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Published in:
Urban geography

DOI:
10.1080/02723638.2021.2007663

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2023

Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database

Citation for published version (APA):
Shaker, R., van Hoven, B., & van Lanen, S. (2023). "Just as much as there is Islamophobia, there is racism": corporeal encounters with the Muslim Other in Amsterdam. Urban geography, 44(4), 570-590. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.2007663

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To cite this article: Reza Shaker, Bettina van Hoven & Sander van Lanen (2023) “Just as much as there is Islamophobia, there is racism:” corporeal encounters with the Muslim Other in Amsterdam, Urban Geography, 44:4, 570-590, DOI: 10.1080/02723638.2021.2007663

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02723638.2021.2007663

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Published online: 04 Jan 2022.

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“Just as much as there is Islamophobia, there is racism:” corporeal encounters with the Muslim Other in Amsterdam

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ABSTRACT
Conceptualizing Othering as an intercorporeal encounter in urban space, the paper explores how Otherness is lived in the networks of everyday embodied urban living of young Muslims. We provide an in-depth understanding of the ways through which corporeal Othering is spatially organized and practised within everyday urban space felt and lived with different intensities and registered in the sensing bodies of young Muslims as part of their lived embodied urbanism in Amsterdam. We shed light on how the (re) construction of the Muslim Other is spatialized concerning intersectionality, clothing, and stereotyping.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 23 December 2019
Accepted 15 November 2021

KEYWORDS
The Muslim Other; othering; embodiment; encounter; Amsterdam

Introduction

Muslims are the prevalent shared Other for much of Europe now (Eid, 2014; Emerson, 2009; Wintle, 2016). Socio-political struggles and conflicts around Muslims are, to some extent, related to the fear of the religious occupation of social spaces (Najib & Hopkins, 2020; Ryan, 2011; Scott, 2007; Seul, 1999; Van Liere, 2014). In Islamophobic discourses, Islam is regarded as a religion that commands, oppresses, hates, deceives, conspires, and wages war (Possamai et al., 2016). There are also stereotypes such as militancy, fanaticism, intolerance, fundamentalism, misogyny, and alienness (Dunn et al., 2016). Such Othering discourses deindividualise Muslims, deny their complex identities, and frame how they are or how they are considered to be: ignorant, violent, terrorists, oppressive (men) or oppressed (women), and a threat to freedom of expression.

Whilst scholarship has largely focused on the discursive, public framing of Muslims in the West (Hoekstra & Verkuyten, 2015; Law et al., 2019; Woodward & Lukens-Bull, 2018), this paper distinguishes itself by focusing on the spatial organization of Othering toward young Muslims within their everyday lived experiences of embodied urbanism. Broadly speaking, by embodied urbanism the study refers to the public representation of the body in different urban settings. It is not only about the conspicuous display of religious signs but also mundane activities such as appearance, clothing, eating/going out, mobility, shopping, education, employment, leisure activities, and any other corporeal
aspects of everyday urban life. Within the framework of embodied urbanism, we ask how the Muslim Other is (re)constructed and Othering made present; how Othering is spatially organized and practised; and how Othering shapes Muslims’ capacities of embodied urbanism.

By foregrounding young Muslims’ accounts on Othering, we think through the relations between the body, space, and the spatial dimensions of corporeal Othering. Reflections on Othering encounters in the context of different urban settings, e.g. public transport, education, consumption, contribute to our understanding of the daily negotiation of difference, justice, and socio-spatial (in)equality that define attitudes toward the Muslim Other. By doing so, we also touch upon the wider discussions on the lived, esthetic, and embodied dimensions of everyday multiculturalism (Lobo, 2014; Mansson Mcginty, 2020; Swanton, 2010) and contribute to the literature on the embodied experiences of (im)mobility (Koefoed et al., 2017; Purifoye, 2015; Wilson, 2011) and the sub-disciplinary field of encountering difference and geographies of encounter (Valentine, 2008, 2013; Valentine & Waite, 2012). Exploring corporeal Othering experiences of young Muslims and various social interactions in the urban public domain, moreover, is part of understanding their everyday life, struggles, and possibilities to participate in society. We, therefore, contribute to the growing body of literature on the social and cultural urban geographies of religion and belief. Muslim communities and identities in the West, and urban exclusion in Muslim-minority countries (Finlay & Hopkins, 2019, 2020; Hancock, 2015, 2020; Itouei, 2016, 2020; Najib & Teeple Hopkins, 2020).

The study predominantly makes use of field data in Amsterdam, comprising semi-structured in-depth interviews, walking interviews, life-stories, and biographies. In our analysis, we investigate 18 young Muslims’ embodied practices and material consequences of such embodiment through their own eyes within their own urban habitat. In the remaining parts, we first briefly situate the research in the literature on the embodied encounter, Othering, and Muslims in the Netherlands and the West. Thereafter, we describe our methodology and present our empirical findings through which Othering is spatialized through intersectionality, clothing, and stereotyping.

