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# Kader Abdolah: How Europe is Changing



Edited by Jeroen Dewulf  
Translation by Donald E. Backman

**Kader Abdolah**  
**How Europe is Changing**



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Edited by Jeroen Dewulf

Translated by Donald Backman

Introduction by Ton Broos, Jeroen Dewulf, Esther Ham and  
Chrissy Hosea

Photo of Kader Abdolah© Jen Garber

University of California, Berkeley

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## Introduction

Kader Abdolah is the pen name of Hossein Sadjadi Ghaemmaghami Farahani. While some authors use a pseudonym for reasons related to the marketing and the aesthetic presentation of their work, this pen name was born out of resistance. It refers to two of the author's comrades in the underground – Kader and Abdolah – who were assassinated by Iran's successive regimes of oppression: one of them died in his fight against the Shah, the other in his fight against the Ayatollahs. The name Kader Abdolah is a form of tribute and also a statement. It reminds the reader that the writings presented under the name Kader Abdolah are not just concerned with aesthetics, but also contain a political message. This combination is particularly evident in Kader Abdolah's columns which appear here for the first time in English translation.

The author of the columns presented in this book was born in 1954 in the city of Arak, in Iran. Despite growing up in a religious family, he distanced himself from Islam as a university student in Tehran. He joined an underground leftist movement that first rebelled against the Shah and later against Khomeini. As a member of the clandestine press, he adopted the alias Kader Abdolah. After two of his sisters were arrested and his only brother was killed, he decided to flee Iran. Through Kurdistan, Abdolah made it into Turkey from where he entered the European Union illegally. In 1988, he reached the Netherlands. His request for political asylum was granted by the Dutch authorities that allowed him to be reunited with his family. He soon abandoned his original idea to join the large Iranian exile community in the United States and instead decided to begin a new life in the Netherlands.

This new life was marked by an attempt to realize an old dream: to become a famous writer like his great-great-grandfather Qhaem Megham Ferahani, a former Prime Minister of Iran and one of the country's greatest poets. Little by little, Abdolah began to master the Dutch language and once he was able to read fluently, he familiarized himself with the classics of Dutch literature. His literary career began in 1993, when a selection of short stories under the title *De adelaars* (The Eagles) was accepted for publication by the Dutch publishing company De Geus. His debut was an astonishing success and paved the way for a career that would lead him to the top of contemporary Dutch literature. Abdolah's international breakthrough came in 2000 with the publication of the autobiographical novel *Spijkerschrift*, which was translated into over twenty languages, including the English translation *My Father's Notebook*, by Susan Massotty. In 2010, a second novel appeared in English translation, *The House of the Mosque*, about the impact of Islamic fundamentalism on the daily life of a tradition-conscious family in Iran. Abdolah's most controversial work was his Dutch translation of the *Koran*, in which he deliberately altered some parts to make the book more accessible for a Western audience. His message that Islam had also become a Dutch religion and that the *Koran* should therefore have its place within Dutch literature displeased many. His book met with severe opposition from people who claimed Europe's exclusive Christian-Jewish heritage as well as from orthodox Muslims who were appalled by the idea that the word of the Prophet had been rephrased in order to make it fit into Western literature. In Spring 2010, Kader Abdolah was elected by the *Foundation for the Collective Support of Dutch Literature* (CPNB) to write the prestigious 2011 "boekenweekgeschenk," a book that each visitor to the organization's book fair receives as a gift. In his latest novel, *De Koning* (The King, 2011), Abdolah narrates about the impact of the industrial revolution on daily life and politics in the Middle East.

Kader Abdolah is widely seen as one the most original and thought-provoking voices in the debate on the profound transformations that are taking place in Europe in consequence of the massive immigration in the last decades. His prominent

position in the media on issues dealing with the growing Muslim population(s) and the role of Islam in Europe was made possible because of the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* which invited Abdolah to become one of its columnists in 1996. His weekly columns under the name of *Mirza* (Persian for “chronicler”) have made Abdolah one of the leading intellectuals in Dutch society. While the Netherlands used to be seen as a guiding country to the rest of Europe with regard to the successful integration of immigrants, the sudden popularity of the Islamophobic anti-immigration rhetoric of Pim Fortuyn at the turn of the century made it painfully clear that a broad dissatisfaction with the government’s approach to immigration existed amongst the Dutch people. The murder of Fortuyn in 2002, only days before the national elections he was bound to win, was followed two years later by the assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in retaliation for his provocative movie *Submission* about the position of women in Islam. These murders, which sent shockwaves all over Europe, threw the Netherlands into a deep identity crisis. Among the many comments about the Dutch multicultural crisis, those of Abdolah stand out for their sharp insight.

Identity is a keyword in Abdolah’s columns. He presents the Dutch case as an example of how Europe is adapting itself to its new identity. While he does not avoid the dark sides of this process of transformation, his columns convey confidence that despite all the problems it might cause in the short term, immigration is ultimately beneficial to the future of Europe in a globalized world. Abdolah speaks about immigration from personal experience and does not hide the fact that his own struggle with a new identity shaped his worldview. His columns usually begin in the Netherlands, but they rarely remain within a Dutch context. They take us from Europe to the Middle East, to America and to Africa and represent a unique perspective on the challenges which today’s world is facing on a global scale.

In Spring 2010, Abdolah was invited as Regents’ Lecturer to the University of California, Berkeley. Thanks to the support of the

*Nederlands Letterenfonds* (Foundation for the Promotion of Dutch Literature) and the *Nederlandse Taalunie* (Foundation for the Promotion of Dutch Language), the *American Association for Netherlandic Studies* was able to extend this visit to a tour that took him to several other American universities. The columns written by Abdolah during his American journey conclude our selection. We hope that they might contribute to a broader interest in Kader Abdolah's singular message on how Europe is changing.

Ton Broos (University of Michigan)

Jeroen Dewulf (University of California, Berkeley)

Esther Ham (University of Indiana)

Chrissy Hosea (Cornell University)



## Grab the Chance

Do you know Adnan?

No, how could you also know Adnan. I myself have only known him for a short time. He is a compatriot. A companion.

I met him in the Netherlands, in a shelter where I myself also sat for awhile. Usually when I have to go to Amsterdam, I call him and we plan to meet at the Central Station. Occasionally when I miss the last train, I take the tram to the Bijlmermeer neighborhood to stay with him. I also take the tram to the Bijlmermeer when I need to sort things out in my mother tongue.

No, you do not know Adnan. It's not about him, but about a place where I can strike and hit.

Adnan is a poet. Every night at the moment I close my eyes, I say: tomorrow I will leave this place, with a backpack.

He is also a translator. Day and night he works on translating the books of Shakespeare again into his mother tongue. He does this to keep himself afloat in his exile. "Can you imagine, Shakespeare in a poor immigrant neighborhood like the Bijlmermeer? I gasp for air in that upper flat."

Last week I called him: "I want to discuss a few things with you."

And I took the tram.

"How is it possible that you can write in such a language," is the phrase he always greets me with when we meet. "How can you give shape to those harsh words? In God's name, where do you derive your inspiration from amongst those dark clouds and all that dog shit?"

And coincidentally a piece of dog poop gets stuck under his shoe. Looking for a stick to remove it with, he shouts: "Name! I mean it. Name a great Dutch writer."

I name a name.

And he laughs. He laughs loudly.

He reads Dutch literature in English. The discounted English translations. "Listen boy! No whale can swim in a pond," he

says. "You can give me a list of names, but no whale. Do you understand?"

Adnan is not an old man, but he no longer dares to cross the streets of the Bijlmermeer at night.

I am a gentleman. So he writes. A gentleman, with a wet hat in the Bijlmermeer.

He grabs my arm and we cross together.

"I have a question, Adnan. I want to discuss something with you," I say once we are on the pavement. "Listen. De Volkskrant has asked me to write a weekly column. Do you hear me? I need your advice. What do you think?"

Suddenly he lets go of my arm.

"That's it," he says. "Do it! Now is the time. Now you strike. Hard."

"But listen. I'm busy with a lot of other things right now."

"Everything to the side," he says. "Grab that chance and hit."

"It is an inconspicuous corner of the newspaper," I say. "Just change it into a place where you can stand steadfast and hit hard."

"Hit where?" I say.

"It doesn't matter where," he says. "Where it hurts," he stresses.

And he laughs. He laughs loudly. "Oh, those Dutchmen of yours." And the rain falls on his hat.

## An Empty Grave

A few months ago Mirza's father died in his home country. Mirza had fled from his country. Those who turn their back on their fatherland are punished. Therefore, he was not allowed to participate in the burial of his father. Now he has frequent dreams about his father. Last night he dreamed something uncommon. He went to a church graveyard here in Holland and asked for the gravedigger.

"Sir, I have a problem," he said.

"What kind of problem?" asked the gravedigger.

"I need a grave," he said.

"That's not a problem," said the gravedigger.

"But I don't have a body," he said.

"What did you say?" asked the gravedigger surprised.

"I said that I don't have a body," Mirza emphasized.

"And what did you say you wanted?"

"A grave," said Mirza.

"For whom?"

"For my father."

"For your father? Where is your father then?"

"Dead. He is dead!" said Mirza.

"But where is the body then?"

"I don't have a body," he said.

The gravedigger continued to look at him and clearly didn't understand him.

"I don't understand you very well. I don't exactly know what you want from me."

"A grave," professed Mirza.

"What kind of grave?"

"An empty grave," he said.



“No. We don’t do that here in Holland,” said the gravedigger.

“But maybe you would give me one, if you heard my story.”

“Let’s hear it,” said the gravedigger.

Mirza told him his story with tears in his eyes.

“Now everything’s different,” said the man. “You’ll get that grave from me, but beware, this stays between us.”

The gravedigger got a shovel and pickaxe out of the shed and pointed to a place behind the trees. “Quick! Get moving.”

Mirza dug a grave for his father. The man came with a gravestone. “This I’ll give you for free.”

Together they laid the stone on the empty grave and Mirza carved out the words Akbar ebne Hasan ebne Mirza with Dutch letters.

He also added the text 1313-1383, according to their own calendar.

In the morning when he woke up, he sat for a moment on the edge of his bed. He then stood up and opened the window. Although it was raining hard, a horse stood ready at the door.

## A Foreign Homeland

You asked recently whether the Dutch language had become my second home. Did you know that that question has kept me very busy?

Am I a Persian writer? No, not anymore. A Dutch writer then? No, that doesn't work either. What am I, then? Or what am I becoming? How long does this process of transformation take?

To such questions, I have no answer. Has Dutch really become my second home even though I knew nothing of it at first? Could Dutch ever be my second home? When I look at my surroundings, I see that I've given everything a new place in the Dutch language. Until now I was actually constantly busy with a big move.

My mother is no longer there in the mountains, but here on her rug, in the grass.

My grandfather even brought his old hats with him. His walking stick is now hanging somewhere in one of my stories.

The Sefidganie, the river of my childhood, has changed its course. It now flows through the IJssel River in the Netherlands.

I even brought the Shah and the peaked cap of the Persian king with me.

And in the evening I am busy bringing my dead loved ones to life with Dutch words.

You're right. Dutch is indeed my second home now. Maybe you can also see that the dike of my mother tongue has almost broken.

At the same time, I warn myself: "Watch your mouth! Are you sure you can live in this language?"

No. Absolutely not. The Dutch language is an enemy. An occupier. Like the Germans in World War II. I've been robbed by foreign words. I want my homeland back. I want my family home back. But the occupier has taken everything to the Netherlands. There is almost nothing left of my parents' house. Only a window with curtains.

In the mountains of my homeland my brother's grave lies empty. The occupier has taken my brother's body and buried it in the ground of the Dutch language.

I fear. I fear that one night I might sneak to my homeland. Open the grave of my father and that I would tie his body to my back and bring him back here. To a spot in the Dutch language.

Do you see? You scare me with your words. Say no more. Just come sit quietly with me. And hold my hand.

## The Weather and the Word

You asked me recently if I could occasionally write for you about the Netherlands. Now that everyone is happily busy with the discussion on the national budget, I give them their space and write about two totally different things: the weather and the Dutch language.

You still climb in the mountains, I suppose. Not me. When I came here, I put on a pair of training shoes. For seven and half years, without interruption, I have run through the village with the running group in the rain, in the cold and in the sun, but every time I hesitate about what I should put on. A long jacket with pants? Without a jacket? Asport shirt underneath? A thick shirt? A thin? No, you never learn. It is something strange. I listen to the weather, even go outside, "Good weather. There's no wind. Okay, I'll put on shorts."

I run to the meeting, but I see that everyone has on long pants and a windbreaker. Along the way a cold wind begins blowing. Once home I crawl right under the covers.

I don't need to tell you that when I wear long training pants and a training jacket, that everyone comes wearing a pair of shorts. Rarely do I guess correctly. One time a dark mass of

clouds was in the air, I really didn't know what I should wear. Because I no longer wanted to run as the black sheep in the group, I first went out and watched what the others were wearing.

A fellow runner ran past. He had on running pants and a running jacket.

"Are you not running tonight?" He yelled.

"Yeah. I'm going to change clothes right away."

Well-dressed I ran to the meeting. Just like me, everyone was wrapped against the cold. But once the coach whistled to start, everyone pulled off their training pants and began to run in shorts.

Not me. I couldn't. I didn't wear shorts under my pants.

“Aren’t you hot?” asked the coach.

“No,” I said. “I’m used to it. I can handle it.”

I have this hesitation not only with the weather. Also with the language. The Dutch language is something unique. You have to drink it in with your mother’s milk otherwise you will never learn it perfectly. As a foreigner you can surely go shopping after a few weeks.

“Can I have a kilo of potatoes?”

And you get it. Or, after a year, you can read the children’s stories Jip en Janneke with the help of a dictionary. You understand the story, but do not feel it completely. When you’ve lived in the Netherlands for eight years, you still keep your words under your own control and speak them word after word with hesitation. You’re always afraid you will use a wrong article, that you will place the emphasis on the wrong syllable. That you will use a short “i” instead of a long “i”. And hold on to a short “c” for too long. And you still have troubles with “ui”.

I still can’t pronounce the word “screaming,” “schreeuwen” in Dutch. Instead of screaming it, I cry in my pronunciation. The Dutch also have a small, difficult word: “er”. If you have thirteen “er’s”, you can place six of them well, but you are still stuck with the rest. The Dutch language is the language of the Dutch. If you disguise yourself as a Dutchman, everyone knows you do not wear shorts under your training pants as soon as you open your mouth.

## My Little Wars

Time changes everything. I understand that all the better, now that I no longer live in my native land. The changes seem like a joke at times. There is a Persian saying: "You live your life like a horseman." Sometimes you sit in the saddle; sometimes you have to carry the saddle on your back. There was a time when we had to revolt to remove the Shah from the country. Now, he rests in his grave in Cairo.

We oppose the clergy. They have become too comfortable in the seat of power. For a time, Saddam had set his left foot in the south of our country. We went as one to the front and drove him back to his hole. Then the time came when we had to escape. I reached the Dutch border.

Here began my little wars. Getting to know a people in the rain and struggling to tell the difference between the two Dutch articles "de" and "het". Learning to take only one cookie. Learning not to wave to the neighbors, but rather to put on a fake smile. To take a couple of dictionaries and crawl under the blankets with a book of poems by Slauerhoff: The further I flee from you, the more I come into your power. And I had a daughter. As a lullaby, I hummed for her enchanting Persian poetry, so as not to let her forget who she was and where her father came from. She turned three, she turned four, five, six. Before the magic of the Dutch language captured her, I wanted her to learn Persian.

When she began to decipher the strange and funny scribbles of the Persian language, she looked at me with wonder: "Is this my name? Nice. Teach me how to write 'bird.'"

