it looks as though when portraying Islam, the same process is followed and techniques are being used that have been around for what is at least decades. The next paragraph outlines the general findings, when looking at the visual elements from chapter two, and the use of captions.

Apart from the relatively neutral pictures that portray meetings of, for instance, politicians and imams, most images use stereotypical visual elements. The camera angles used are often from above, when picturing large groups – and groups are pictured very often. Shots are made from an equal level, but very close-up, when showing protesting and often angry Muslim men and women. The people are frequently pictured from behind, or from the side, working together with lighting to create silhouettes and figures half covered in shadows. Women are a favorite subject for many photographs as well and then most of the time from a short distance or unfocused. Where headings are commonly provocative, the captions used convey a more neutral stance, but are unfortunately less eye-catching than the large headings. Some combinations of image, heading, and caption are questionable, as I observed earlier, but not on a regular basis and usually in one of the peak periods of negative news surrounding Islam. Speaking of the visual techniques used in general, I'd say there haven't been significant changes.

I was surprised at first, at finding no particular changes due to the World Trade Center attacks, while coursing through the newspaper issues of 2001. Guessing something had changed over the years, I then relayed my focus on the domestic news. Although Pim Fortuyn was not murdered by an extremist Muslim, it did spike debate because he was a politician who was known for his anti-Islamic remarks. The murder of Theo van Gogh, two years later, was committed by a Muslim, however. These events only led to surges in the media, instead of introducing a continuing trend. Less concrete moments are the rise of figures like Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders; their rise continues today and what that concretely does to reporting, I cannot say. Though, like I said, they only led to surges of interest, I believe that the domestic murders were more important to the Dutch debate on Islam than were the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, but again: photographically, no deep impact was made. I do have to say, however, that this does not mean that Islam is photographed in a neutral way and has balanced captions. On the contrary. Over the eight years I have studied, Muslims and Islam have been depicted in stereotypical ways almost all of the time. It seems as though this is normal; the West has been portraying Islam like this since it

was able to portray at all. Overall, the hypothesis I stated in my introduction is not proved. To be able to give an accurate answer, though, more research should be done, which I will discuss further in the overall conclusions and epilogue.

Conclusions

Studying and writing about this subject has once again shown me that history is something that we should not take lightly. The relationship between the West and the Islamic world has been a complex one, ever since their first encounter. Fear of Islam, or fear of others, as I have discussed in the first chapter, is not recent. It has been with us for centuries. In times when we feel insecure about our own position and progress, it flares up. The rise of Al Qaeda and the insecurity it encourages help the fear to surge to new heights. Images are used that confirm the fear: mysterious images, full of darkness, silhouettes, smoke and covered faces – apparently not more frequent than they were used before, but the kind of impact it makes combined with written articles and television should not be underestimated.

When discussing bombings or other forms of attacks, sometimes Muslims are photographed that have nothing to do with what happened. Even when articles are not meant in a negative way, many headings combined with stereotypical images are very provocative. There is a general tendency to portray Muslims in groups, or mobs being the more accurate word: shouting, masked men, often close-up, giving the impression of a large group. This alone is misleading: what would have happened if the shot was taken from further away? And are these men really representatives of ‘the Muslim’?

It is expected of photojournalists to produce compelling visual imagery – especially when they are sent out on specific assignments. This requirement quickly leads to stereotypical images, or more to the point: exaggerated and therefore oversimplified images. When asked for a compelling image, one looks to extremes. A Muslim woman covered from head to toe leaves more of an impression than does her moderate counterpart: just a headscarf is less shocking. The veil in general is still the most frequently used symbol of Islam. The feeling rises that not much has really changed since colonial times. ‘In some discourses, Islam remains, like a woman, a mystery and perhaps a threat, but like an Oriental woman, perhaps also redeemable. Yet, there are other ways of speaking. Ways of speaking which undercut the binaries that would oppose Islam and modernity, Islam and the West, Islam and humaneness.’⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Baderoon, 2003, p. 21.

Drawing conclusions from my findings is quite hard, because even though I have covered an extensive period of time to find change, it has been a tumultuous period overall and not of a steady pace. Researching the subject in the introductory manner I have done so far is of course not enough. To be able to give a definitive conclusion, I would have to do research into the last decade of the previous century, and research more newspapers instead of just the *Volkskrant*. Furthermore, involving other newspapers may give a better idea of the Dutch media as a whole. Many people get their information from less subtle papers, such as the *Telegraaf* or free dailies like *Metro* or *Spits*. These newspapers are by some considered to be of a lesser quality and use more photographs, frequently quite large and colorful, with screaming headlines. Roggeband and Vliegthart conclude at the end of their study that ‘[t]here are, however, significant differences between quality newspapers on the one hand and popular ones on the other, with the quality newspapers being more diverse in their framing.’⁵⁷

Another interesting project might be the comparison between television- and photographic influence. Studies can be done to find out how people get their news; how many people rely on television or print media. Future research should, in my opinion, focus on getting concrete numbers and comparisons. Ideally, these findings can then be presented to the media themselves, as well as the public, so that the first can perhaps make some changes in both the processes of visual gatekeeping and the writing of headings and captions. For the public, raising awareness of the stereotypical images that are presented to them on a regular basis may help balance their personal views of the Middle-East and Islam. Looking into the Israel-Palestine conflict as an extra might also add perspective to the way that Islam is represented. It is a complex situation, which was why I left it out of my research, but since it is so tied up with its surroundings, in an extensive research it should be included or be examined on its own. One more possibility – and again a highly idealistic one – is that the news itself might change and become more balanced. ‘With the development of transnational mass media, and mass media structures and satellite technology in Asia, the Western media may be challenged with diverse representation and perceptions.’⁵⁸

I have discussed the way images can be of influence to people’s views. Something that challenges all this somewhat, and that I’d like to end my conclusions with to think about, is the claim that ‘(...) in a world saturated, no, hyper-saturated with images, those that should matter have a

⁵⁷ Roggeband & Vliegthart, 2007, p. 541.

⁵⁸ Fahmy, 2004, p. 23.

diminishing effect.⁵⁹ We are so used to images today – they are everywhere – that they do not influence us as much as they did years ago. We are no longer impressed with graphic footage or images: they have become ‘normal’.

⁵⁹ Sontag, 2003, pp. 93-94.

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