**Embodied encounters with the Other**

The city has always been a key site for the negotiation of different bodies. Massey (2005) conceptualizes the city as “throwntogetherness” where strangers, previously unrelated bodies, come together highlighting the inevitable challenge of negotiating multiplicity, the fact that we have to get along with each other (Simonsen, 2007; Wilson, Wilson, 2017a, Wilson, 2017b). Consequently, urbanism as the practical knowledge of living in the city is intrinsically embodied through intercorporeal encounters with fellow citizens. As the lived experience, embodied urbanism refers to the spatial processes through which bodies are located corporeally and conceptually, concretely and metaphorically, materially and discursively within the framework of everyday urban life (Moss & Dyck, 2003).

In this respect, social scholars have identified the importance of different bodies and their encounters in urban space. A particular line of research has approached the experiences of the Other such as ethno-racial and sexual minority groups as well as people with mental and bodily ability problems (Askins, 2016; Askins & Pain, 2011; Peterson, 2017; Valentine & Harris, 2016; Valentine & Waite, 2012). These studies
conceptualize encounters as unanticipated exposure to difference. Encounter is about disturbance, rupture, surprise, shock, maybe even conflict situated within personal/collective histories and imagined futures (Ahmed, 2000; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, Wilson, 2017a, Wilson, 2017b).

There are, however, debates regarding whether there is hope in cultivating urban conviviality in which encountering difference offers the prospect of receptivity or whether intercultural contacts provoke further racial and ethnic antagonisms. Valentine (2008, p. 332), for example, argues that “positive encounters with individuals from minority groups do not necessarily change people’s opinions about groups as a whole for the better.” Although some argue that fleeting urban encounters contribute to a sense of familiarity with difference, Amin (2002) stresses that such short-lived everyday moments on the street have no impact on learning to live with difference since they do not promote any intercultural exchange. For Peterson (2017), only meaningful urban encounters of a certain depth, repetition, and duration can break existing stereotypes, challenge prejudice, and produce lasting relationships with the Other.

Encounter, therefore, is the process through which the Other is constructed. Othering, as Campbell (2001, p. 44) argues, is “a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body (the corporeal standard) that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human.” Every body is constantly constituted in everyday encounters in a spectrum of familiarity and strangeness. The Other is a relational body constructed through bodily encounters either face-to-face or mediated by images shaped via encounters in other times and spaces (Ahmed, 2000; Koefoed & Simonsen, 2011, 2012).

The Other, moreover, is a homogenized body constructed through an encounter when individuals are met, not as an individual, but as a collective identity, an indefinite mass of “they” (Simonsen, 2005). It also has to do with the national construction of the Other whose figure poses a threat, burden, or danger to the (imagined) national community (Ahmed, 2000; Anderson, 2006). In this respect, bodies that are perceived familiar incorporate a sense of community, being with each other as like bodies, whereas the Other body is possibly excluded framed as abnormal, deviant, ugly, and/or dangerous (Simonsen, 2010; Terry & Urla, 1995). Othering encounters thus are not only corporeal but also historically and geopolitically mediated (Ahmed, 2000; Matejskova & Leitner, 2011; Said, 1978; Valentine, 2008).

The construction of the Other, hence, is a practice. Encountering the Other includes practices and techniques of differentiation through numerous small little practices that have become part and parcel of everyday life. The daily negotiation with the Other (re) produces the system of power that establishes it as natural, “normal”, self-evident, and taken-for-granted. In the daily discussion about identity, “foreigners”, mostly those coming from Islamic countries, are generalized as the Other, either as exotic inspiring or, dominantly, as problematic, troublesome strangers, stereotyped as threatening. Their Otherness is not only about the acknowledgment imposed upon us by the experience of their strange embodiments. It also revolves around ambivalence or the exoticism of the gaze. Their bodies are seen as spectacular, simultaneously the target of fascination and fear (Jensen, 2011; Moghissi, 2016; Reginster, 2013; Said, 1978).
Embodied Othering encounters, furthermore, are socio-spatially constructed and distributed across different urban spaces. Spatialized Othering involves not only “us” versus “them” but also “here” versus “there” (Najib & Hopkins, Najib and Hopkins, 2019; Najib & Teeple Hopkins, 2020). The question of the “right place” for the “right body” is linked to the socio-spatial practices of exclusion and segregation. For instance, Gokariksel (2009) and Secor (2002) have conceptualized “regimes of veiling” that govern public space. Certain urban areas, they argue, provide the veiled women with comfort and security where it is common to see women in the veil, whereas, in some public places, they experience being out of place, looked at, anxious. According to Puwar (2004), marked bodies, those that deviate from the somatic norms of society, never quite fit or sink into everyday urban space; they are disrupted and negotiated. Such a mismatch between certain bodies and certain spaces, or the spatio-corporeal gap, renders the Other as a “space invader,” “intruder,” a body “out of place.” A place-based understanding of Othering encounters offers insight into everyday geographies, including the ownership of space and the different ways through which the Other body is perceived as excluding and restricting from using certain areas in the city (Hopkins et al., 2017; Leitner, 2012; Raanan & Avni, 2020). Simply put, Othering and the meaning that the Other carries in an encounter shift across different spatial contexts.

Embodied Othering, moreover, is intersectional and touches upon several different forms of social differentiation. Encounters cannot be separated from multiple interlocking dimensions of identity. Everyday meetings between “we” and “they” are performed through the body, within the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, clothing, and socio-economic status that force people to think in us/them dichotomies (Crenshaw, 1989, 1990; Hopkins, 2019). These intersecting aspects of identity blend together not only reinforce a hierarchy between the majority society and minority groups (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Warren, 2019) but also shape how the Othered people access to space.