I taught her to find the country, the house, grandma and grandpa amongst the unfamiliar words.

"Are you happy now, Dad?"

"Sure. You are the smartest girl of the strictest father in the world."

"Hmm, now I'm hungry," she said in Dutch. "Can we go to McDonalds? A promise is a promise."

“Say it in Persian, please,” I stressed, as always. At home, we speak only Persian.

“Okay, pasho berim to MacDonald’s.”

It went well, and she wrote delightfully from right to left. But as soon as she started to learn Dutch, she pushed my Persian words aside. After that, I had to bike with her to the local library. She placed a child’s chair before me in the children’s book department, and she put a book into my hands. “This, we’ll read here, and the rest we’ll take home,” she said.

In the evening, she piled her books for me.

“Just a minute,” she said. “Tuck me in first. Now read to me until I fall asleep.”

I read it to her with my bad accent.

“No, not like that,” she said. “You’re saying it all wrong. You say ‘oo’, it’s not ‘oo’, it’s ‘ou’, house, house, say it again, ou, ou, just house.”

“House, hoose, house, house,” I tried again.

“That’s good, Dad. Read on.”

“I’m reading it all wrong,” I said. “It’s not good for your language development. Let me read Persian stories to you.”

“No, no. You’re doing really well, Dad. Go on.”

I read on.

“You’re saying it wrong,” she said sleepily. “Just repeat what I say...”

I repeated her example the best I could and then she fell fast asleep.

## I Won't Trade

With 33 opposing votes, the Second Chamber has legalized marriage for people of the same sex. From now on gays can marry just like heteros. Too bad that René is gone.

He was the first gay man I met, and the first whose butt I saw.

The day I first stood in my new Dutch garden I suddenly saw two naked, male butt cheeks. The sun shone, a man, René, stood there in his teeny-weeny underwear. He bent forward in his own garden, but because the fence was broken his backside pointed in the direction of our garden. I closed my eyes for a moment, but after that I stayed and stared at it.

A week later he invited me over for a cup of coffee. There was a black double bed under his window and many photos of unknown male butts hung on his walls, bald butts, hairy butts, old butts, young butts, sick butts.

Later, when I began to write in Dutch, I got a lot of help from him. I wrote and he looked over my text. This is why there are so many curious words in my first book.

In my fatherland I knew well men who wanted to sleep with other men. I got my knowledge primarily from the Old Persian literature. When you read some of those books, you soon think that it had once been very normal for men to go to bed with other men. The great masters have always written with pleasure about it. Here: "There once was an elderly king that had a good-looking slave and he could not keep his hands off of him. Because he had one foot in the grave, he said to his second-in-command: help me, keep that young man away from me, give him a woman and send him on his way, so far that I cannot reach him anymore."

One of the most beautiful verses in our literature is by Saadi where the master tells about his longing for a young man.

In our books I had only heard the voice of the men that did that, but you heard nothing about the other men, I mean men those that receive a man. Through the centuries we've heard no word from them. Society has oppressed them.



It wasn't until I reached the Netherlands that I heard their voice and I became acquainted with their words. Here they displayed their naked butts and forced you to look at them.

Later I became friends with a professor who at home always put on a bow tie and clenched a pipe between his teeth. One day, or perhaps one night, I saw at his place a poster of a naked man in a golden frame hanging on the wall. The man had pushed his abdomen exaggeratedly far forward and prominently displayed that very personal part of his body.

Now when I walk in Amsterdam from the station to the Dam Square, I usually encounter a man who rides from afar toward me on his rollerblades. He wears a light brown leather jacket and leather chaps. Once he gets close, he abruptly turns around. His pants have no back. He shows me his bare butt.

The Second Chamber approved gay marriage with 109 votes. Your voice is heard. Congratulations.

But I wouldn't want to trade the beauty of one single woman even for hundreds of men.

## Unavoidable

Fifty-eight Chinese between the ages of about twenty to twenty-five, died in a tomato shipping container and the police have arrested five people who are suspected of involvement in human smuggling. At the same time there are still thousands in Moscow, Istanbul, Tehran, Karachi, Delhi and all of the African capital cities waiting to come to the west in a plane or in a container.

I was one of them who waited in Turkey and looked for a smuggler. After searching for a while, I found a lead. Someone told me: "You have to go to that bar every Tuesday and sit on the chair that is in front of the door. If he comes, he comes at precisely 6:00 and then goes and stands under the old tree, he does not sit down, he orders a cup of tea and lights a cigarette."

I went to that bar for five Tuesdays, but he did not show up, on the sixth Tuesday, he appeared and went and stood under the tree. I expected a criminal with scary eyes, but he was a nice man of about 40, with a brotherly smile. He looked in my eyes and knew immediately that I wasn't a policeman.

"Can I speak with you for a moment?"

"Yeah, sure! Cigarette?"

"Yes, thank you. I want..."

"How much can you pay?"

"How much is enough?"

"Depends on your choice. America? Europe? Plane? Ship? Or by truck?"

Those fifty-eight Chinese had chosen the cheapest transportation. They were of the poorest sort of those who were waiting.

According to the law of normal life, that tragedy should never have occurred and the smugglers should be severely punished. I agree with you and am completely against the smugglers that abuse the impotence of their clients. But in a world where the

rich countries have not only prosperity but also democracy, no one can prevent the travel of the curious person. Death, loss and deceit inevitably accompany such travel, whoever wants to be smuggled, cannot blame his smuggler. Because what a smuggler does, he doesn't do on his own. It is a deliberate collaboration between both parties. They commit the illegal act together. While the smugglers will do anything for money, you cannot compare them with drug smugglers, because human smugglers, through their illegal power, play a decisive role in society. They are constantly bringing thousands of foreigners through all types of transportation into the country. They have succeeded in changing the color of Amsterdam and The Hague. Now they are also busy changing the composition of the other cities and indirectly stirring things up in society. Is what they are doing good? Is it bad? It depends on who is looking at it.

Many crimes have been committed, but people nowadays need the smugglers more than ever.

Now that all the borders are monitored digitally, cunning smugglers are in demand.

Unfortunately, 58 people have died, but that doesn't have to be, I personally know dozens of people who escaped death with the help of smugglers.

I give my condolences to the unknown Chinese families for the loss of their loved ones. And I take up the law of illegitimacy and give my regards to the families of the five Dutch people arrested.

I secretly let them know that I am prepared to testify in court that these relocations are inevitable.

## **Eqra! Proclaim!**

Amsterdam, a beautiful day. Suddenly I hear a festive sura from the Quran coming from a loudspeaker. Next appear two black convertibles with colorful balloons, blue and orange tulips, and streamers, in which a pair of happy imams stands in their festive white garments. What is going on?

They were commemorating Mohammed's birthday. The people of Amsterdam stood staring open-mouthed. I had to laugh, and I laughed hard. I found it funny. I had never before experienced anything like it.

The procession took me back to the past. Balloons? Orange tulips? No, they were too gay for such a celebration. On Mohammed's birthday the women pinned fragrant roses on their clothes, and in the evening the men came over to talk about Mohammed: "When he announced that he was the messenger, the children pelted him with pebbles, the women threw dirty water from the roofs on his head and the men teased him: Moses knew the language of the animals, and his staff slithered like a snake, Jesus brought the dead to life. Tell us, what is your miracle?"

"The Quran," answered Mohammed.

"Read it. It is a wonder."

Long ago I had left all those stories behind. But I remained fascinated by Mohammed. He was illiterate, but the world kept him busy, he searched for an answer to his questions.

Looking for his God he climbed Mount Hera at night, he stood there and stared at the universe.

On the night that he turned forty, the angel Gabriel descended from heaven to reveal to him that he was the last prophet. Gabriel showed him the first sura of the Quran, written by God Himself, and shouted: "Eqra! Proclaim!"

"I cannot read," reacted Mohammed fearfully.

"Read in the name of God, who taught man by the pen, who loves man and gives..."

Then Mohammed started to read the text out loud, unsure of himself.

At home his wife asked: " Mohammed, what is the matter? Why are you shaking so much?"

"I...I...I..."

She put his head in her lap and pulled a blanket over him. Again Gabriel appeared: "Jaa ajyo haal modasser! Khom fanzer....You who hides under the blankets! Get up! And warn the people!"

Since that time fourteen hundred years have passed. Now they commemorate his birthday in a jolly way in Amsterdam.

Not until that day did I realized that Islam is more present than ever in the Netherlands. And I saw that it was a different Islam than the one with which I was familiar. As we travel from the farthest eastern spot in Asia, where the sun rises, and gradually toward the West, where the sun sets, we will meet different faces of Islam. In fact, Islam is a material that takes different shapes from different molds. Its Dutch mold (poldermodel) has germinated.

Later, Mohammed fell in love with the young, beautiful Ayeshe, the daughter of Sultan Omar. At the time Mohammed had forbidden street music. But his young Ayeshe adamantly wanted to experience it.

Together they snuck to the rooftop, Mohammed did not look, Ayeshe did. As she stood there looking, she got tired. She wanted to sit down. Mohammed bent over and Ayeshe sat on his back.

The time is ripe that The Netherlands comes to know Mohammed. Read his book, but just as a book. Such a wonder!

## Speak

In the discussion about minorities you often hear inappropriate words. For example: the big stick.

It is suggested that a big stick should be put behind the door in order to force parents to speak Dutch at home. If you do that, Dutch becomes a language in which the immigrant expresses hate. It's also not wise if immigrant parents only speak Dutch at home. Because they cannot keep up with their children, that will have a negative effect on their language development. It is a blessing if the children can also speak the parents' language.

An experiment. We were a group of seven families with thirteen children when we came to the Netherlands. The youngest child in the group was five, and the oldest twelve. We did not enter as asylum seekers, but were invited in as refugees. For that reason the municipality had to facilitate our entrance into society.

We received a contact person, a volunteer, someone who immediately spoke Dutch with us, even though we didn't know a word. Then every family was offered a house in a neighborhood where everyone around us spoke Dutch. The children went immediately to school. No separate classrooms, no separate classes. Totally normal, according to age, in different grades. They only took a month-long language class.

Not one of the parents spoke Dutch at home. Now, after eleven years, those children speak excellent Persian, but their Dutch is a hundred times better. Two of those children study medicine, two of them are in high school, five of them in middle school, and the rest of them in trade school.

It turned out differently for the parents. Some of them could manage, but a few remained so isolated from the Dutch language that they longed for death.

Sticks? Even a hundred sticks could not have changed anything.

Based on this experience I think the language deficiency of other children can also be solved:

- If they get the chance to more easily go to daycare.

- If society offers them the possibility to go to a school where the majority speaks Dutch.

- And if they are given a space to live and play next to Dutch speaking children.

So I call for direct contacts.

And I think that is possible.

The Netherlands has not closed its door completely, but you have to struggle to open it.

It is the duty of the immigrant intellectuals and the task of the sons and daughters of the guest workers to take up the pen and let the voice of their parents be heard.

There is no other way.

## The Fears of a Publicist

Clip I: "Why is the straggling of entire generations of immigrant minorities and the formation of an ethnic underclass not discussed in more pressing terms?"

As energetically as 'the social question' was gone at in the old days, so hesitatingly is the multicultural **drama**, which is enacted before our eyes, handled... Unemployment, poverty, dropping out of school and criminality pile themselves up among the ethnic minorities... It is about enormous numbers of stragglers and those without a chance, who weigh on Dutch society in ever increasing measure. The situation for the future is most troubling. In the next fifteen years the Netherlands will accommodate about one million asylum seekers. Very many of them struggle with **traumas** because of the wars or battles they have encountered.

Clip II: "The **enormous** problems which that delivers are known, but it seems that the advocates of a generous asylum policy are not much concerned... but we (Netherlanders) cannot continue to pass over the cultural isolation and the feelings of **resentment**."

Clip III: "Moroccans are angry with the society that so used their parents, and with their parents because they didn't fight against it. Some worry about the **resentment** and **hatred** towards the Dutch society. Many of these 'victims' make a swift career as **perpetrator**."

Clip IV: "In a time of massive immigration, freedom in the Netherlands cannot be maintained through old methods... A society that belies itself has nothing to offer newcomers. A majority that denies being the majority, has no eye for the 'hard skills' of integration, which also always means the loss of one's own traditions... Let's begin by taking the Dutch language, culture and history more seriously... Tolerance groans under the weight of overdue maintenance... The multicultural **drama** that plays itself out is then also the greatest threat to social peace."

These are clips from a long article by the publicist Paul Scheffer in the *NRC Handelsblad*. His fears remind me of the millennium



fears. Some hoarded and a few had procured a weapon. First I thought he had come out in support of the immigrants. Later I felt I had been crossed. The foreigners don't undermine the Dutch culture. They give it strength. The satellites have cleared away the boundaries between cultures. The curious person moves over the entire earth in order to claim his part of the wealth and of modern science. It is one of the markers of our time. The foreigners have not just entered Holland, but also by the millions in Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Norway, Canada and America.

This leads to problems that can be resolved. The word drama fits for someone that wants to hold on to his own potato.

People who have escaped a war, a catastrophe, a dictator, must not per se be mentally ill. Those people are most often able to start over stronger than ever and take part in the new culture. Germans were also not mentally paralyzed after the war.

Refugees are also worried about the Dutch language of our children. It has been so for a long time that the health of the Dutch society became synonymous with the health of our children. Dutch society is no longer yours. Away with the resentment, hatred, traumas and dramas of the publicist.

Paul Scheffer, step aside! The Netherlands is also ours.

## What Did He Want to Say?

Kurds, the Kurds have occupied me in recent weeks.

When I put my head on a pillow, I thought of them. When I descended the stairs, I thought of them. And when my friends came, I talked about them. I did not expect that I would feel so involved. Why was that?

Am I, perhaps, a Kurd?

No, but one of my great-grandfathers was a Kurd.

A real, traditional Kurd. He was always silent when he looked outside.

“Are you waiting for someone?” He said nothing, as if he had a gag order.

And he hummed:

*Be sahara bengaram, sahara té binom*

*be darja bengaram daarja to binom...*

*When I look at the mountains, I see you,*

*when I look at the land, I see you.*

*When I look at the sea, I see you.*

*Wherever I look, I see you.*

Who was this great-grandfather? I know nothing about him, I only know that song.

I myself wear a Kurdish name: Kader Abdolah. But that’s not me. I hide behind two Kurds, two friends: Kader and Abdolah.

Kader was a Kurdish doctor. A doctor on horseback with a bag on his back.

“Dr. Kader, come quick. A pishmarge (fighter) has fallen.”

He jumped on his horse and rode away.

“Dr. Kader, come quick. My wife can’t give birth.”

He jumped on his horse and rode away.

Abdolah was an urban planner. He had plans for Iraq. He designed bridges for a train that, in his dreams, rumbled through the mountains.

The design of the Kurdish university, which would one day come, hung in his office.

During the war, when Kurdistan was independent for a few seasons, I was there. I went as a writer, from one house to another to let the voice of the Kurds be heard.

Suddenly the warplanes came and they bombed everything flat. The imam Galgali, who carried a chair under his arm, stepped out of a tank.

He took his seat in the city square to judge hundreds of arrested Kurds in one afternoon.

"Name?"

"Kader"

"Occupation?"

"Doctor."

"Oh, so that's you. The doctor on the horse."

"But I must explain something," said the doctor. "I wanted to say ..."

He didn't get the chance. He was blindfolded and executed.

Next.

"Name?"

"Abdolah."

"Occupation?"

"Urban Planner."

"Oh, you're that one. That..."

"But I want to explain something. I wanted to say..."

He also got no chance.

