Performing Parenthood: A Scaled Analysis of Online Muslim Parenting Discourse in the Netherlands

Parenting discourses in Dutch society are gendered, with mothers still being presented as the most natural and competent caregivers for children. Yet, with the rise of social media it is argued that hegemonic gendered discourses are more 'effectively' negotiated. Despite the continued overrepresentation of women on parenting pages some studies indicate that the discursive representation of fathers is expanding. Persistent, however, seems the scholarly focus on white, middle-class parents. Which in the current Western European context often concerns secular families, who are known to strongly endorse egalitarian gender relations in the first place. With our paper on online Dutch Muslim parenting, we seek to contribute to a more inclusive understanding of online constructions of 'good' parenting.

Muslims are the largest religious minority, yet also the most stigmatized group in the contemporary secularized Dutch context. Negative stereotypes of Muslim (migrant) parents still lingers in public and political discourses, but also seem to be internalized by many pedagogical professionals (Koçak and Badou, 2020; Raffaeta, 2016). While some argue that Islamic parenting discourse emphasizes intrinsic gender differences, with a corresponding task division, our previous online fieldwork (Schenkels and Mutsaers, 2019) rather showed the prevalance of egalitarian parenting discourses. Still, we noted that on these pages, women/mothers formed the largest majority, resulting in a somewhat one-dimensional depiction of Muslim fathering.

This brings us to the following questions: How is gendered Muslim parenthood performed online? To what extent are motherhood and fatherhood stratified or polarized in these representations? Do these representations travel between platforms, or are they highly platform-specific? Which gendered parenting representation generate the most discursive attention?

We answer these questions using an approach called 'digital hermeneutics' (Van de Ven & Van Nuenen, 2022), which consists of a comparative discourse analysis on five different scales: platform hermeneutics; contextual reading (making use of the tool Issuecrawler); distant reading; hyper-reading (concordance views); and close reading. We study two different platforms. Data have been scraped from a popular Dutch Islamic parenting Facebook page (see: Schenkels & Mutsaers, 2019), a popular parenting blog on Instagram, and an Islamic parenting website.

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