The Muslim Other

Dutch society has experienced different political approaches toward Muslims during the past decades. In the 1980s and 90s, political debates revolved around the integration of newcomers into society by learning the language, norms, and values to participate in society, work, and education (Gazzah, 2010). However, some events in the early 2000s shifted the public opinion: some terror attacks in the US and Europe such as 9/11/2001 in New York, 3/11/2004 in Madrid, 7/7/2005 in London, and several events in the Netherlands such as the murder of film director Theo van Gogh and Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, who was one of the first to run a political campaign against Islam and Muslims as a threat to western liberal values (Cesari, 2009; Creighton, 2020). Political debates have focused on the position of Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands regarding whether Islam and Islamic lifestyles are compatible with Dutch society (De Koning, 2013; Pertwee, 2017). From 2006 onwards, negative expressions of attitude toward immigrants have steadily increased through voting for the Party for Freedom, an overtly anti-Muslim party headed by Geert Wilders which suggests a hardening of sentiment toward Islam and Muslims in the Netherlands (Creighton, 2020). Consequently, a sharp line has been
drawn between non-Muslims (us) and Muslims (them) making it almost impossible to be Muslim and Dutch simultaneously. A dialectical relationship between Islam and Dutchness has been established: you are a Muslim, then you are a foreigner and/or you are a foreigner, then you are a Muslim. Islam has become the most important identity marker for “foreigners” (Gazzah, 2010) to the extent that even white Muslims and converts are not seen as Dutch anymore.

Muslims, therefore, are regularly (re)produced as strangers, stigmatized as Others who do not belong (Koefoed & Simonsen, 2012). Their Otherness is usually based on two major arguments: incompatibility and fundamentalism. On the one hand, it has been argued that Islam, Muslims, and their religio-cultural demands often contradict the central values of Western liberal-democratic societies and their ethos of individual rights and secularism. On the other, there has been terrorism and violence (Orenstein & Weismann, 2016). The Muslim Other pertains to a fixed image. Muslims are regularly imagined as bearded men in white dresses, oppressed women with headscarves, and agitated radical young men who cause troubles. All Muslims in the West are allegedly ignorant with inadequate linguistic proficiency, with low educational background, with un-/under-skilled jobs, if employed at all, who live in (self-)segregated (sub)urban working-class areas. They are, in a nutshell, people who do not conform to the mainstream norms, values, and attitudes of the liberal West, have not acknowledged the Enlightenment, have missed the boat to modernity, and live in a parallel society (Jackson, 2016; Listerborn, 2015; Rath, 2014).

This fixed image of Muslims in everyday encounter creates potentials for Othering through embodiments that challenge the dominant systems of meaning and doing things. Next to the so-called “Muslim ban” in the US and/or burqa/niqab ban in Belgium, the Netherlands, and France in the name of gender equality and/or security, some recent polls have shown that the majority of people in Europe think that Islam does not belong in their countries (Broomfield, 2016 May 13; Goodwin et al., 2017; Listerborn, 2015). There is, moreover, an abundance of alarming research from different European countries showing Muslims are affected by a variety of systemic disadvantages in the professional, educational, and housing sectors (see the edited works of Law et al., 2019; Woodward & Lukens-Bull, 2018). They face what Essed (1991) calls “everyday racism,” and Mansson McGinty (2020) dubs “embodied Islamophobia,” the lived and embodied experiences of anti-Muslim assaults and routine marginalization within everyday life.

A significant question here is how the fixed image of the Muslim Other is spatially organized and lived out in the structure of their everyday embodied urban living. This paper focuses on the experiences of Othering practised through embodied encounters manifested in everyday, banal, bodily practices. The aim is to provide an in-depth understanding of how Muslims perceive Otherness in different urban settings to unpack socio-spatial inequalities and the complex and intersecting ways in which Othering operates across urban space. We situate Otherness within the spatial organization of everyday life because Otherness is something that is created and spatially experienced through corporeal encounters and understood through individuals’ routine lived and felt realities within different urban spheres.
Methodology

Global cities in Western Europe are simultaneous sites of secularization and religious innovation and diversification. With the growing visibility of religion in their public spaces, these cities are an indicator of post-secularism (Gokariksel & Secor, 2015; Hatziprokopiou & Evergeti, 2014; Henkel, 2014; Stevenson et al., 2010). Amsterdam is an interesting city to reflect on religious diversity, particularly the visibility of Islam and its followers. This city encompasses 350 different religious communities from 180 nationalities (Beck, 2013) making it one of the most religiously diverse cities in the world (Van Kempen & Bolt, 2009). Islam and Muslims are highly visible in the city; for example, 42 mosques (~15% of the total religious buildings of Amsterdam) shape the religious urban landscape and more than 120,000 Muslims (~12% of Amsterdammers) populate the city (CBS, 2016; OIS, 2014). Islam has also been politicized in the Netherlands turning its super-diverse capital into an interesting site to investigate the everyday Othering practices within everyday urban living, or how the condition of super-diversity is dealt with on the ground.