I fled. To let their words be heard. The title of my first Persian book was: *What Do the Kurds Say?*

And because the Kurds have never had the opportunity to express themselves, the pain in their songs is strong:

*You said you would come  
as soon the first flowers bloomed.  
All flowers in the world have ceased blooming,  
why are you not here?*



## Help

In the late autumn of 2000 a couple of prison officers brought Iran's most famous journalist, Akbar Gandji, into the courtroom. He was still in his prison jumpsuit and his head was shaved. He looked more like a doped or psychiatric patient than a powerful journalist. Once he set foot inside the courtroom, he raised his arms in the air and shouted: "Help! They torture me. Look at my wounds. The head of the prison system has beaten me with the help of three officers. Out of complete helplessness, I began a hunger strike!"

The policemen forced him to sit down in the seat of the accused. Suddenly he took off his striped jumpsuit and put it under his seat.

When the clerical judge came in and saw him with no clothes, he asked: "Where are your clothes?"

"I am a political prisoner," he cried. "According to the international rights of political prisoners, no one can force me to put on this jumpsuit. I am a journalist, and I have done nothing more than support the reforms. And that is not a crime. So nobody should lock me up in a dark cell for 108 days."

"Sit! And keep quiet," threatened the judge, "otherwise I will hold your trial behind closed doors."

"I do not even recognize this court," he replied. "The decision has been made. You will kill me." Then he revealed the crimes of the mullahs against the political prisoners.

When the clergy gained the power after the revolution, it was the end of the free press. Bearded men from the brutal secret police took control of the editorial pages and dozens of journalists and writers were killed or went missing. The heavy suppression lasted seventeen years. Suddenly there were new voices in the newspapers. They could not believe it.

A group of unknown journalists appeared in the spiritual papers. They came directly from the center of the regime, had a strong pen and knew the secrets.

Actually they were the sons, and daughters of the mullahs themselves, the trustees of the Imam, former bodyguards of the great spiritual leaders, former advisers to the current right-wing conservative leader, torturers, former employees of the secret service who had discovered something diving in the morass of the Islamic republic: the freedom of expression for people is just as necessary as water and bread.

The hope flared up again. The reckoning began. First they helped Khatami, the liberal Mullahs, into the seat of the presidency. Then they turned to the powerful conservative forces and tried to knock them out of the saddle.

Gandji was the most famous and smartest journalist of that generation. He was brave.

He supported the reforms with his powerful pen and we needed his articles like we needed bread and water. He supported President Khatami, but Khatami has fallen. The president fell into the lap of the right-wing conservative leader. In the past year, all the journalists who supported him have been shaved and stuffed into striped jumpsuits, but the president does not respond. He sees nothing, he hears nothing, and he has fallen so deep that he can no longer open his mouth.

The Tehran spring is over. The phase of Khatami is over. The process of reform has been nipped in the bud. A dark period has broken out again. No one dares raise his voice. But Gandji raised his voice one more time, as the last.

## He Who Talks Much

I am reading a very old Persian book, *Kélilé wá Demné*. And I've summarized a chapter of it's wisdom for you.

Hekajat: Once a group of birds sat down together to see if they could elect the owl as their king. They were very busy working on it and discussing it. Then a crow appeared in the distance. The birds said, "He is one of us, we can also ask his opinion."

The crow perched beside them.

"We are on the verge of choosing the owl as sultan of our province," said one of the birds to him, "Could we also have your opinion?"

"Suppose all the birds of the meadow die," said the Raven, "and the peacock and the eagle also disappear, then life would be better without a king than to appoint the owl king. He has an ugly face and little common sense, his rage is boundless and his mercy is limited. He is afraid of the light and hides in the dark. Further, he is mean and miserly. So put him to the side and find another."

The birds listened to him, followed his advice and rejected the owl.

The owl looked stunned at the crow and said to him, "You can bet that the owls will never forget this. You have inflicted me with a wound that will not heal before the end of time. When you saw down a tree, it grows once again, when you wound someone with a sword, the wound heals after a while, and if you get an arrow in your heart, you pull it back out, but the wound that a word inflicts never heals. The tree of resentment that you have planted will be rooted deep in the earth and its branches will reach the red star. Just wait!"

The crow was filled with immense regret at his act and reproached himself: "Stupid of me. I have made a serious mistake. The owls will never let my people rest. Why was it necessary for me to interfere in the matters of another? These birds knew for themselves who they wanted as king. They also knew that despot better than anyone, but they were smart, they



used my words to reject the owl. Stupid of me, I didn't see the situation and ran blindly into it. I've done something that a wise one never would have done, because if he is absolutely certain he will never say it directly. He always keeps a little room for any mistakes. Even if you invented a cure for snake poison, you still wouldn't let the snake set its fangs in your flesh. If I had been wise, I would have thought about it first, and then I would have spoken to someone about it.

And only if it were necessary, would I have calmly, in veiled and nuanced terms given my opinion. He who talks much can be compared with someone in the desert that searches for dead branches in the dark; chances are that a black desert scorpion will sting him dead. He who talks much can suddenly let slip a word that kills him."

The crow talked to himself in this way for a long, then flew away and disappeared.

## Brave People

The people at the Foreign Affairs ministry think that windmills, tulips, and clogs are outdated. They want to lend the Dutch image a helping hand.

Are the Dutch people the ones who define the Dutch national image? The famous story about the Dutch boy that stopped the leak in the dike with his finger is not a story from the Netherlands.

We learned about the boy at school, and he made such a deep impact on us that we will never forget his valiant deed. Because of him we admired the people who lived in a low land behind a dike.

Later we were introduced to the famous Dutch Cheese Girl on the cookie tins. She also made an impression on us. At a time when all of the women in our land were covered in veils, that Dutch girl stuck out her beautiful chest provocatively. We boys in the neighborhood thought she was brave.

The old images are now replaced with a number of new ones, but I had not expected that the old women of our house also knew them. Our religious grandmother recently visited us in the Netherlands. She hardly left the house.

"I have nothing do with the outside and will be dead soon. I have come only to visit you."

I sometimes took her in the car with me and drove past the windmills and the tulip fields.

But I noticed that it didn't make much of an impact on her.

"Boy, I have heard that all of the people here smoke that stuff," she said one evening.

"What kind of stuff?"

"I don't know, but you don't do that right?"

"No, surely not. I don't do that."

Two laughing young men walked past our window.

"Are they it?" she whispered.

“What?”

“Men that do sinful things everywhere and also adopt children?”

One time I pointed out a pair of muddy clogs in front of the door of a farm. “That I do know,” she said. When we were walking back, she said, “I have heard that people stand in their windows.”

“Who?”

“And that they are so beautiful that an orange light radiates from their bodies.”

In the darkness I drove to the place where they sit behind the windows and their chests and buttocks give off an orange glow.

“Now I have seen at least something from life, when I die,” she said satisfied.

At night, when I helped her into bed, I wanted to cover her with a bed sheet. “You aren’t going to strangle me, right?”

“What do you mean, Grandma?”

The foreign affairs department does not need to worry about improving the Dutch image.

My grandmother and I have just done that together. After a couple long nights of discussion, we have established the following:

The first people that chose the marshes of this land as foundations for their homes were brave.

The Netherlands looks like a bouquet of tulips that fell out of the sky and onto the ground.

The Netherlands is a country where everyone sits in a coffee shop and smokes grass.

The Netherlands is a country where the men have sex in the street. And homosexuals adopt children.

The Netherlands is a country where prostitutes go to work on their bike, just like the prime minister, go to work on their bike.

The Netherlands is a country where they put a white sheet over the heads of old people and strangle them with it.

The Netherlands is a country where one gives God a helping hand.

The Netherlands is a country where people dare.

And before you die, you must visit Amsterdam.



## Congratulate

700,000 and one Muslims live in the Netherlands. And now it's Ramadan. Who takes part in this holy month? Do all Muslims these days fast in the Netherlands? Do they comply with the norm? I don't know, but I do know that most Iranians do not fast. Persian culture is a merging of two cultures, that of the ancient Persian Empire and that of Islamic culture. When the shah was in power, He aimed for the glory of ancient times. Then came the clergy, they strove for the glory of Islam. When Iranians move abroad, the Muslim side fades, and the original Persian feeling branches off.

I was surprised when I first encountered Arab Muslims who seriously observed Ramadan. I was even more surprised when I spoke to their artists and writers. They too strictly observed Ramadan. In Iran, we for the most part (secretly) did not do it. I found it impressive of the Dutch Arabs, but unfortunately I never talked to them about it.

Meanwhile, I notice that the month of Ramadan in the Netherlands receives ever more space and attention. Even a decade ago it was the holy month of the guest workers, but Ramadan has taken on Dutch traits. The Muslims talk more assertively about it and the holy month makes it to the front of the newspapers.

The ancient ritual is clearly making its mark on the edge of Dutch society. Ramadan is sacred because in that month the Quran was revealed. Allah gave a piece of paper to Gabriel, on which he had written the first sura of the Quran: "Teach Mohammad to read this!"

Gabriel descended to earth and held it before Mohammad: "Eqra (Proclaim)! Read this!"

"I can not read," said Mohammad.

In memory of that night, the Muslims in the Netherlands are supposed to not eat or drink during the day for two weeks. After that comes the festival, the Sugar Festival to mark the end of Ramadan.

The old Ramadan in the Netherlands took on a new lowland form. What Dutch Muslims do, differs from the original. It isn't only about refraining from food and water.

Ramadan is the month of reflection with many rules, but in this hectic society, one cannot always follow them.

The Sugar Festival has not received appropriate attention in the Netherlands. In Islamic countries the kings congratulate their subjects with perfume, flowers and sugar. It would be polite if the Dutch government would react to the festival. Wim Kok, the Minister of State, could say a few unusual phrases in his weekly notes. A suggestion: "Tomorrow is the Sugar Festival. The revelation of the Quran. Thousands of our compatriots have observed Ramadan for a month. Tonight they go into the clouds to find the new moon. Congratulations."

Because The Hague might have some difficulty with this as a political issue, perhaps Queen Beatrix could do it. She could just happen to go stand in the garden and say: "Oh, it's cold outside, if I had only put on a head scarf. Look! There! A young moon between the clouds. How unique." Then she can go back inside.

Or maybe we should leave that to Prince Alexander. It is good for the monarchy. He will be king, and he has almost a million Muslims in his kingdom. On the festival day, he could unexpectedly enter one of the mosques and shout: "O, a party. Is there perhaps something to drink here?"

Do that. It will do you good.

## Education and Integration

“Educating immigrants is not substantially different. Differences with immigrant children are small,” says a new study.

“So Dutch and immigrant children receive the same education?” asks the editor of *NRC Handelsblad* of Trees Pels, one of the researchers.

“The differences are much smaller than we think,” she replied.

That answer is good, but they have overlooked something important in their research. There are plenty of rumors about the immigrant living rooms: strict fathers. Pathetic mothers who stand day and night in the kitchen serving the men. Naive daughters who will soon be sent to the mountains as brides. And brutal boys who are coddled like crown princes.

The hierarchy of a traditional family is as follows: The man. The woman. The boys. The girls. The grandfather. The grandmother. And the milieu.

Or sometimes: The man. The grandfather. The boys. The woman. The grandmother. The girls and the milieu.

Most foreigners who come to live in the Netherlands, take the first hierarchy with them. When the children are still small, this power sequence still works, but, as the children grow, something substantial happens. And, at some point, the mother and the girls carry out a kind of coup.

The traditional hierarchy is abolished, the man is set aside and the girls get the power. The new power sequence is as follows: The girls. The mother. The boys. The father.

The old parental authority disappears. The girls take over the reins. And the boys? They don't show a rebellious attitude, they try to maintain peace in the tent.

Are these changes good? Sometimes they are good. Sometimes they are very good. And sometimes they are downright miserable.

Men who lay down with the change of power and cooperate with the changes, undergo a complete change. The family takes



on a new character and there are many new ideas brought home by the kids.

Something modern blooms in these families, something of a revolution. If the father agrees to new ideas, he gets a piece of his power back. He is respected and sometimes he gets to raise the children.

But men who cannot stand this loss, destroy the family. In vain they try to rule with an iron fist, but it's an effort that leads nowhere. The girls leave the house. Thus they are punished.

The Dutch language plays an important role in this change of power.

Immigrant children have something in common with the children of deaf parents. They wake up and find that they are different from the other children, whose parents completely understand their language. Their body is preparing urgently to emerge as an adult. And they are completely aware of their dominance. If we occasionally read in the newspapers about a man who has killed his daughter, we should not immediately think of a strong, strict man who grabbed a knife, but of a powerless man who was disposed of by his daughter and who couldn't stand the loss.

Nevertheless, we, the men, are proud of our daughters. They are the pioneers of our new life. They connect us with the changes outside. They are our language improvers, our system managers, our pride. We live happily together and we let them educate us, if necessary. The men who want their power back, must fight Holland's windmills with their rusty swords.

"Educating immigrants is substantially different."

Look at the men who fight the windmills.

## Djal and Roedabé

“Give me a historical example,” said the queen of the Low Countries to Bidpa, “help me imagine the wedding of my son.”

Bidpa came forth with an ancient Persian story as an example: “When Prince Djal hunting on horseback, he saw a young woman at the window. Her face shone like the sun in the morning, her hair as black as *shabaq* [wormwood], her eyes as beautiful as those of a gazelle, her lips as red as rubies, and her black eyebrows had the arc of the young moon. Djal lost his balance. At night he could not sleep. He asked his old servant if he would go find out who she was. Roedabé was her name and she had the blood of Zahak in her veins.

Zahak was the most horrible king of Persia, from whose shoulders snakes were grown for his crimes. The people had to deliver a young man to the royal kitchen every day to feed his snakes with his brains.

In the end, the people revolted and killed the king and his snakes.

Djal knew immediately that it was an impossible love and that he should stay away from her.

That same night Roedabé sat in her bed to watch the moon.

The next day Djal rode far way from Roedabé’s house, but at night he could no longer suppress his desire. He galloped to her window, where she awaited him. Meanwhile, she sent out her old servant to find out who the horseman was. He appeared to be Djal, the hero, about whom many stories of courage and beauty had circulated. Djal was hiding under the window, but did not know what he should do next. Roedabé greeted him. And asked what he was looking for in the beautiful night and why he hurt his royal feet on her hard ground. Djal gave her the ultimate answer, “The whole night I have asked my god to show me your face one more time. Think that over and let me come stand beside you.

At that time Roedabé waved her long black hair over the window, leaned over and said softly, “Here! For years, I have let my hair grow long for tonight.”

Djal kissed her long hair, threw his rope through the window and climbed to Roedabé. They embraced and experienced one of the most beautiful Persian nights. Once the light broke through the window, they knew that when his father the Shah heard about their love story, he would kill Roedabé and the rest of her family.

The Shah heard about it. He asked Djal to come to him, spoke to him in the utmost secrecy, and warned him of the consequences of such marriages. That they would probably give birth to a son who would take up revenge for Zahak. Djal would have none of it. He stepped down from succession to his father and chose Roedabé. In the interest of the kingdom the Shah decided to kill all surviving relatives of Zahak. But the astrologers stopped him. They had read something else in the stars. The marriage was very blessed and the couple would have a son who would save the kingdom.”

“Bidpa, tell me now what I should do with her father,” see the queen.

“Do not belittle your folk. Stand amongst your subjects. Take your power and force the man to sit at home,” said Bidpa.

## In Africa

The captain of the plane shouted that we were flying over Cape Town. Through the window I looked down. The ground was brown. The earth stuck out her brown arms, like a black mother, to embrace you.

I had regained my Persian mountains.

The colors of Africa are dark yellow, dark red, dark green, dark blue and black.

I set foot on African soil for the first time. Suddenly I felt at home and I experienced this as a betrayal that in the Netherlands I never felt at home.

When I put my suitcase on the bed, I saw through the window a mountain in the distance. For years I had not climbed. I immediately put on my running shoes and ran to it.

I ran on the soil of Africa, and around me I saw only black men, black children playing on the ground. And the sun shone brightly.

I passed an old soccer stadium, ran along a wild river, at the bottom of the river were large round stones. These formed the stone floor of my home-river.

I ran among bushes I did not know and in the shade of trees with autumn fruits on the branches, I ran so far, until I came to barbed wire and couldn't go further.

I wanted to cross the river, but there was no bridge and moreover the bank on the other side was covered with tall sugar cane, so you couldn't run along it, but I had to.

At that moment, a black boy emerged from the cane sucking on a piece of sugar cane.

"I want to get to the other side," I said in English, "But how should I cross?"

"There!" He pointed to a few large stones that lay in the river.

Oh, I couldn't see. I used to be a mountaineer. For years I had crossed hundreds of wild rivers, but now I could no longer tell the stones that would make a nice bridge.

Awkwardly and hesitantly I crossed the river, jumping from one stone to another. And the boy helped me through the sugarcane to the mountain path.

I wanted to run to the foot of the mountain and back again. But I had become afraid. The mountain begged to be climbed. I wasn't allowed, was afraid something would happen and nobody could take me back. Ah, the Netherlands had changed me so. Earlier I went on my own in the cold, in a storm, into the mountains in the dark, but now, in the bright sunshine I dared not. Yet I climbed.

Halfway through the fear got me in its grip, I was afraid of a black snake, afraid of a mosquito that I suspected would bite me and feared malaria. Never before had I thought such things. The Netherlands had me scared. I had become too bourgeois.

I climbed on and reached the summit. The mountain rewarded me: I was home. And that beautiful scenery was mine, I was drunk with joy at the top, but a Dutch thought threw a black shadow over my happiness: who will pay if I suddenly break a leg? Is my travel insurance still valid? I was thirsty, saw the vines. Before I knelt as a deer, a buck, like a wild boar before a bunch of grapes.

This time I knelt before a bunch of dark red African grapes, only I dared not eat them.

## Out!

The Public Prosecution Service instituted a criminal investigation into the statements of a Rotterdam imam. The Moroccan imam Khalil el Moumni declared that homosexuality is a disease that is detrimental to society. Meanwhile, three other imams have gotten behind El Moumni and confirmed his statement: "If this disease spreads among the young, it will lead to extinction."

I find imam Khalil el Moumni to be an interesting man. He knows the sensitive spots of Dutch society and looks straight into the camera with self-control. He is the first imam to receive front-page headlines in all the newspapers.

Until yesterday, the imams said everything they wanted in the mosques. And nobody took them seriously. But suddenly the entire media machine is in motion.

Dutch society is changing significantly. Imam Khalil el Moumni, congratulations! You're smart. Your timing was perfect.

You know very well that the Netherlands is a wonderful democratic country. In this country everyone has the right to express his opinion. You too. There are often harsh words said against immigrants here. So do not be afraid. Express your opinion. Convert the land. Then you'll go down in history. One of these days I will come to your mosque to admire you for a moment. Where do you preach, actually? Imam Khalil el Moumni! It was always dirty to go to bed with men. That is what we learned at home. Not one time dirty, three times dirty, one hundred times dirty. But the men did it anyway, and they did it well.

Imam Khalil el Moumni! You also know that they did. Even the Imams did. The young imams in the dark rooms of the old closed boarding schools. If you deny that, I'll immediately go find some witnesses.

When can you officially call someone a homosexual? If he does it once? Or more often? Or if he always does it? Although Islam is known as a fixed strict religion, it is as slick as a fish. You may have committed sins, but if you act quickly and express regret,

your sins are forgiven. Many make use of these rules. Arabic literature has been enriched by this footnote to all these harsh laws.

In the Persian classics the masters have always done it with men and we have always forgiven them because of their fine work.

Imam Khalil el Moumni! You are now living in a country where much room is given to the views of one another, and where those views are protected. It's a celebration to participate in this democracy as a writer, artist, politician, and as an imam. To not only join, but to also give meaning to the democracy.

What has been achieved in this country up to now, the Taliban may achieve 300 years later. You imams, who live in the Netherlands, eat, sleep, make love and pray, know that you have a different task than that of imams in Afghanistan. Grab your chance! Participate in the democracy and take the new ideas (secretly) home for the other imams.

You're smart. Attempt something modern. Take initiative! Invite the homosexuals to your mosque once. They can take a shower first and put on clean socks. This opportunity to get acquainted is good for Dutch society as well as for Islam.

## Devil

Thousands of Americans dead. World Trade Center destroyed. Pentagon on fire.

Many planes hijacked. Enormous chaos in New York. America in shock. Bush stunned.

Those were the words I suddenly heard.

I sat with a few fellow writers in a cafe in Brussels, when the waitress quickly told of the disaster in French. What?! The whole night the hijacked Boeings flew in my sleep and pierced the towers of the World Trade Center.

“What do you think about it?” I asked a French colleague in the morning.

“Devil! The Devil exists. Times have changed, the Devil has learned to fly a Boeing 767. I’m terribly worried!”

“And you? What do you think about this whole situation?” I asked an old Italian colleague.

“I know a lot about astrology. Times have changed, mankind is struck by negative energy. I couldn’t sleep all night.”

In the afternoon I drove to the Dutch town of Hoorn, to give a lecture. During the drive I thought about all of the Hollywood movies I had seen in recent years. The directors had often seen New York under fire in their imagination. Bush’s speech also reminded me of the familiar scenarios in films where the presidents speak to the people.

I drove and thought that such crimes can only be interpreted with faith and a strong ideology. You have to receive the power to undertake such an awesome act from God and especially Allah. We have to respond by giving them back their human rights. That is the only weapon with which we can fight against the evil forces.

I was sad and happy at the same time that the President of the motherland clearly rejected the crime.

In Hoorn I first had an appointment with a journalist. First I asked her the question: “What do you think?”



“Afraid, I do not know why, but I'm very scared and afraid Bush will do crazy things.”

Then she began a strange question: "Suppose you were an employee in the north WTC tower, and suddenly you saw that an airplane was flying toward your workspace. What would you do? Would you stay put or jump from the 58<sup>th</sup> floor?"

Why that question now? I thought.

“I would jump. That way I would give priority to life.”

I thought of the hijackers that had set aside the pilots of the Boeings in order to pierce the towers. I saw them before me, at the last second they would have yelled with all their power “La illaha illa Allah.”

I checked my e-mails: “I ran as fast as I could to get the kids from school. Right in front of our eyes, people were jumping out of windows. Kids were in shock. Pray for us!”

That night I could not sleep and all the shops in Hoorn were closed except one where a couple of tramps sat. I went inside, they all sadly watched CNN. The owner unexpectedly turned off the TV and put Dutch music on.

Momentarily it sounded inappropriate. Then they looked at each other. An old woman sitting at the end of the bar moved a little along with the music. The men smiled, the woman dared more, stood up and carefully began to dance. She danced alone. In her movement, I saw mourning.

## Tyranny

America is looking everywhere for a sheet of paper, a certificate to confirm that bin Laden was behind the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. But that single piece of paper is nowhere to be found. They do have a stack of papers that they showed the NATO countries, but “these papers can’t stand up in a courtroom.”

What should America do? Attack! This is America. The America that sows hatred.

But America has two faces. One is a belligerent, dictatorial oppressor that has blood on its hands. The tyrant.

The other face of America is loved and shows ultimate beauty. It is the America of jazz, pop music, great novels, theater, poetry, democracy, movies, computers, travel to the moon, flights to the sun, inventions of wonderful things that bring mankind close, very close, to the secret of the universe. The wonderful country that is immersed in the dream of immigrants. America.

Islam also has two faces. In his writings Allah constantly reiterates that he is *Rahman* (merciful) and at the same time he warns everyone that he is *Djabbar*. And that is the ultimate tyranny.

Allah undergoes a metamorphosis when needed. The sweetest Rahman turns into the scariest tyrant.

One billion Muslims over the age of nine bow eighteen times a day towards Mecca and repeat an old sentiment from 1400 years ago, which fits well with these days:

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. We serve you and we ask for help. Lead us to the right path. On the path of those to whom you have freely given mercy, not that of those upon whom wrath rests, nor of the astray.

One billion Muslims, simultaneously placing their forehead on the floor 18 billion times a year in order that Allah leads them to the correct path.

The world of that Allah is full of beauty. Art comes in contact with the mystery of existence, the architecture shows heavenly

buildings, the carpet weavers create the most beautiful images wherewith they bring carpet to the edge of poetry. The calligraphy becomes one with the arabesques and together they offer an unprecedented view of art. Sacred texts are put in jewelry, gold gets a new gloss on the necks and breasts of Arab women and poetry and prose take on an unparalleled power.

But the other face of Allah is frightening. If he is angry, it is almost impossible to calm him. He destroys, he kills and he burns.

If necessary, he even asks the birds to throw stones in order to make his enemy like chewed straw on the ground. Here in his own words: "*Algarato malgare, wa ma venous malgara ...* The catastrophe! What is the catastrophe? And how will you come to know what that catastrophe is? On the day that the people are like scattered moths and the mountains like carded wool."

The Muslims that grab for a gun or an aircraft against America are the disciples of Allah.

Now the tyrant America stands opposite Allah as Djabbar.

America, don't do it! America, be patient! Think! You will lose the war against Allah.

America, leave your warplanes on the ground. Gather your strength and use it to help the Palestinians build their own, worthy state. Give them back their honor.

Allah will smile. And he'll love you. Palestine is the daughter, the lovely daughter of Allah. Understand that, America.

## Bin Laden

I know what I want to discuss, but hesitate to write about it. Well, I do not hesitate, I'm a little afraid. Also not afraid, let me say: "Around a head that does not hurt, you don't wrap a bandage."

The meaning of these words is perhaps not clear, but I cannot say it more clearly. If I do, it will be a bit surprising.

Logical and illogical at the same time.

There is something eastern in what you can only express with difficulty in the West.

Let's see if I have another example that fits better with the text.

Perhaps this: "Though you have antidote in your pocket, you shouldn't kiss the mouth of the poisonous snake."

I was recently in a restaurant. While drinking, we talked about Afghanistan and especially about Osama bin Laden.

Now that Kabul has fallen and the Taliban have been chased to the mountains, America has put everything toward catching Bin Laden. All guns, all planes, all bombs, all the money and all the interviews and discussions are focused on him.

Exciting, and you feel the excitement: on TV, on the radio, in the newspapers. And during that dinner.

"Whatever the cost America must get Bin Laden. And put him in a jail."

"I think he will be arrested before Christmas. Nice Christmas present for everyone!"

"They should shoot him. That is the best solution."

"What do you think?"

The whole time I had kept quiet. Now that was not going to work. At first I wanted to hide my opinion, but I found that ignoble. So I kissed the mouth of the snake and said, "I hope that America never catches Osama bin Laden!"

"Explain," said Jan.

I cannot explain. That just can't be done.

Chase away the Taliban to the Afghan caves! Bomb all the Al Qaeda training camps! Pull the terrorists roots and all from the ground! Drag Mullah Omar and his supporters behind bars in America! But Osama bin Laden must not be caught by the Americans.

Why not? I do not know, I listen to my own heart. I did not know Bin Laden at all and did not hate his Taliban Islam. What kind of feeling is this? Am I the only one? When I look around me, I know I definitely am not alone.

Is it because of Islam? No, I don't think so. Bin Laden doesn't count at all in the world of Islam. He is a terrorist. Can it come from America's radical intervention with our history? A bit, but not quite. Is it perhaps the very old historical wounds that may unexpectedly open? From the Crusades, for example. It was not a coincidence that that word came from the mouth of Bush.

Maybe it's the pain that the Palestinians suffer? Or can it be from the incredibly inappropriate arrogance of the West towards the east? I do not know.

The West turned bin Laden from a terrorist into an old wound. A painful eastern wound in history. No one should reach him and certainly not Americans.

Bin Laden asked his son to shoot him as soon as he hears American footsteps outside the cave. Thereafter, I would immediately bury him in a secret place. Why? I don't know.

## The Little Elements of Beer

If anyone should talk about beer or wine, it's not me. Well, maybe a bit about beer, but I don't have the necessary drinking culture.

When I am sad, I don't drink wine. Wine brings the grief with it into your tongue into your blood and gives it to your soul.

Beer, on the other hand, washes the sadness away, lacks the power to send it too deep.

When I drink wine, I feel a layer of depression in the morning, it lasts until eleven o'clock, half past eleven, then the depression returns. During that time I feel irritable. Chances are great that an unwanted word will slip from my mouth, or that I will do something wrong or hurt someone.

Because I know that, I stay in my study.

With beer, I don't have this problem. Drinking beer is fun. I'm apt to go right to work. A bottle of beer helps you concentrate better on the subject you are working on. Beer is at your service.

Wine goes to the secret places of your mind and awakens the locked up, forgotten memories. Wine surprises you. It takes you with it in your sleep to the impassable places of your mind and holds up a weather-beaten mirror before you. That is why you feel so tired in the morning.

Freddy Heineken is deceased. I have nothing new to say about him, I only knew him as the boss of Heineken. I used to be a colleague of his. In my fatherland I brewed beer for a while. One of the grandfathers in our house did it. A secret brewery in his dark basement. And I worked as his journeyman, cleaned the bottles, sieved the materials, carried away the brown stuff that sank to the bottom of the pan, put a watering can to the neck of the bottles and poured in beer, cleaned the pans with a rag, pressed caps on the bottles with a rusted press tool, occasionally glanced through the flap to the courtyard and kept an eye on grandmother.

When the clergy came, alcohol was banned. Grandfather bought illegal bottles on the black market, but they were all suspicious.

One night grandfather came home with a few pans, bottles and copper pipes and went quietly to the basement. So I became the journeyman of his brewery.

As soon as grandmother went to the bathhouse, we rushed to the basement, but the problem was that we could not get the beer clear. No matter how often I sieved, which sieve I used, there were loose, dark elements hanging in it. Every time we had a new problem. Sometimes the bottles exploded.

Sometimes it tasted too bitter, sometimes a little too sour.

I always admired Freddy Heineken for his clear beer. I could not understand how he did it and how he kept millions of people on earth happy.

It's precisely the beer that we wanted and what we never accomplished. Now I have found it. For clear beer, there are two elements necessary. First the freedom and then a grandmother who drinks.

## Women Without Men

I derive the text that follows from the Persian version of *Parsipoor*:

If she had become pregnant, it would have turned out better, thought Mahdocht. Her brothers would come together and kill her.

“My hymen possesses the attributes of a tree,” said Mahdocht to her, “why does my skin look so green.” The hymen is a thin skin, a film of flesh, grandmother always said, if you jump down from a height, you will damage your hymen.

“That is not true grandmother. It is not a flap, but a small hole, when you use it just one time, it becomes a big hole,” said Mahdocht.

“Hogwash,” said grandmother. “Go away!”

“I haven’t said anything wrong. I read it in a book. I read many books. It’s a hole.”

Mahdocht sat at the window and thought that she had looked at the garden for twenty-eight years with the thought of the hymen. She was eight years old when they told her that if a girl loses her hymen, God would never forgive her. She sighed and looked at the trees, she had always wanted to climb one of those trees, but she was afraid of damaging her hymen.

Remaining a virgin and getting a virgin is a fundamental issue in Islamic countries. The men who get their brides from their homeland do so as guardians of that rusty tradition.