We have focused on the embodied Othering experiences of young Muslims in Amsterdam. This particular group has been selected because debates about the geopolitics of Islamophobia mostly revolves around the young urbanites. They are growing up in a political climate where they are often seen as victim, villain, agitated who cause troubles. Framed as susceptible to indoctrination or radicalization, media often projects them as the driving force behind the security issues in Europe (Bayat & Herrera, 2010). Further, depicted as the source of conflicts between Islam and the West, their occupation of space, social cohesion, integration, and identity are questioned (Hopkins et al., 2018; Itaoui, 2020). Bayat and Herrera (2010) argue that the feeling of Otherness amongst young Muslims is strong because they are assumed as immigrant outsiders who are tolerated by the nation.

Multiple recruitment strategies were employed including contacts with gatekeepers at mosques, universities, and educational institutions as well as networking and snowballing. The first author frequented everyday micro-social spaces (Amin, 2002) such as libraries, community centers, corner shops, local sports clubs, and public transport stations. In these places, he had informal conversations with young Muslims and distributed flyers and business cards. Recruited respondents were diverse in terms of gender (eight women and 10 men), socio-economic status (from working class to upper-middle class), occupation, education (from high school to PhD), Islamic branches (Sunni and Shia), religious involvement (from orthodoxy to liberal), age (young adults between 19 and 32), generation (native, first, and second), and national origin (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, the Netherlands, Somalia, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Cameroon).

Carried out between January and October 2019, 34 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 18 participants were recorded. Lasting to a maximum of 180 minutes, in total 44 hours, the conducted interviews were mostly sequential, up to five sessions; only five interviews were one-off. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted with individuals whilst six interviews were in groups of two. Five participants (two men and three women) were either busy or because of their beliefs or discomfort did not want to be interviewed in person. Consequently, alternative data collection methods such as phone, Skype, and/or e-mail interviews were employed. Walking interviews were also conducted as another
verbal embodied qualitative method. Routes were all determined by participants and six (individual/group) walking interviews were recorded to understand how they make sense of urban space. It allowed participants to not only show us “their” Amsterdam and neighborhoods but also describe their memories, histories, and imaginations, which may have been forgotten in sedentary interviews (Carpiano, 2009; Evans & Jones, 2011).

**Embodied encounters with the Muslim Other in Amsterdam**

Participants have in-depth knowledge of Othering because they have, one way or another, experienced that in a variety of spatio-temporalities within their life-worlds. Emerged inductively from detailed and repeated readings of the empirical data, this paper focuses on Otherness through intersectionality, clothing, and stereotyping. This list is not exhaustive yet indicative of spatial instances within which corporeal Othering has occurred to the participants throughout their biographies.

**Intersectional othering**

Young Muslims experience Othering in diverse ways based on their gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and other characteristics. Othering toward Muslims cannot be separated from their multiple dimensions of identity. Many interviewees noted that their religion is not the only subject of Othering but various non-religious aspects of their identity also bring them difficulties. During a walking interview in his neighborhood in Amsterdam-West, Ahmad, a young working Muslim man in his early 20s, explained that he has been through many experiences not merely because of his faith but because he does not look like a white Dutchman:

> Even if I were not a Muslim, I’m still a Moroccan. It’s a lot recently: just as much as there is Islamophobia, there is racism. Moroccan and Muslim are two things you don’t want to be.

This narration is embedded within power relations which indicate that any forms of deviations from the “normal” ethno-national body has the Othering potential (Fanon, 1986; Haldrup et al., 2006). Race and ethnicity were highly pronounced during the interviews. Participants have gone through many troubles because they are simply not white. It is what Itaoui (2020) calls “double minority status” due to the racial/ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Besides, Ahmad stated that there is a relationship between intersectional Othering and space. “If you go outside [Amsterdam-]West, it’s harder . . . West is ideal for us. If you go to [Amsterdam-]Oost or [Amsterdam-]Nord it’s harder.” He indicated that he has experienced the majority of his Othering encounters outside his neighborhood in Amsterdam-West, a nonwhite-majority neighborhood, but rather in white-dominated urban spaces. In other words, intersectionality is spatialized. This “here” vs. “there” operates in space by spatially assigning who is in/out of place and who belongs in the where of the city. Ahmad’s story in Amsterdam is also in line with conducted studies in Paris (Hancock & Mobillion, 2019; Najib & Hopkins, Najib and Hopkins, 2019), Malmö (Listerborn, 2015), and San Francisco (Itaoui, 2020). Urban areas or neighborhoods with the greater presence of Muslim communities can provide a stronger sense of acceptance,
therefore, lower levels of Othering. The question of the “right place” for the “right body” projects a sense of spatial confinement, sends the Muslim Other into the “symbolic exile” (Hall, 1997). This spatial distance replicates the social distance.

Another aspect of Othering mentioned by some participants is the socio-economic status. Hadi, a highly educated working man at a multinational company in his mid-20s argued that he has been Othered not only because of his high economic capital, he is also Othered because having expensive brand clothes is not considered “normal” for someone who looks like him:

I go once a year to the US and the stuff is cheap there and I buy a lot of things . . . I wear only brands but it’s cheap there. I’m not shy about it; I tell people I bought it from the outlet for very cheap . . . they think you’re a drug dealer because they’re expensive and how come you can afford them. Even if the police see you driving an expensive car and they see you as a foreigner or Muslim-looking, they would check the car.