It’s also a theme that recurs often in our literature and films. You always hear stories about girls who commit suicide. And about men who kill each other with a knife. And about the horrified parents. And about the doctors who illegally repair the damaged tissue. Virginity is a passport for a young woman, she is otherwise illegal.

It is one of the biggest obstacles to freedom for women in religious societies, a heavy chain that men put around the feet of girls and young women.



The men, who get their brides from overseas, try in this way to stubbornly maintain that tradition.

I am not speaking now about the hopeless men or about the imams. I am addressing the young men who live here and engage in a kind of macho behavior. They clearly trample one of the key rights of women. They consume the freedom, enjoy everything, but they don't want that for women. They give themselves the liberty to crawl into any bed they choose, but if they marry, they go in search of a woman whose body has not even been seen by the moon. These are young men from the second or third generation of immigrants who fear a brave woman and therefore look for an obedient one.

So they put the chain around the ankles of the young immigrant women. They pee on the poles of democracy and they go unpunished for it. I stand with harsh words against those men.

Yet, something ironic is happening. Immigration also helps the new brides. Soon they are aware of their rights. Then they sit on their husbands as a bride on a worn couch.

The following fall Mahdocht planted herself along the river. In the spring, after the first rain, green leaves grew from her fingers and her feet softly rooted in the warm soil.

## Simorg

Terrorism! Caution! You are walking in a minefield! The assault on the Twin Towers in New York suited the modern electronic world. We are again witnessing an extraordinary series of suicide attacks: after Bali now Riyadh and Morocco.

Earlier two men rode on a motorcycle, one drove and one opened fire. Later, they left behind a car full of explosives. Now they are destroying themselves together with their target and innocent civilians. An act of revenge. Ravage.

Do they achieve something with their actions? That is the question. But with the Western way of thinking, you can't find an answer. It sounds strange. Exploding your *I* with dynamite to make a difference. If your *I* does not exist, you do not exist. So you achieve nothing. But the problem is that they do not want to achieve anything. The goal is the destruction of the *I*. In Eastern philosophy and Islamic doctrine *I* has no value.

Everything revolves around *WE*. *WE* is central. *I* wants to achieve nothing. *I* will destroy itself so that *WE* can achieve something.

Is this a Muslim approach or is it older than Islam? I think the roots of it are much older than Islam. Am I mistaken? That is possible. I'm trying to understand.

The idea lies in the Eastern way of thinking. But Islam has brought it to the forefront. In our old stories, our myths, our history we have many examples of a man or a few men who take action against a powerful government, although they know they are destroying themselves and that they achieve nothing. At that time there was no dynamite or a pistol or an airplane, but what those men did, was the same thing. Thus *WE*! That idea calls for ultimate violence against the enemy when used politically. But in literature the pinnacle of beauty has been achieved with this idea. One of the best examples is a masterpiece of the poet Attar. Thousands of birds gathered to choose their king. The bird Hodhod said, "There is nothing to choose. The king of birds exists. Simorg is his name and he lives in the mountain Ghaf. We just need to look for him."

Simorg is a mythical bird. And Simorg is literally Si + morg. Si is the number thirty. And "morg" means, "bird." "Simorg" literally means "thirty birds." And the mountain Ghaf means "unreachable place."

Thousands of birds began with an impossible quest for the *I-Simorg*.

Hundreds turned back, hundreds fell dead. Until finally thirty exhausted birds remained.

Where is that mountain? Where is Simorg? They looked around. They saw nothing but themselves, thirty *I's* that came together to form the mythical bird Simorg. An *I-Simorg* did not exist. They were the Simorg. Many *I's* needed to fall in order for Simorg to appear.

It is therefore the idea, not the person, not the body of one or two or ten terrorists. It is Simorg.

When the Americans plowed the land of Afghanistan, the land of Iraq with their ultra-modern warplanes, many *I's* came out of the ground.

Can anyone stop them? I do not know.

If Iraq were a democracy, the *I's* might return to whence they came.

## The Culture of the Father

The Muslims feel offended by the words of the Dutch politician, Pim Fortuyn. Sorry dad, sorry dear uncle, sorry aunt, sorry Muslims, but maybe that's good for you.

I have learned that the word was once everything, and that the first word was God's.

I have also learned that you should look carefully at where the words come from. The words of Pim Fortuyn come out of his ass.

What he says is not special, that's why it is always discussed quietly.

Just one time it should be said loudly. The most important lesson that immigration has taught me is: express your opinion! And listen to the opinion of another! Therefore I hate the Muslim organizations that immediately play the victim. I hate them when they immediately seek refuge at the National Bureau against Racial Discrimination and complain, "We feel attacked. We fear a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. And the statements that Islam is a backward culture, and that the border should be closed to Muslims."

Brother! Do not fear a divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. This division is well established.

Do not be angry if someone tells the truth. Pim Fortuyn is right. The culture that now represents Islam is backward.

And don't worry about a closing of the border. I read somewhere that a man with a slick head who talks out of his ass can never close the border.

No whining, no moaning! Your Islam is the Islam of my father, your religion has brought wonderful things, but the power of Islam is over.

Stop groaning! Grab your chance! Explain to that man why your culture is not backward, if you can.

I'm afraid you cannot. The essential rights of mankind are violated in Islamic cultures. An example? Very simple: women there have no rights.

Another example? Men there have almost no rights.

And that means that we are immensely backward.

Islam was once a revolution, the revolution: *La Elaha ella Allah*. That slogan suddenly blew fresh air over the earth. An unprecedented achievement of equality. Islam was simultaneously the ultimate poetry and the ultimate violence. It was a volcano. But seven centuries ago the energy of that volcano ran out.

An excellent book is all that remains of Islam, the Quran.

That is my book. Will I ever be able to write as mysteriously as the Quran? The Quran is wealth. But the Quran does not tolerate the views of another. It determines. It forbids. It destroys.

The book of my father has arrested our cultural, industrial and commercial developments.

The Bible is also an excellent book. But the Bible is also a backward book if you use it as law.

Brother! Do not be afraid of Pim Fortuyn. He is one of us, consists of us. Because we exist, he exists. He's our by-product: a toadstool.

We, those who have left our home, must dare to criticize our own cultural heritage. That is the law of immigration. No talk of vicarious shame. If we do that ourselves, there is no room left for Pim Fortuyn.

That is difficult and painful. But we have no way out, otherwise we put that burden on the shoulders of our children. Judaism, Christianity, Islam and the Enlightenment are several routes that humanity has taken during its development. All are the cultural heritage of our beautiful planet.

## It No Longer Matters

Dutch politician, Pim Fortuyn has been killed. In my opinion that is unacceptable. So says someone who has had many friends, relatives and comrades who have been killed just for their views. A bullet in their head, a bullet in their back, a bullet in their neck and a bullet in their sleep. Until the end of the world that is unacceptable.

His death hit me head on accompanied with fear. An old fear.

Seeking the identity of the perpetrator I immediately turned on the TV and the radio. There were six shots fired. The perpetrator was not arrested. Would he be a Muslim? I looked out the window. As if I expected a riot to break out in the the street soon.

"The perpetrator has been arrested!" I heard in the living room. "And?"

"They haven't released any details."

Especially since they are holding further details close to their chest, chances are he is a fanatical Muslim.

I went out the door, I could not stay home. I felt that outside everything had changed. If someone passed, I knew what he thought: foreigner! I thought this might be the last time that I would be in the old atmosphere, the atmosphere of a half hour ago, walking in the street. Soon everything could be different. I felt the street press on my shoulders. I would not vote for a person like Pim Fortuyn, but in my column, I shook his hand. My cellphone chimed: "Arrested! A white Dutchman!"

The street fell off my shoulders. I could breathe normally again. I dared to look at the people, "Hello, good evening!"

Nothing was the old way anymore. Nothing could bring back the situation of an hour ago. The country leaves behind its traditional Dutch pattern. The six bullets announce a new phase, but not necessarily a negative one. Pim Fortuyn was a manifestation of that change. Society perished in order to come back stronger.

Prime Minister Kok said that this people can bear much. I doubt that. But I hope that people in the voting booths will just think a moment before pressing that button. But there will be no significant change, even if Pim Fortuyn's party should win 45 seats. I do not believe in the Dutch, but I believe in Dutch democracy.

It is a thousand times older and wiser than those I see on TV these days and about whom I read in the papers. It is powerful, it has become one with the rain in this country. And no one can take it away. In a short time they have become firmly rooted in my body. I became a Democrat. Extremely tolerant. And I feel more sane than ever. I got the chance to become myself. That is because of the precious spirit of Dutch law. Your mind can cause embarrassment, but to compel him to leave is impossible. My greetings to Pim Fortuyn, but I am against him and against his party.

PS: On that night when I returned home, I noticed that I had changed.

I am no longer afraid of the race and color of a perpetrator. Warning! There is a real chance that the next offender will be a radical Muslim, a dark or a black, yellow, green, that does not matter. The immigrants no longer need to worry. The Netherlands has changed. It can now endure it.

## Damned Moroccan!

“They want to blacken us when they talk about us / We’ve done nothing to them and still they want to hate us / They want to blacken us when they talk about us / Until this has changed you will never understand.”

This rap from Raymzter is very long. I've read it almost twenty times and listened to it five times. In rap, the texts are always very long. The rappers have a lot to say. And they don't just tell about the love that's lost, they rap because they have to. He raps because he has been thinking about something for a long time. He reacts, he reacts strongly. He kicks, he hits, he expresses himself: “I really didn't see a single person try / To profile Moroccans any better / You'd rather see us arrested / So I came to you, ladies and gentlemen / to teach you / not to lump us all together.”

The rap of Raymzter consists of words that are not said and that need to be said. So I read him and listened.

For the first time there is a Dutch artist of Moroccan descent who clearly stands for the rights of Moroccans. Until now almost every Moroccan who had achieved success, turned their backs on the Moroccan community. They show hesitation and suffer from a kind of identity problem. Raymzter does it differently. He solved the problem nicely: “I'm as Moroccan as I am Dutch. I even eat cauliflower, I was born here / that you can almost hear / You look at me dirty from behind / and politely from the front / My honest words hurt your ears / With such a of mindset, the world is lost.”

He shows confidence and knows what he is talking about.

He speaks badly needed new words for “the being” of the young generation: Dutch Moroccans. He has a new voice and his text is clear and politically engaged.

He compares his rap with the act of a historical Arabian hero, Abdel Karim: “I rap and that is the thing that helps me win Abdel Karim 1821.”

The Prophet Mohammad turns up in his song. Raymzter calls himself a poet and not just a poet, but one of the caliber of the



Prophet, “Raymzter is a poet who can speak properly. Like Mohammad, the prophet, this you should know.”

He incorporates the Prophet Mohammad into his text, and thus he gives more weight to his message. Mohammad was a poet, a storyteller and a fighter. You can best read his musical suras in the Quran as a great rap. If Mohammad were a Dutch-Moroccan boy, he would have had chosen rap, “shit like that can ruin my day / when I walk past a woman / and I see her hide her purse / but my dad really had it worse / he was a Berber, a guest from the mountains.”

Our rapper speaks nor reads Arabic, he also doesn't know the Quran, but the phrases he rhymes, read like the suras of the street, “We came here as guest workers on the *downlow* / to spread some good hash / I still remember what they used to call me, / I was a bit smaller: damned Moroccan, / that's what they said.”

Raymzter calls himself a star. The Dutch nights are becoming increasingly more interesting, new stars are emerging.

## Jahjah's Dream

The Belgian Muslim militant organization Arab European League (AEL) is busy setting up sister organizations in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. Dutch politicians react nervously. Some speak of an immediate ban, others of a tough approach.

What does the charming 31-year-old Abu Jahjah say that works the nerves of Belgian and Dutch politicians so badly and what are the foundations of his ideas?

What's wrong with us? Look how they have humiliated us. They kill us, put us under so much oppression that we lose our human dignity.

Belgium pushes us to excuse us for our presence.

Under these inhuman conditions, the Arabs in Europe become more Arab than European.

The new generation of Arabs is not prepared to live in Europe as second-class citizens.

Our identity is rooted in two sources: the Arab civilization and Islam. The young generation is Arab and Muslim first and European second.

Abu Jahjah comes to the market with something new, which generates fear in Belgium and the Netherlands: Islam is becoming a part of European culture and it makes an essential contribution to European civilization. He believes that Arabic should be adopted as an official language.

I partly agree with Abu Jahjah when he talks about the inhuman situation of immigrants in Belgium, let's say Europe. I stand beside him when he tries to show the seriousness of this situation. And I enjoy when he unfolds his ideas with conviction. I'm glad he's there. But unfortunately I can't stand next to him for long.

The young generation of immigrants in Belgium has lost its hope. What does Abu Jahjah do? He gives them new hope, a prophetic promise. But it is a false hope. He leads them to a mirage in the desert.

It's a lie when you tell those young men that they are part of a large Arab-Islamic civilization. Those young men do not belong to the original culture of Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and the rest.

The Islam of Saudi Arabia is not theirs. They do speak Arabic with an accent, but almost none of them can read or write it. Read the Quran? No, that they can't do. They have no place in the hard Sharia law of their grandfathers. They are Belgians, Dutch, Brits and Germans with an Islamic background. You are deceiving them when you refer to Mecca.

Islam in the Arab world cannot be the Islam of those young men. What Abu Jahjah says about the presence of Islam in Europe, I find interesting, but Islam in Europe must become a very different Islam. European Islam must take on the spirit of the Enlightenment. Not *la illaha illa allah* as a slogan, but "everyone is equal."

Abu Jahjah is working on a dream of pan-Arabism. An old ideal, but it has never come to anything in the Arab world and it will never come to anything in Belgium, the Netherlands.

Abu Jahjah, which Arabs are you talking about? That broad pure band doesn't exist there and definitely not here. Isn't it the Moroccan Berbers that are against the Arabic language? We'll see, I am glad Belgium has released him. He can do something for Belgium. Abu Jahjah, scream like a lion! But do not sell air to naïve teenagers!

## The Pen of the Guest Workers

It was not intended that the immigrants would continue to live here, let alone create their own space and fight for their own rights.

In the sixties, no one had counted on this, when The Hague allowed the men from Morocco and Turkey to come here. They thought they would return when the Dutch economy no longer needed them.

Business and politics had calculated it all, but they had not taken into account time as a decisive factor. They had forgotten that the young and strong migrant workers would one day be old.

According to them the guest workers would come alone and then return quickly, but it happened differently.

They missed their wives and children. And they brought them over.

For a while it was quiet. You didn't hear much about the children of the guestworkers. They were busy with their own questions. Do we belong to this society? Are these streets, the busses, the language, the trams, the movie theaters also ours? At the same time, in the big cities a group of tough young Moroccans emerged, that made the neighborhoods restless. They kicked at the phone booths, made the swimming pools uneasy and spit on everything they encountered.

A little later another group of immigrant children completely unexpectedly came forward. They seized the pen and published their stories.

Last week, Abdelkader Benali won the 2003 edition of the prestigious Libris Literature Prize. And rightly so! I congratulate the guest worker, father Benali.

I congratulate mother Benali on the outstanding literary achievement of her son.

And from the bottom of my heart I congratulate Abdelkader.

The presentation of the Libris Prize to Abdelkader Benali was a turning point in Dutch literature.

It is a confirmation of the wealth that immigrants have added to Dutch literature.

In the past fifteen years, the sons and daughters of immigrants have worked hard in Dutch literature. But the guardians of the white literary elite have always tried to give their books cheap labels like “immigrant literature.”

And I have an announcement: The domination of white Dutch literature has ended! There are dozens more dark writers and they are working on promising books.

Abdelkader Benali did not say it in his speech during the awards ceremony. I will say it. The Libris Prize is his, he deserves it, but the honor goes to all immigrant writers.

The guest workers could only bring their wives and children. They had to leave the rest behind. This younger group has picked up the pen, brought the mountains, the rivers, the mosques, the songs, the aunts, the grandmothers, the rugs, the goats and the Quran of their parents to the Netherlands and placed them on the soil of Dutch literature.

The guest workers from back then have now grown old.

Occasionally they go on their own back to their native village to see if they could live there, if they could grow old there, if they could, perhaps, buy a grave for themselves there.

But they are increasingly confronted with something unexpected. They went there in hopes of returning soon. But the return is impossible. The moment they left home, the lock fell shut on the door.

It does not matter. With the power of the word their sons and their daughters will open the doors.

## Al-Haram Al-Sharif

It's war and I have my pockets full of stones. I have just come back from Palestine and have thrown many stones. I had to. I stood there with my Palestinian friends when the Israeli helicopter fired missiles at us. I could not stand still, let alone watch. Like everyone else I grabbed the nearest, the best stone and threw. I do not know why, but I am a Palestinian, and I like Yasser Arafat, Abu Ammar. I like him as a father, an uncle, an older brother. It hurts me when I see his lips trembling more and more. I am always with him, stand behind him, especially in the moments when he wants to say something important in his poor English and he has forgotten the right word. I immediately jump to help him, whispering: "The Noble Sanctuary, Al-Haram Al-Sharif." At home we always talked about Al-Haram Al-Sharif, Al-Aqsa and Al-Sharif, Al-Quds Al-Sharif. As a child I fell in love with Al-Aqsa Mosque on the Heavenly Rock. And the following sentence aroused my imagination: "God built the rest of the world with the stones of that rock." And this was on a page of the old book with a dark brown cover that sat on our mantelpiece: "One night the angel Gabriel brought the heavenly horse Boraq to earth for Mohammad with an invitation from God. Gabriel helped Mohammad into the saddle and he galloped to the sacred rock. From there he went on horseback to heaven. God welcomed him, led him around and showed him His heaven, His rivers of stars, His Paradise and His secret wonders." In memory of that visit, the Muslims later built the magical shrine Al-Haram Al-Sharif on that rock, where the Al-Aqsa mosque shines as a miracle.

Years later I became acquainted with a couple of clandestine books of another kind wherein it said that we would one day descend from the mountains with our weapons into the city in order to drive out the dictator. In one of those books I saw for the first time the name of Abu Ammar.

In those days it was a dream to go to Palestine to meet Abu Ammar and free Al-Haram Al-Sharif with his guerrillas. But fate had other plans. The revolution began in our own country and we went first to expel the shah. And again fate decided

differently, I ended up here and I saw Abu Ammar for the first time on TV. He had grown old and his lips quivered. From that moment I have been with him everywhere. I accompanied him to the White House and I was with him when he secretly went to Israel. He kissed Mrs. Rabin on her head and condoled with her over the tragic death of her husband Yitzhak Rabin. And I walk with him when, tired and devastated, he returns from protracted negotiations. In these difficult days, I stand next to him with my pockets full of stones.

For thirty years I have not prayed, but I remember the day I prayed with Yasser Arafat with shaking hands in Al-Aqsa.

I declare: Al-Haram Al-Sharif is ours, is mine. But tonight I have a very secret mission from Abu Ammar. Deep in the night I am going to Jerusalem. I will share my Al-Haram Al-Sharif with Mrs. Rabin. Perhaps the war can be stopped in this way.

## Minarets

Rotterdam is beautiful, lively. The city moves and rejuvenates itself. When you approach the city today, you have to slow your speed to fifty miles per hour. It seems as if the city is thinking, and nobody should disturb her.

Rotterdam sits leaning forward, her hands in her hair because of her Muslims.

Action groups present a new plan every day: Immigrant ban! Immigrant integration! Unemployment Ban! Shut the door! Rotterdam is full!

Will it work? Will it not work? Is it not too late? Could something come of it? Nobody knows.

But Rotterdam is alive and wants to decide. These days it's busy in the city. All eyes are on the minarets of the mosque or whether the minarets will come.

Many don't want to hear anything of it.

"The minarets damage the beauty of the city," they say.

But Muslims think otherwise. They claim that their minarets will add an exotic kind of beauty to the city.

What is a minaret? What is a minaret good for? Minaret comes from the Arabic word *menar*, *me* + *nar*. *Nar* is fire. *Menar* is something you put fire in. Thus a minaret is a lantern, an old, high Muslim lantern.

The first followers of the Prophet Mohammad lived simply. With a sword in hand they rode on malnourished camels to conquer the world.

When Mohammad turned toward Mecca, his followers piled the camel saddles together and used them to make a raised platform. The black Balaal, the Moaz of Islam, took a torch, got on top of the platform and cried, "Allahu akbar! Hajj Allal salat. Allah is great! Hasten to prayer!"

A few centuries later, the Islamic architects, in memory of the original Menars, devised the mysterious minarets of the mosques. The dome and the two enormous minarets, upon



which suras from the Koran were immortalized in mosaics, caused a revolution in architecture at the time.

The traditional architecture of mosques was once a brilliant idea, but it's no longer as brilliant when you want to build a mosque in Rotterdam.

A minaret irritates the residents of the city in these difficult times. The time of two minarets reaching for the sky is over. The Christians also no longer build a church with a young golden rooster atop a tall spire.

Think of something else. Let the spirit of Rotterdam inspire you. Use the Erasmus Bridge as an example. Create a Rotterdam mosque, a moving mosque on the water, two minarets on a white ship, for example.

A minaret no longer necessarily needs to go into the air. You can build it crooked like the Erasmus Bridge.

A mosque has always been a work of art. Nobody can stop art. What is beautiful is beautiful. But the mosques of Rotterdam are not beautiful, they are ugly. They are cheap and look very sad. What should we do with so many small mosques with thin poor immigrant minarets?

There is only one Allah. Sunnis, Shiites and Alevis can put their heads together, pool their money and build a spectacular mosque together, a jewel for Rotterdam. There should be a difference between the mosques in the Netherlands and Morocco. Allah is also tired of the boring monotonous Dutch mosques. You do not live in the desert, but in Rotterdam. The new minarets should make the city more beautiful. So beautiful that anyone can say: Wow, what a mosque!

## Veils in Paris

*Chador*, is a Persian word. An old word.

*Cha* or *che*, is the seventh letter of the 32-letter Persian alphabet. In the

Arabic alphabet there is no *cha*. So you will never find a *cha* in the Islamic world.

In Persian literature, *chador* is understood with various meanings and used in diverse

contexts. A few examples:

*Chador*: a certain type of veil that women wear to cover their bodies.

*Chador*: a cloth that you hang up when the sun shines, so that you can sit in the shadow.

*Chador*: a tent.

*Chador*: a type of large curtain.

*Chadoré kafeeri*: a metaphor for the morning light, when the world is veiled by a *chador*.

*Chadoré kahli*: a metaphor for a dark night, a night covered with a black veil.

*Chadoré ladjewaard*: a dark blue sky.

*Chadoré tarsi*: the red color of the sun at twilight.

*Chadoré chab*: a large cloth in which to store and keep bedding.

*Chadoré namaz*: a flowered veil worn by women when they go to prayer.

The veil was something of the kings. The Sassanidic kings wore a kind of *chador*, a

veil, to hide themselves from their subjects. In this manner they distinguished themselves from the common people and bound themselves with higher and invisible powers.

The veil radiates power. The king's veil was no *chador*, but a curtain, and the king was the secret behind the curtain.

The same curtain was used by Scheherazade, the storyteller from the one thousand and one night tales. As soon as the king went to bed, Scheherazade took her place behind the curtain and told her story. With the curtain she separated herself from the king and became part of the secret, the power of the words, and the magic of the story.

Later Islam took the Old Persian tradition of the *chador* and added Arabic customs to it.

Islam is an ongoing issue in Europe. French President Chirac began a fight against the veil. In Paris, young Muslim women who speak fluent French demonstrated for weeks against the bill that Chirac had sent to parliament. Chirac got his way, and the parliament forbade the students and the educators from wearing a veil at school.

In the Middle East there is enough experience with banning the *chador*. At the beginning of the last century, Reza Khan Pahlawi, the father of the Shah, declared war on the *chador*, saying: "Whoever wears a *chador* will be arrested."

It proved impossible. Thousands of women were arrested. The mosques were shot with canons, and the imams were hung. The traditional women did not dare to walk the streets anymore, and grandmothers stayed at home until the death of Reza Khan.

Fifty years later, the ayatollahs uprooted the kingdom of Pahlawi. Millions of women with black *chadors* appeared again in the bazaars.

Fighting against the *chador* does not solve anything. A head covering is part of the identity of a Muslim woman. She must decide for herself if she will cover her head, with a headscarf or a baseball hat.

Nevertheless, I must think about the new direction that France has taken. It is interesting.

In this way Europe can offer the young girls of Muslim families the experience of appearing in public without a head covering. The Netherlands could learn from this example. Let's forbid the headscarf in school.

## Modern Guardians

There are men in the Netherlands that really need to be put in their place.

They are men whose roots are still deep in the ground of the traditional religious countries, even though they no longer live there. Men with cultural baggage from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco and many other Arab and African countries.

These are young men from immigrant families who were born or grew up here. They went to school here, have their high school diploma and are working to build a future as Dutch citizens.

These are young men who have experienced their sexual development here, sat on a bench at school with girls, gone to gym class with them, and went to swimming lessons with them.

These are young men that during their youth first kissed a girl, made plans with them and went together to the clubs with them. They have had their first sexual experiences here.

But when they are ready to marry, they go to the village of their father to get a bride.

The immigrant girls are the first victims of their vicious methods. The men build relationships with them and go to bed with them, but after a while they pack their bags and leave them in the lurch.

This kind of man is as dangerous as the Taliban in Afghanistan who wants to keep women under burqas.

Compared to these young men the Taliban is innocent, because the Taliban has never known freedom and has never lived in a society with equal rights. They always lived in the mountains, carried a gun and fought back, they had never seen even the toes of a female stranger, never laughed with them, never sat together on a couch, never walked together with them, much less gone to gym class together. In short, they didn't know what they were doing. But these young men know very well what they are doing.

In the traditional, religious society, men have put a chain around the ankles of women for at least fourteen centuries. The men can do anything before marriage, but women must remain a virgin. Every year many women die because of this inflexible requirement imposed by men. The lives of thousands of women are destroyed daily in those countries because they lost their virginity in a relationship that got out of control.

Being a virgin is like a cold pistol that the men hold to the necks of young women. Their demand is so persistent that it asserts itself everywhere.

This despicable tradition doesn't only exist in traditional countries, it also roots itself outside of those countries. Some of the immigrant men have taken the old habits with them and passed them on to their sons.

They commit a crime, it is an insult to the women in this country and especially to those girls from immigrant families. The women in the traditional countries fight with their bare hands to rid themselves of those heavy, rusty chains. But it may take another few centuries before they are freed.

It must be different here.

The young men who get a bride from their homeland, are the modern guardians of the hymen. They must be dealt with. Make the threshold so high that they can never jump over it, or that they can never look for a bride who is still a virgin in their father's mountain village.

## Abu Ghraib

Bush offered his forced apologies. Lies. All lies.

In the Arab world, no one believes him. The mask has dropped from Bush's face. That, which is a lie, will not stand long. Bush also needs to offer his apologies for the following events:

Apologies for the torture of Afghan prisoners (and stop it!).

Apologies for the weapons of mass destruction he has not found.

Apologies for losing the golden opportunity to make Iraq a democracy.

Apologies for the chaos he has caused in Iraq and fueling the terror.

Apologies for insulting the UN.

Apologies for the power that dangerous imams like Al-Sadr have received.

Apologies for the many people who died or have been wounded.

Apologies for the many sorrows he has caused in the world.

What's going on? Why does everyone react like a wounded tiger when they see the pictures of the tortured Iraqi prisoners? Why so much grief? America has committed a crime that Saddam never dared to commit.

From the moment the Iraqis began pelting the American soldiers with stones, you all saw that something bad was happening. For they were the same people that had welcomed the soldiers the year before while dancing around with American flags.

Bombing is allowable, Iraqi demonstrators can be fired upon. Laying waste to holy cities like Najaf and Karbala is okay, for every dead American soldier kill twenty Iraqis, and the prisoners can be put against the wall in handcuffs, because this is a true war against the most powerful occupier in history. The Iraqis were prepared for this kind of violence.

President Bush misleads everyone when he says that torture is not part of their culture and that this is an isolated

incident. Violence and torture sit deeply rooted in the spirit of the American culture. The music is excellent, the computer and space technology is incredible, the cinema is immense, the literature is masterful, but the violence is the cornerstone.

These are not individual crimes. America tortures.

It's not just the Iraqi prisoners, they frequently torture the Afghan rebels in the American military camp on Cuba. Have we forgotten Vietnam? They knew in Baghdad that the Americans tortured the Iraqis in Abu Ghraib. But why then was everyone so taken aback when the photos were leaked?

The photographs of naked Iraqi men, blindfolded, stacked like corpses, actually showed no sign of serious abuse. When you talk about torture, you talk about violence and blood. You have to hang the enemy by his feet from the ceiling. Putting a pair of white women's underwear over the head of a prisoner can hardly be called torture. When a small American woman puts a rope around the neck of a naked prisoner and drags him over the ground, yes, then you can call it torture.

The Iraqis had to undergo the deepest humiliation in order to receive the promised American model of democracy, and for that they were not prepared.

Humiliation is the course that America follows in Iraq. U.S. soldiers pat down the clergy, stabbing their hands between their legs and taking off their turbans. America spits on everyone and everything in Iraq. They never believed in their mission. Abu Ghraib Prison must be locked up for good. And it's over with America in Iraq.

## The Doves Fly Away

Nothing will come of it. I feel helpless when I want to write something about Israel, I write, I delete, I cut, I paste, but nothing comes of it. Whatever I write is worthless, the text is like a broken home in which nothing is in its place, like a Palestinian house that's been destroyed by Israeli fire. Israel unexpectedly invaded Rafah and again destroyed dozens of houses.

The Palestinians took their children and a blanket and fled into the dark. Only early the next day when they saw what Israel had done to their homes, did they take to the streets to demonstrate and Israel bombed the crowd with missiles from the air: The UN Security Council condemned Israel for the umpteenth time, but Israel continued the destruction as usual. At least forty people were killed.

I looked in the dictionary for the meaning of Israel, it said the following, "Name of the Jewish national state in Palestine. Israeli, (- s) resident of the State of Israel." It was a very neutral explanation that didn't quite fit. Below it there was some empty space on the page, I filled it with a pen and completed the definition. Israel is also synonymous with: the ultimate violence, crime, occupation, oppression, unreliability, brutality, aggression, and the axis of evil.

Israel commits many crimes and no one can stop them.

Israel has become mentally ill because of the extraordinary violence it uses. The Israelis have taken themselves captive with their own hands; they put up a long high wall around themselves and thereby isolate themselves from the rest of the world. The state of Israel is in need of comprehensive psychotherapy. I sent an email to the only Israeli friend I have, in Tel Aviv: "Today is the day when everything must be made clear. Why do you keep quiet about Sharon's crimes? If you keep silent, I hope the ground opens up and I disappear into it."

I was again a Palestinian in recent days, a Palestinian writer who lived in Rafah and whose house was destroyed by the Israelis. I no longer had a place to sleep, and went to visit Arafat. He has issued a curfew, so I was able to reach his office door



unaccompanied. I offered my condolences to him for the dead and the houses. I didn't do it weakly or pathetically. I pressed his hands firmly and said in Surat al-Fiel, "Alam tare kaaife faél rabbok bé asabol fiel." I said the verses from the Quran out loud not because I'm religious, but because the men of my culture had also done this in the past when they didn't want to kneel before death, and certainly not before Israel.