Similar to Ahmad’s account, Hadi’s story shows that the conceptualization of the Muslim Other merely through the public embodiment of their religion seems reductive and does not paint the full picture. Muslims embody not only their religion but also non-religious factors, amongst others, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, language, and socio-economic class. As Hadi explained, “being brown” and/or looking like a “foreigner” (read Muslim) suffice for rendering a suspicious approach and/or random check. Simply put, these policing practices and racial profiling associate racially marked bodies with criminality. Related to race, Hadi’s account hints at another dimension of intersectional Othering: economic status. Participants mentioned that Muslims in the Netherlands are perceived to have a lower economic status than the average Dutch. Consequently, it could be argued that Hadi and some other male participants are not subject to suspicion merely because of their embodied faith but also their perceived socio-economic status. An average Muslim is imagined to lack enough economic capital to be fashionable, to afford a fancy expensive car unless “he” is doing something illegal. This, therefore, touches upon the gender dimension of Othering and anti-Muslim racism. Although the literature has mostly focused on veiled women, Hadi’s story indicates that Othering limits the mobility of Muslim men as part of a technology of racism (Ahmed, 2007) that renders a Muslim(-looking) man the criminal/villain/dangerous Other.

Next to the socio-economic status, Farah, a PhD in urban sociology and currently a housewife in her early 30s who at the time of the sedentary interview was struggling to find a job related to her academic background, clearly expressed that she has experienced many discriminatory acts, verbal abuses, and physical violence in urban space such as parks, streets, and public transport (stations) because her embodiment does not fall within the hegemonic representation of whiteness:

This type of things happens with my father more and they certainly happen with my sister because my sister is also very oriental looking. She’s big so there are all those like fat-phobia and body sort of image and particularities but my sister is visibly queer, she’s gender nonconforming. So, when I’m with her, it happens more and it happens when we are speaking our language on public transport.
Farah and many other female participants highlighted that their urban life is full of intersecting discriminatory acts of Islamophobia, sexism, and racism (Finlay & Hopkins, 2019; Hancock, 2015; Listerborn, 2015). Most participants expressed that multiple discriminations have to be negotiated in everyday life in different areas of Amsterdam such as public transport, parks, and streets. Taking Farah’s experiences into account, Othering is multidimensional, touches upon many forms of social differentiation; the construction of the Muslim Other, consequently, is primarily based on the consolidation of race, ethnicity, religion, language, accent, and size (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Hopkins, 2019, 2020; Mahbuba & Wichelen, 2019; Najib & Hopkins, Najib and Hopkins, 2020, Najib and Hopkins, 2019). Rooted in intersectional theory, everyday life is lived in multiple and relational ways based on the embodied subjectivities (Avraamidou, 2019). Muslimness is not an all-encompassing identity; the Muslim body incorporates racial, religious, sexual, linguistic, and social identities which concerning the majority of “normal” bodies, i.e. the white Dutch, are read as unmanageably different. Intersectional Otherness is important in the participants’ lives indicating how cognate forms of social distinctions intersect within and give meaning to bodies which in return constitute regimes of hierarchy between “them” and “us.” As Wekker (2016) argues, Dutch racism is infused with classism, sexism, and Islamophobia in discussions of everyday racism. She avers that the implicit message of Othering from white Dutch people is that if you wish to be treated properly and respected, do not be mistaken for an immigrant to the Netherlands. Therefore, it becomes impossible for nonwhite citizens to be Dutch since belonging requires the impossible task of shedding all features of difference.

**Clothed othering**

Dress, a liminal space between the self and others, is a non-verbal communicative performance. Clothes, the surfaces we put on the body’s surface, project information and elicit evaluation about the socio-national identity, economic class, political status, ethno-cultural differences, and religious affiliations. The visibility of Islam in urban space derives predominantly from the religious and cultural clothing practices of Muslims: the hijab/headscarf/abay/a/chador/jilbab/burqa/khimar, some of many terms regarding different forms and styles of covering up for women, and thobe/dishdasha/qamis/panjabi, different names and styles of the ankle-length garments for men. Inscribed with symbols, clothing is regularly negotiated in Amsterdam (re)producing not only the ontological discourses on who “we” are and who “they” are but also where “we” are and where “they” belong (Haldrup et al., 2006; Sargent & Larchanche, 2007). This particular esthetic style of dress is marked as spectacular, suspicious, dangerous, and/or inferior. As Entwistle (2000, p. 344) states, clothing is a “situated embodied practice … an understanding of dress in everyday life requires understanding how the body is experienced and lived and the role that dress plays in the presentation of the body/self.” Hafez, a bearded working man in his early 30s explained the spatiality of his experienced clothed Othering through interurban public transport travel:
For example, I wear dishdasha but only when I go to the mosque or in my area where I live. But I don’t wear the dishdasha when I go, for example, to Utrecht. I did it once and I saw many looks. I think it was after the attack in Paris. I was thinking okay, now it’s time not to hide it anymore but to show yourself because you are here and you belong here. I wore my dishdasha and I took the tram. It was OK in Amsterdam but in the central station, I noticed more looks but they were very intimidating like get out of here, we don’t want you in the centre of Amsterdam . . . On the train, I always sit next to the window which means there is always a place next to me for other people. When I sat there, no one sat next to me and the train was almost full. It was very interesting to see and experience that you are not belonging somewhere. At the Utrecht central station, there were looks again. However, on the bus to my brother’s, there were way fewer looks because where he lives, there are many Moroccans and Turkish people [living].