I was tired; I had demonstrated all day and tasted the Earth of our broken homes in my mouth. I was thirsty, wanted a drink, but Arafat only drank tea. I got a mattress from Arafat, I put it on the ground, but I could not sleep. Sharon forced me to violence, the pen didn't work anymore, and the image of a gun appeared in my head. But I did not want it. I needed something more powerful in order to pick the pen back up. Mahmoud Darwish, the great Palestinian poet came to my rescue. I heard him read one of his poems:

My body is the country the place for you the doves fly away the doves return.

You are the first of the family of the waves that are held back by the coast.

I think of you.

## The Nuclear Power Plant

What should I do with Iran?

My beautiful country. My cursed country!

The country I belong to.

What should I do when the high mountains and mysterious nights are so far away from me?

What should I do with the ayatollahs when they talk about atoms and electrons and George W. Bush with a mouthful of violence?

I often wanted to write about it, but then I abandoned it, because it is a touchy subject for me. The question is: what position should I take when I write about the nuclear program of the fatherland, while I myself have left home?

Are the ayatollahs actually engaged in the development of nuclear weapons?

My answer is yes. If they had had the chance, they would have made them. And if they get the chance, they will do so immediately.

Do they have the necessary science and technology in house in order to make such weapons?

We already had the necessary knowledge in our possession at the time of the shah.

I must be careful what I say or I will walk into a trap, and get the stamp of traitor on my forehead.

So first this:

Developing a nuclear weapon is something different from a nuclear program for peaceful purposes.

It is the legal right of Iranians to have a nuclear power plant if they so choose, they can decide for themselves how they heat their homes. Based on international treaties, the decision about what they do with their uranium lies with them.

Now I can say this: I do not want the ayatollahs to get their hands on the remains of enriched uranium. The Quran, the atom, the electron and the ayatollahs are not compatible.

Two years ago, the ayatollahs developed the Shahab-3! It is a ballistic missile that can easily reach a target at a distance of 1,000 miles. Why not? After all, it is their duty to defend their country. However, if they come into possession of enriched uranium, they will immediately use it for their warheads. That should never happen, because then we'll never get away from them.

There is a saying: you should never help an ayatollah onto the back of a donkey, because once he sits there, he will not get off until the beast is dead.

The nuclear missiles will be their donkey.

Iran is one of the richest oil countries in the world; in addition to oil there are oceans of natural gas in the earth of my beautiful fatherland. Our natural gas supply is large enough to meet the energy needs of Iranian households for the next five hundred years. The past few weeks it became unexpectedly cold in Iran and it began snowing incessantly, in some provinces more than a meter of snow fell on the streets. Hundreds of people died from the cold, just because they had no gas or oil to heat their homes.

We have so much natural gas in the country, but the residents of Tehran went to bed with heavy clothes on last week, because the national gas plant stood empty. This was due to sloppy ayatollahs that leave everything to Allah.

It is irresponsible to give them the keys to a nuclear power plant. A nuclear power plant is part of a democratic country. In a dictatorship, the citizens of the country must take this power hostage. The Iranian people must have a little patience; the ayatollahs are still not one of us.

## Auschwitz

With the whistle of a train in the distance, we all look back to the year 1945.

I always searched for an opportunity to write about Auschwitz, but did not find one. I didn't know what I could write about because the information was not mine. I had a fictional picture in my head that I had gathered from films.

Auschwitz was far away from us and because we were not involved there, we had nothing to say about it.

Now I see it differently.

Reza Khan was the father of the Persian Shah. He was an ambitious man and had big dreams for the country: national railways that reached from the Persian Gulf to the Soviet Union border, a national radio station, a university for Tehran, freedom from the veil for women, the founding of the first national oil refinery, fighting with the ayatollahs for the separation of religion and state. Hitler noticed it all and secretly sent Goebbels to Iran with a confidential message for Reza Khan: "We are Arian, the Germans are Arian, but the Iranians are even more Arian. Reza Khan and Hitler are brothers." The Iranian politicians were proud that they were the brothers of Hitler and Goebbels; however, they did not yet know of Hitler's diabolical schemes for the Iranian railways, with which he could ride to Russia's back door.

The relationship between Reza Khan and the Nazis was so covertly intertwined that plainclothes Nazis filled the small room with cheers for the crown prince of Iran when he opened the first official radio station.

Reza Khan had gone too far with Hitler; the allies saw this too and invaded Iran. The British occupied the southern provinces, the Soviet Union conquered the northern provinces, and Reza Khan was exiled to Egypt where he died.

The crown prince became Shah in Persia. Nothing more was said about the Germans, not about Hitler, not about Auschwitz.

There was silence for decades. Suddenly in 1976, there was a film shown on television about World War II. It was about a Jewish family in Amsterdam: *Anne Frank*.

It was an impressive film, even though it looked like a fictitious story. Moreover, where was Amsterdam again? And where was the Netherlands?

One year later, when the revolution began in the fatherland and the Shah was forced out of the country, there were suddenly hundreds of books published about Nazi crimes. These books were all forbidden during the reign of the Shah. Simultaneously, a series of films about the Holocaust were shown in the theaters.

This all happened in the short time of the power vacuum, after the Shah left and before the ayatollahs took power.

But there is one truth: the Iranian intellectuals, authors, artists, and filmmakers have all kept silent about the Holocaust. Actually, there is a silent agreement among the artists in the Middle East to avoid the topic because of Israel's role in the Middle East.

This silence must be broken. The Holocaust was one of the greatest human tragedies; it originated with the beast sitting inside each person that is always prepared to commit crimes.

I think about those who perished in Auschwitz and those who still suffer from it.

## The Blogs

The Internet has made life better. It's a bunch of fresh flowers on your desk.

This digital democracy is delightful. Blogs have brought about a revolution in a part of the world that is suppressed. A relief.

There are millions of people around the world who keep their daily blog. Iran and the United States top the list of most bloggers. President Bush has no need to worry about democracy in Iran.

It is an unprecedented phenomenon in the twenty-five hundred year writing history of the country. The ancient Persian kings once cut their words in the rock high in the mountains with a hammer and chisel. They had a need to express themselves, to show their words: "I, Dariush. King of Kings! The king of a great country. From where the sun rises. To where the sun sets."

It's not that everyone in Iran has a computer at home, but the internet cafes have opened the doors to a wonderful digital democracy. The Iranians open up their hearts in masses through blogs. After hundreds of years of oppression my compatriots express their opinions without fear for the first time. It is a revolution in the ancient Iranian culture that they now, exactly fourteen hundred years after the advent of Islam, can speak without major cultural censorship.

It is so surprising, so interesting, so fascinating to hear a people that through the centuries could not speak and now suddenly can say what it wants.

The stories are original. The words are like a fresh piece of meat. You don't read their words; you eat them up. They discuss everything: their lives, their work, the ayatollahs, their old mothers, their feelings and sex. They write about their bodies, as if they were seeing it in daylight for the first time.

Iranian men tell things on their blogs that make you hold your hands over your eyes to avoid reading it. The Iranian women write so frankly about their secrets that I keep my hand over my mouth in astonishment.

It ended with Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Islamic Republic and the Pope of the Shiite world. Five years ago, when the journalist Gandji wrote an article about him, he had Gandji arrested. Gandji weighed in at 183 pounds then. He now weighs 119 pounds! All because of one article.

These days one ridicules the Ayatollah day and night in the Internet. But he can no longer arrest anyone.

Until last year the Ayatollah sent hundreds of armed bearded men into the dark streets to shoot the satellites on the roofs and keep people from watching Western television. Now, everyone looks on the web at everything they want to see in the world.

All the books he had ever declared unclean are now freely available.

“Last Saturday the new Iranian President Ahmadinejad spoke during a meeting of the United Nations. He is nothing. He's nobody. Who allowed that creep admittance to New York?” I read on a blog.

My countrymen have become wonderfully mad.

Just like ancient horses, which have been held captive for centuries in the darkness of a barn, they are now running free through the green pastures of the blogs.

Whoever expresses him/herself, won't get sick. Whoever uses no self-censorship, need not visit the family physician. Whoever writes, becomes king. The king of kings!

## Paris

Who would have thought that classic scenes of an eastern revolution would occur in Paris, the bridal city of Europe?

The riots are like the Iranian revolution against the Shah, like Iraq against Saddam. Heavy rioting has developed in the poor neighborhoods of Paris, and the anger of the stone throwing immigrant children has reached into other French cities. Hundreds of cars were set on fire, buildings went up in flames and shots rang out here and there.

There is talk of a decisive new movement in Europe. It is a global action that will break the old, cramped European framework to make room for the oppressed immigrants. It's a revolt that has just begun.

The riots are part of a modern protest movement. It's not the adult immigrants who have rebelled, not the fathers or the mothers, but the youth! And poverty, humiliation, unemployment and the hopelessness are causes of the resistance.

It is a new element in European history.

What has taken place in Paris, serves as an introduction to the rest of European countries. Paris is a precursor. But the ingredients for such a riot in the Netherlands are also in place.

But why is it the children of immigrants who have rebelled in Paris?

Because they can see with their own eyes that their parents can no longer cope. They hear everything and they see that they, like their parents, are not welcome in the city where they were born and raised. They feel the bitter humiliation on their tongue. They see that their older brother, their older sister is not called back for an interview. They know full well that they will soon have to accept the status of an unemployed, second-class citizen.

Until a few years ago they were children of immigrants, but they have suddenly received a new stamp on their forehead: Muslim!

Last Wednesday just a few hundred people showed up for the commemoration of the recently killed filmmaker Theo van Gogh. It was a wise gesture on the part of Amsterdam: the



culprit has been apprehended, and he has received a severe sentence. The police and the judicial system are busy fighting terror, we continue with life.

But there is a group of the so-called Friends of van Gogh, who still talk with a mouth full of hatred. They wait for a second murder to get even. It is time they learn from Paris.

They offend the immigrants, they provoke the fanatical Muslims: "Come! Kill me if you can!"

It is remarkable that van Gogh is getting more and more new friends after his death. Everyone who ever saw him walking on the other side of the canal is now coming forward as his friend and begins to rankle.

"They should stop their rankling. The prophet Mohammad is a pedophile, a goatfucker, a perverse man." I'm fed up with hearing that.

Stop it!

"The Quran is a damned book," cried a simpleton on the news recently. Okay. We have heard it. Now quit after Paris!

It no longer has anything to do with freedom of speech. It is pure provocation.

The immigrant children learned that their parents were no longer able to protect them from the humiliation. They have taken over the helm. Once in a while let a gentle word be heard!

## The Nest Polluters

The Netherlands is busy with the trials of the terror suspects. This trial carries with it a separate burden, although most of the suspects were born and raised here, they rejected the democratic system and opted for Allah.

The defendants have built a wall between themselves and the rest of society.

The knowledge of the Quran and of Islam on the part of the arrested young men is limited. They get their adolescent knowledge from ugly and literally translated Dutch texts of the ancient Arabic writings.

And with that superficial internet knowledge, they have created a type of backward Islam in the poorer neighborhoods of Rotterdam and The Hague. A sort of rotgut religion they use to rebel against the rest.

On the first day of the trial five young women in black veils stood outside the Amsterdam courthouse. They were probably the wives, sisters or friends of the suspects. They campaigned and they got all the front pages of newspapers and the news.

But they showed nothing of their faces and they stood with their backs emphatically turned to the cameras. One of them held a protest cloth to her face that said, "Allah is enough for us, the best protector! The Quran, Sura 3 verse 173."

They had, as it were, with their long black veils drawn a curtain between themselves and the rest of the population.

There should be no room for the thoughts of those weird people who are behind bars for the time being, because they represent no one but themselves and their pitiful culture.

If those women believe that their husband or their brother is innocent, they should not hide behind their veils. They must rightly show their faces and let their voices be heard.

What they do is stupid. And it means they have understood nothing of the society where they were born and raised.

It is very weak and testifies to your spiritual poverty when you live in the Netherlands and think that Allah is enough for you and that only he could protect you.

It is not Allah who defends the accused men—Dutch lawyers do that. They're working hard for the accused, but they are actually working to protect democracy. And so they have recently shown a beautiful side of the Netherlands.

These women know the power of the media darn well, they turn their back to society, but at the same time they use one of the main pillars of Dutch democracy, namely the cameras, in order to present their sick version of Islam.

Those who walk around with such thoughts want to spread fear. They are working to disseminate their ideas to the youth. But they should neither get the space nor especially the attention. They are what they are, the representatives of no one.

I want a fair trial for their men. I have faith that democracy will not take revenge on them. I have faith that their lawyers will join forces, if they are innocent, to advocate for their freedom.

It may one day be the end of the antisocial behavior of these men and women. For many Muslims suffer damage through their behavior. Away with their suffocating little Islam. Away with unnecessary, fear-spreading black veils. If they have nothing more to say than that meaningless protest cloth, they are nothing more than a fake group of little hypocrites who should be firmly dealt with.

## Mohammad Was an Ordinary Man

The Danish cartoonist made twelve drawings of Mohammad and Ayeshe.

Fanatic Muslims worldwide have taken to the streets and set the Danish embassies in Syria and Beirut on fire. I have seen the cartoon of Mohammad, but I was curious about the one of Ayeshe. She was the second wife of Mohammad, still a girl when she married him:

Mohammad and Ayeshe and were working in the yard when they heard a group of musicians in the street. Ayeshe wanted to watch, but that was not allowed; Mohammad had just declared music forbidden. But Ayeshe was a bit naughty and said, "You are my husband, I want to listen." Mohammad replied that God had forbidden it, and that if she wanted to listen to the music, that was something between her and God. Ayeshe repeated stubbornly: "You are my husband." Mohammad gave in and knelt before Ayeshe and she stood on his back with her shoes, so that she could see the musicians over the wall of the courtyard.

Mohammad is dear to me. In my youth I always saw him in my mind on a camel, a handsome man with a green scarf, wild black hair, brown eyes and a desert sword at his side.

He lived in the seventh century, far from the Middle Ages. He did not live in Europe but in Mecca, in a chaotic society where the law of the desert ruled.

At that time women had no rights, they were treated as less than animals. Any man who could afford it had a number of regular women who lived in his house and even more outside the house. Without a single social obstacle they put their hand on any female slave they wanted.

The camels had more rights than the women in Mecca. They were handled like a jeep in the desert.

Mohammad tried to create order out of chaos, he suggested a few fixed rules for everything and thus revealed his Quran as a book of law:

The women inherit.

You cannot just leave your spouse because you met another nice woman.

Using force to sleep with a woman who does not want to sleep with you is prohibited.

Leave the woman alone if she does not feel well.

His laws were so intolerable that the men wanted to kill him in his sleep.

There was neither Senate nor House nor a feminist organization that could do something for the people. Someone had to raise his voice: Mohammad's Quran and its prose were as refreshing as the Internet today.

He was an earthly prophet, an interesting historical figure, a poet, a wily warlord and an Arab with a weakness for beautiful women. It was foolish of the artists from his time that they didn't draw a sketch of him on a stone, or on a camel bone.

In my youth I drew Muhammad with too much love.

The Danish cartoonist has drawn him with too much disgust, both through lack of true knowledge.

Mohammad was not a terrorist. It's silly that the Muslims set fire to Danish embassies. It's a clear sign of ignorance. They do not know that it's a great thing when a man can express himself in whatever form he chooses. Mohammad claimed throughout his Quran that he was an ordinary man. If the Europeans need to depict Mohammad as such, then they should do it.