Hafez’s elaborate story touches upon several socio-spatial practices through which the representation of his culturally clothed body is excluding and restricting his mobility and use of certain urban spaces concerning religious, ethnic, and geopolitical aspects of Othering. Firstly, he mentioned that his mobility with his religio-cultural clothing is noticeably limited within his neighborhood to frequent the mosque. This could be based upon the anxieties of neighboring white territories and discomfort around his ethnорacial differences (Clayton, 2009). Similar to Secor’s (2002) arguments for viewing veiling as a socio-spatial practice for Muslim women, Hafez’s account highlights that there are also multiple regimes of dress code for Muslim men that govern the urban spaces of Amsterdam. These regimes spatialize specific norms or requirements regarding clothing that regulate and/or challenge Muslim men’s mobility in public spaces. Therefore, Hafez’s socio-spatial clothing practices are embedded within everyday intimate geographies where he feels safer in familiar spaces of his neighborhood, potentially shaping his everyday life spatially constrained (Najib & Hopkins, Najib and Hopkins, 2019).

Relatedly, Hafez indicated that there are spatial conflicts across Amsterdam particularly between its center and periphery. This geographical tension is structured through places of belonging, identification, and subjugation (Gokariksel, 2009). Hooks (1990), in this regard, has theorized “marginal spaces” based on fear, distrust, unease, and being denied access to and moving through the white-dominated urban spaces (also Hooks, 2008). This resonates with Puwar’s (2004) “space invaders” where she argues that racio-ethnic bodies face difficulties in certain spaces and become intruders, bodies out of place. Hafez’s experiences of oppression, consequently, hints at the restricted and limited mobility in central and privileged parts of Amsterdam pointing out Othering as a practice the meaning of which arises from corporeality, materiality, i.e. clothing, mobility, and spatiality.

Hafez’s narrative, moreover, specifies public transport as one of the key sites of Othering. Intense embodied encounters within the confined and mobile spaces of public transport carry powerful socio-spatial potentials. There are a full range of Othering processes, racial and class tensions and confrontations, (tacit/explicit) negotiations of difference, symbolic power struggle, and protests over space, rights, and status where passengers are engaged in a complex system of selection, exclusion, and control as well as politics of location and movement (Koefoed et al., 2017; Purifoye, 2015; Shaker, 2021; Shaker et al., in press, Shaker, et al., 2021; Wilson, 2011). Further, the “bitter looks” on the tram and the reluctance of other passengers to sit next to Hafez on the busy train clearly show how the visual and haptic forms of Othering (Shaker et al., 2021) derive from the
esthetic representation of faith through clothing. Sara Ahmed (2000) argues that visual and tactile encounters create the Other. It shows that familiar and stranger bodies do not precede bodily encounters; they are the production of such encounters (Simonsen, 2010).

Last but not least, Hafez’s storyline in a multi-ethnic neighborhood in Utrecht where his brother lives is similar to Ahmad’s account in the previous section regarding urban areas that are considered to be safe through the association of certain neighborhoods with higher levels of diversity and everyday exposure to difference. The majority of participants felt comfortable, less Othered, in diverse neighborhoods, notably in Muslim-majority areas. Next to the greater presence of Muslim communities in certain neighborhoods which projects a stronger sense of acceptance, it could be argued that diversity in these areas has prompted repetitive meaningful encounters between diverse groups allowing citizens to lessen feelings of uncertainty and anxiety around difference, disrupt familiar patterns, and form new attachments (Amin, 2002; Peterson, 2017; Valentine, 2013).

The spatiality of clothed Othering, consequently, modifies everyday activities of participants such as shopping, recreational activities, eating out, or other mundane practices. For instance, Sumayyah, early 20s, a university student and a martial art coach for children who wears the hijab, during the phone interview implied that her shopping has a spatial dimension:

When I have to choose between two places where to go shopping or whatever, I normally just go to the places I know, okay, in that place I would feel comfortable because there are people that look like me or at least there are people that understand why I look like this.

Sumayyah’s narrative refers to the spatial management of the visual representation of her faith within, and avoiding from, certain urban spaces where she does not stand out where she feels safe, familiar, and welcome such as her neighborhood shops or community/ethnic restaurants and cafés. Regarding the visibly Muslim women, Gokarinkel (2009) and Secor (2002) have conceptualized the politics of veiling. For them, veiling is a gendered embodied socio-spatial practice that touches upon the production of bodies and subjectivities. As Sumayyah argued, certain urban areas provide the veiled women with comfort and security where it is common to see the veiled women, whereas in some public places, they experience being out of place. Veiling, thus, is spatialized in relation to the power that occurs at different scales: globe, nation, city, neighborhood, body, and emotion (Najib & Teeple Hopkins, 2020; Secor, 2002).

Myriam, a visibly Muslim woman in her mid-20s who was finishing her bachelor’s degree at the time of the phone interview, told stories regarding her clothing:

People look and stare, some people, some men like that, I’ve noticed. They like the Arabic style and look more. When I wear the black hijab that I got from Dubai, really nice and you don’t have it here in the Netherlands, I feel people sort of romanticising it and I think even the Dutch people think oh she’s an Arabic rich lady.

For Myriam, this visual Othering does not derive from suspicion but curiosity. This curiosity, the white male gaze, which erotically wraps the female body around “the mystery,” is usually associated with psychoanalytic drives based around the notions of
sexuality, libido, and desire (Thrift, 2004). Such looks contain implicit exoticism and spectacular fascination of the Other. Therefore, besides the discourse of the suppressed Muslim women (Cooke, 2007; Mahbuba & Wichelen, 2019), Islamic clothing is related to the perception of beauty and sexual appeal. During a group interview, Nour, a working/studying visibly Muslim woman in her mid-20s, and her close friend Fatima, a university student and a teacher at a high school, a visibly Muslim woman in her early 20s, argued

“Nour: I think the way they view the Muslim women who cover up as someone is not free, oppressed or maybe dumb like why would you wear all the clothing in 30 degrees? Why do you do that? Throw it away, show yourself, you’re so beautiful. But if I cover myself up, am I not beautiful?

Fatima: Dutchmen say Muslim women cover themselves up because they are ugly.”

Fatima and Nour’s stories illustrate how Muslims are perceived as the Other through their bodily appearance. As a symbol of women’s supposed oppression, the headscarf represents the repression of women’s sexuality in Muslim-minority countries. The veil, therefore, symbolizes the rejection of women’s sexual freedom and sexual equality. Scott (2007, p. 166) argues that it is the “clash of gender systems” that Otherizes the veiled women because women’s ability to expose publicly their bodies and embody their sexuality in public space are important ways through which sexual equality is performed. Here the dominant culture degrades certain groups as the Other and the members of those groups are defined in terms of their perceived deviant esthetics of dress not only as sexually oppressed but also sexually unappealing. It means that to be socially accepted, the body needs to be first esthetically accepted (Featherstone, 1982) based on certain sexual and esthetic criteria and images of the body (re)produced within a specific social, spatial, cultural, and political context.

These stories, anxieties, and fears around certain urban spaces not only limit the mobility of the veiled women but also teach them how to perceive and engage with public space. This is what Itaoui (2016, 2020) calls the spatial imaginaries or mental maps of Islamophobia. Similar to Valentine’s (1989) geography of women’s fear, Muslim women develop mental maps of feared environments as a product of their past Othering encounters, hearing the frightening experiences, advice of others, and media reporting. Clothed Othering, therefore, is a socio-spatial construct, whose distribution and meaning shifts across different spatial contexts (Najib & Hopkins, Najib and Hopkins, 2019; Raanan & Avni, 2020). Different emotions and anxieties are assigned to specific urban geographies. The veiled women move through everyday urban spaces with the knowledge that their Othered body is associated with risk and insecurity which shape the geographies of the body, subjectivity, and the city, challenge their sense of national belonging, cultural citizenship, sense of belonging in public space, and access to and movement through their cities.
Stereotyped othering

The Other is constructed through a process of homogenization; individuals are met as an archetype characterized by the signs inscribed on their bodies (Simonsen, 2010). Othering deindividualises and ascribes the Other as a collective identity. A person who embodies signs of Muslimness becomes representative of the entire community. Lisa, mid-20s, is a Dutch convert, married, highly educated Muslim woman, and works as a manager at a chain supermarket. She explained how her customer expected her to know a recipe related to a specific culinary culture:

For now, this [headscarf] does make a difference in the way people react to your being and identify you. This makes it easier for others to place me . . . I work at this supermarket and I got my nametag and Dutch people look at me and they don’t understand. For example, a lady came to me asking ‘I am going to make curry and I was wondering which ingredients I should have. You make all the time at home so you must know.’ I’m like why should I know?

Lisa’s story shows that encounters are historically and geopolitically mediated; they foreground images associated with other times and places (Ahmed, 2000; Simonsen, 2010). Wekker (2016) also exposes how Dutch racism is rooted in the intentional ignorance of colonial history, enslavement, and the nation’s immigration history. Here curry is related to the colonial past and Indonesia (read Muslims); therefore, Lisa, as a Muslim woman, should know how to make it even though she is native Dutch not Indonesian. This minor incident of Othering shows that colonialism has never really left the Dutch imagination. Besides, as an aspect of Othering, stereotyping gets hold of a few “simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped, and widely recognised characteristics” (Hall, 2001, p. 258) about a person, culture, or spatio-temporality and reduces everything to those traits. For instance, Ahmad, during a group walking interview with his close friend, Fouad, a working man in his mid-20s, explained how every (bearded) Muslim man is either a potential terrorist or has to be apologetic:

“Ahmad: they [white Dutch people] just come to you asking a question about the majority of Muslims like why they are doing that. I have to represent them. I’m not the one who bombed something and it is not me who has to say sorry or apologize.

Fouad: they [white Dutch people] think they [bombers] are one of us and all Muslims are the same.”

Based on what Ahmad and Fouad argued, stereotyping not only renders “banal terrorism” (Katz, 2007) but also maintains symbolic and social order through the negation of broader or expansive understandings whilst simultaneously forecloses diversity of Muslims embodied identities (Allen, 2010; Hall, 2001). It symbolically distinguishes between normal and deviant, acceptable and unacceptable. Moreover, “the social construction of evil is necessary for the construction of good” (Achugar, 2004, p. 317). As Daneshpour and Dadras (2018) claim, the underlying narration to this assumption is embedded in a crucial orientation toward “ours,” i.e. white Dutch people’s ways of being and doing things, as the standard norms of viability, validity, and civilized patterns of the social organization whilst Islam and Muslims are seen as inherently violent and
fundamentally inferior to the West (Sayyid, 2014). Some participants, moreover, narrated their experiences regarding practising Islam publicly. The following excerpts depict stereotyping Muslim bodies regarding saying their prayer publicly.

My husband once had to pray at Amsterdam’s Central Station. I felt a little bit scared and I was like be quick because people will think . . . (Lisa).

I was with my brother and it was the praying time. We had our wudu [ritual Islamic washing] and praying cloth so we prayed publicly. It was very funny because people were looking [at us] (Hafez).

The socio-spatial experience of Othering is organized around spatially manifested sets of hegemonic rules and norms regarding religious practices. The stories of Lisa and Hafez demonstrate how religious identity and practice are negotiated within everyday urban space, focusing particularly on the spatial dimensions of Islamic presence and its (in)visibility in the intersection of public and private, secular and sacred (Hatziprokopiou & Evergeti, 2014). In the everyday secular context of Amsterdam, religion, especially Islam, is perceived to be practised within a specific place either at the mosque or the private sphere but not in public space, streets, or train stations. A body that does not follow this unwritten rule disobeys and challenges the dominant system of doing things and creates suspicion and chaos. Chaos is scary; order needs to be restored “quickly,” as Lisa told her husband. Hafez’s brother also symbolically violated some dominant secular social norms and codes of conduct. He not only ignored the “acceptable” public dress code by wearing his ankle-length garment but also prayed publicly and created suspicion. The anxieties around and sanctioning of praying publicly in urban Amsterdam points to the fact that religious practices are knitted into both anonymous and intimate spaces at the same time (O’Mahony, 2019).

Public prayer blurs the boundaries between places of worship and public space. Central to post-secular cities is the integration of religious ways of being into the public sphere shared by others. Working on post-secular geographies, Gokariksel and Secor (2015) have shown how the secular and the sacred in urban settings are mutually constituted where the apparent tensions between secularization and desecularisation and their consequences are played out which allow disentangling the public/private binary.

**Conclusion**

Building upon encountering difference, the study has contributed to the growing interest in the Othering of Muslims within their everyday embodied urbanism. Focusing on the politically charged field of Islam and Muslim in the Netherlands, we have shown that Otherness is spatially organized in Amsterdam, experienced through an intercorporeal encounter, felt by individual Muslims at different urban settings, and registered in/through sensing bodies that generate the multiplicity of experiences of Othering in everyday urban life. We have explored how embodied multiculturality encounters and intersections of subjectivities, beards, language, veils, praying, looks, and everyday spaces of encounter become the rubric through which the difference of Muslims is assembled and Otherness is lived.
We have shed light on the body-society relationship and provided a better understanding of the role of urban space in the Othering and everyday life of young Muslims within the Dutch contemporary urban culture. Strongly related to the ongoing debates on the urban geographies of encounter, race, ethnicity, and religion, the study has critically investigated the (micro-)social geographies and tensions associated with the everyday urban living of Muslims. Urban geographies of Othering affect Muslims’ uses of space; experiences of Othering restrict and limit their mobility, access to certain urban spaces, damage their sense of belonging, and hamper the possibility of breaking their Otherness and advocate change. Space is a crucial component of Othering regarding spatial demarcations from the body to the wider relations of power within society or the negotiation of borders taking place in everyday life and engagements in the urban sphere, consumption spaces, public transport, work, amongst others. These Othering experiences contribute to the production of urban space and shape how the Muslim Other experiences the city.

Meanings and experience of Othering, therefore, are neither fixed nor singular, but vary across urban space; in white-dominated and less diverse districts Othering may be an expected practice. The embodied spatial organization of Othering arises out of a hegemonic series of social meanings, the wider geopolitical context, and spatial regimes that govern everyday urban spaces. These spatial oppositions to the presence of Muslims reflect how global and local connect where geopolitical conflicts and global fears continually become entangled, compressed, and materialized into everyday life. Muslims are, therefore, defined by their bodies/embodiments; related and linked to the broader socio-spatial systems of norms of dominant society and culture, they are named as spectacular, ugly, sexually unappealing, suspicious, dangerous. By the same token, we have touched upon the lived, esthetic, and embodied dimensions of everyday multiculturalism in a post-secular city through which “us” and “them” have no fixed position but are constantly (re)produced in so many different ways. Through various small acts, comments, and corporeal practices, the line between “we” and “they” are redrawn and reproduced. We do not generalize these findings yet argue that they are part of the understanding of the debates over “difference” and the everyday challenges of co-existence in the urban West.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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