## Halal

What should we do with the Muslim women who refuse to shake hands and who wear a niqab? Should we tolerate their niqab?

No, we should not do it. In the nicest way possible, we need to not let them have their way. The Netherlands has sixteen million inhabitants; about one hundred of them are niqab-wearers.

Should the large supermarket chain Albert Heijn put halal meat on the shelves or not? It would not be exceptional. Throughout the world, organic eggs sit on the shelves next to factory farm eggs. There are also dozens of varieties from lean, diet meat to artificial meat. So it wouldn't hurt if halal meat was next to pork in the cooler. Moreover, it would be quite chic of Albert Heijn.

Pork?

I respectfully eat what I receive on my plate as a meal. I recently ate a pork leg in a restaurant with a few colleagues from the newspaper. I loved it. It's a shame that the faithful do not want to try it.

In the Quran the meat of animals that put their teeth in a cadaver is prohibited. The pigs of Dutch farmers eat potatoes and grass, if I'm not mistaken.

I really recommend you try pork leg in a traditional village inn just once. It's exotically tasty, and something unknown in the category of eastern dishes. The pork leg is short, thick and fat. It will be a lasting memory if you commit this fat, delicious sin.

Yet tradition is the determining factor: whatever you ate at home will later play a dominant role in your eating patterns. The grandmothers have done their work.

Recently, we were focused on that one Muslim woman, the teacher, who suddenly did not want to shake hands with her male colleagues. Of course, she's allowed to decide for herself whether she will shake hands or not, but I think it's nonsense, distraction, Muslim games. Whether or not a handshake is offered has nothing to do with the Quran, it is a personal

consideration. It is an insult to put all of that on the back of the Quran.

Women who suddenly want to wear a niqab in the Netherlands, women who suddenly will not shake hands and men who suddenly demand a halal mortgage, know very well what they are doing. They want to institute a homemade Sharia in the Netherlands. But they should not get their way.

If you are so religious that you want to live according to the ancient laws of Islam, you should go live as a nun in a convent. No one will compel you to shake hands. No one will compel you to take off your niqab.

But you cannot go to school with such a niqab, let alone teach. It is a school, not a theme park. If you still want to do it, you should apply to a school in Saudi Arabia, near the Kaaba in Mecca. Halal mortgage, halal handshakes, go to school halal, and halal smile, these are all laws that are no good. The laws of the Taliban.

The women in Afghanistan were hungry for freedom, for the removal of their niqab in order to see their children better and to work better in the kitchen. And precisely these woman want to cover there faces again here in the Netherlands.

Millions of Iranian women have been fighting for 27 years against the ayatollahs to reduce the breadth of their headscarves and now these women in the Netherlands want to hide themselves behind a veil.

There should be no place for Sharia in this country. The law is Dutch law. Islam only comes second.

## Abdullah Gül

Turkey sits on a unique geographical location. And Istanbul has always been a wonderful role model for countries with an Islamic culture.

The small part of this city that lies in Europe gives Turkey the properties of a salamander; they can move equally well in water and on land.

From this part of Istanbul trains, the telegraph, printing machines, telephones, automobiles, newspapers, novels, cinema and pornography flowed into the Islamic countries.

In the past one hundred and fifty years, this multicultural city played a crucial role in modernizing the Arab World, especially countries like Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Morocco. Turkey is also the model for all the former Soviet Union countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Mongolia.

For the Islamic cultures Istanbul is a laboratory where the modern, western ideas are experimented with.

For these countries Istanbul is just as important as Paris has ever been to Europe.

It was in this city that Atatürk became acquainted with the doctrine of separation of state and mosque.

And he was the first statesman in an Islamic country to begin a nationwide railway project and the first man who dared point a finger at the headscarves of the women.

With a little bit of a delay Reza Khan (the father of the Shah of Persia) began to modernize Iran. He was the first king to come outside with his daughters not wearing headscarves. The first king who personally fired a cannon from the golden dome of the largest mosque in the country to declare the guaranteed freedom of women.

Last week Turkey took another bold step. The appointment of the religious Abdullah Gül as President will bring about a surge of democratic renewal in Muslim countries for the next fifty years.



Islam in Turkey will be confronted with the separation of state and mosque in practice.

It's a prestigious duty for President Gül and Prime Minister Erdogan to practice that separation.

If they succeed, their model will traditionally be copied by the surrounding countries.

The model democracy that Bush and Blair one day want to establish in the Middle East, can only be practiced in Turkey.

Iraq is still far from reaching a model democracy. Moreover, the Turks do not possess the laziness of the other Islamic nations.

I congratulate Abdullah Gül on his appointment as president of Turkey. But I have a problem with his wife.

She only officially became the First Lady of Turkey one week ago, but I see her as a major problem. Her headscarf will radicalize Turkey.

Atatürk of Turkey, Reza Khan of Iran, Saddam Hussein of Iraq and recently the young King of Morocco have gone to great lengths to free the women from the veils and headscarves.

Mrs. Gül will soon walk with her fashionable little headscarves in a political fashion show for the Turkish women, which means taking ten steps backwards. Mrs Gül is no asset to the Middle East. And though she keeps in the background, she exercises considerable power from behind the curtains. She has clearly opted for Islamic law, for Sharia and for the Quran.

I wish a headscarf for every woman who wants to wear one, but not for the wife of Abdullah Gül, because her headscarf has become a threatening flag waving in the wind over the mosques.

## Show Patience

Happy New Year. A year of prosperity. A year with at least one dream. And a year with good intentions. What are my resolutions for 2008?

I begin with what I don't want. I respectfully ask the Moroccan, Turkish and other young people to not use violence as the film by Geert Wilders about the Quran is released.

Young men, you should not allow yourself to be abused by anyone: not by friends, imams or by the politician Geert Wilders. A demonstration against Geert Wilders is outdated. Whatever he says, is already old-fashioned, we're already long past that stage.

I don't think the youth in Amsterdam or Rotterdam will demonstrate on their own, but only when it has been organized. But who would have the intention to organize them?

The traditional imams are unable to do so. They don't know the Dutch language or Dutch habits. I firmly believe that parents will discourage their sons from throwing even one stone.

Who will do it then? If action is taken, it will be because of Muslim organizations, by the religious men who speak Dutch, and know all the crooked alleys of the law. And particularly by those who have recently expressed veiled threats, not on their own behalf, but under the guise of "We cannot control it."

Friends, don't do it! Don't make Wilders bigger than he is. It is his right to express himself. But he deserves no retaliation. The best reaction to his film is a civilized response: silence.

Geert Wilders altered the historical facts. He takes the texts out of context and thus he intentionally deceives his electorate. He uses verbal abuse, which is sometimes worse than physical violence. Now he wants to use visual violence. But still no one should use force.

The faithful Muslims must withstand this test, they must benefit from it. And as soon Geert Wilders has debuted his film, he has said everything: the Quran is a fascist book. The Quran is a rotten book. The Quran preaches violence. Mohammad is a

tyrant. Mohammad is a pedophile. Mohammad is a racist. Mohammad is a Hitler.

You see? The statements of Geert Wilders' are not worth even lighting a match in protest. Show patience, Mohammad said this perhaps a thousand times in the Quran.

The believers, that are members of Muslim organizations, should consult the Quran more often these days: "Mohammad, please be patient. And wait for the judgment of your Creator, and be not like the man (the prophet Jonah) who was impatient, angry and upset in the belly of the fish."

And I advise the youth to google "Quran," "Mohammad" and "patience."

The result will be a few hundred divine quotes that are very appropriate for this situation:

"Mohammad, be patient! Endure what they say to you." "Mohammad, be patient with what you find. Patience is a great thing."

I've also found an appropriate quote in the Quran for Geert Wilders: "Do not walk around the earth so arrogantly, because you can not open a fissure in the earth, and you can't reach higher than the mountains."

Geert Wilders should frame this quote and hang it on his office wall.

## Geert Wilders

It's good that Geert Wilders has released his anti-Quran film. Free speech stands above all else. It is a jewel in the crown of mankind.

The Quran says that when God created man, he left behind a part of himself. Then he set a crown of green and red jewels on the head of man to distinguish him from the beast. In my opinion that crown is the freedom of expression.

The significance of this great distinction is not well understood in Islamic countries, but through conflicts caused by the drawings of the Danish cartoonist, or now with the film by Geert Wilders, the faithful Muslims in the eastern countries gradually begin to question what is actually going on. Why do the Westerners come out every time and increasingly often with a book, a cartoon, a movie that makes their own country and our country topsy-turvy. It raises a number of key questions that make them stop and think: "Why was that Danish cartoonist not called out on the carpet? Why does Geert Wilders feel he needs to go so far? Why doesn't anyone stop them?"

In the Netherlands we have been occupied with the film by Geert Wilders for months. And I believe that we all wondered at one time or another what it was that he was making.

I sat one day in front of my computer with my eyes closed and fantasized about what he could show us. When I saw his film last week, I nearly fell out of my chair.

He had taken every scene I had imagined and cut and pasted them into the film precisely as I had imagined them. Not a single scene more, not a single scene less.

I was absolutely speechless at so many similarities between myself and Geert Wilders.

Only the last scene was not in my film. I could never explode the head of Mohammad. That's not allowed. Because then the crown jewel falls away and you can no longer distinguish Geert Wilders from the beast.

The rest of the movie was okay.

Geert Wilders is me. That was my conclusion after the film. Geert Wilders is us.

He has expressed the fear and hatred of many. The pressure has been released from kettle.

We are now stronger than last week.

Talk to me and talk loudly if you need to, shout in my face, but never tear my book.

I'm glad the Muslims in the Netherlands have carried themselves in a dignified and mature manner. I congratulate them on their patience and the way they have reacted to the country and to the Muslim world.

Geert Wilders has deliberately insulted the Muslims in the Netherlands. He wanted to hurt them and that he did. But it does not matter. Be patient, Mohammad said this at least a thousand times in the Quran.

You, the Muslims in the Netherlands have a special task. You have a unique position as it concerns Islam. You can and should contribute substantially to the current debate in Islamic countries about the Quran and democracy. You are working daily to put the teachings of the Quran into practice here. And this is the opportunity that is lacking in the Islamic countries. Your experience is invaluable for them.

Fortunately, it is still quiet in the Islamic world. And I hope that Geert Wilders is quiet now that he has expressed his opinion.

## Shirin Ebadi, a Noble Woman

Loss is an experience to a new road, a new opportunity to think in a different way.

Losing is not the end of everything, but the end of a certain way of thinking. Whoever falls, stands up somewhere else. That is the law of life.

A literary analyst has been killed by the regime in Iran. He fought for democracy. And he was on the executive committee of the banned Iranian writers association.

A few years ago a few writers were murdered by the secret service. With this the regime wanted to make others afraid. But Mogtari continued to fight. One night three men climbed into his car at a stoplight and forced him to drive to a highway. The next day his body was found lying along the highway, he had been strangled.

In the same period secret service agents entered the home of Dariush Forouhar. Forouhar was a well-known politician that the clergy did not support. They murdered him and his wife in a horrific way.

Nobody dared mention the names Mogtari and Forouhar. Whoever raised their voice was strangled. The families of the dead writers and politicians were threatened; they were not allowed to ask any questions about their murdered loved ones. A black period in Iranian history.

It was at that moment that Shirin Ebadi raised her voice. The Persian department of the BBC announced that she was the lawyer for the Forouhar family.

Everyone covered their mouth in amazement and fear: "How dare she take such a dangerous step?"

Shirin Ebadi was the leading lawyer in the fatherland; she is a professor at the University of Tehran and is renowned for her fight for women's rights and children's rights. She has often been arrested, but nothing can stop her fight.

Last Friday, on December 10, 2003, she received the Nobel Peace Prize.

The spokesman of the Nobel Committee said, "Mrs. Ebadi is a brave woman who has never been afraid of the threats to her life."

Ebadi herself said, "Anyone who fights for human rights in Iran must live in fear. I have learned to deal with fear."

Suddenly a portrait of a woman appeared on the CNN website: "Iranian rights activist wins Nobel." I was shocked, I recognized her, but couldn't place her; she had deliberately removed her veil for the camera. By doing so, she immediately slapped the ayatollahs hard in the face in front of the cameras of CNN. Right there was one further step toward freedom for women in the fatherland.

I looked for someone to congratulate. I had the need to shake someone's hand and to say, "Sincerely. From the heart."

At last the voice of the women of my country is being heard, at last the voices of the family of Mohammads Mogtari and Forouhar are being heard. At last Ebadi can ask the historical question worldwide: Who killed them?

During a dark period, the regime of Iran took hundreds of prisoners, including many young women, and executed them. The families weren't allowed to bury the bodies of their loved ones in the official cemeteries. They buried their children without gravestones in abandoned sites. Nobody dared ask more questions about the mass executions. Ebadi will do it tomorrow.

The Iranian mothers cry out of happiness for the Nobel Prize.

Now they can dare to place a stone on the graves of their children.

Ebadi earned the Nobel Prize. It is a reward for the battle of Iranian women against the black faith.

## I Thank Life

I always thought I worked hard, and I believed I had gone as far as I could. But I was wrong.

### Reserves

It is a privilege to be a part of student life while living in America. I have seen the reserves of U.S. power, technology, innovation, politics, art and science; that is to say, the smartest students. They work so hard. I've never seen it anywhere else before. They all live on campus and do just one thing, study day and night. The university libraries are open 24 hours a day and are always crowded.

The students brought me to the point of embarrassment. I was sitting in the library with them, beside them, they studied, I wrote, they studied, I rewrote, they studied, I read, but they would not stop. If they were tired, they put their heads on their laptops and took a nap or they lay down for a moment whether in the hallway, on the bench or on the windowsill. They went to get a cup of coffee and studied further.

### Pressure

The crisis, the level of the university, parents who are under heavy financial pressure and the tuition fees that went up 30 percent in one hit, put them under tremendous pressure. For these reasons, they do everything so as not to fail, so as not to fall.

Cornell University in Ithaca is one of the finest, largest and most expensive universities in America. About 40,000 students live on this impressive campus where Nabokov once wrote his *Lolita*. When I was there, it was exam time; the stress was so high that the students hardly slept.

Early in the morning I saw a few guards standing by the high bridge and in the library everyone was restless. In the afternoon students laid solitary flowers on the bridge. The night before, two students had jumped from the high bridge into the valley and the river had taken them. They had done it separately, but both had left their laptop on the bridge.



## Spring

One day it was still on campus. Spring came unexpectedly and the celebration of St. Patrick's Day opened. The students dressed in green and, although alcohol was banned on campus, you could hear the bottles everywhere, accompanied by lively rhythmic music.

I worked with those clever students, with those who will later take a walk on Mars, who will invent something still more wonderful than the internet is today, who will return to the footsteps of God, who will come up with new formulas in mathematics and make great films.

Later in the week it was busy in the computer lab of the campus. The students had picked themselves up a bit, they were happy, they laughed. They went to admire the new iPad. One hundred new iPads lay like large gemstones on the round tables and the students and I could try them. The students whispered, giggled, discussed and admired their national product.

I have seen the reserves of U.S. power, art, science and beauty. I feel good. I thank life.

## In Berkeley

At the University of California at Berkeley the students are almost all sons and daughters of Asian immigrants, and their beautiful dark skin is immediately apparent.

And you, who come from the Netherlands, immediately think: where are the original Americans, the white Americans? The answer is: these are the Americans.

Yesterday, during a lecture I asked and noted the names of about thirty students with dark skin: Yanan, Lila, Vanessa, Mikael, Imran, Rastin, Kirajit, Shumoni, Alyssa, Bethlehem, Marv, Daniel, Sheila, Ambreen, Mao, Rami, Naomi, Niven, Walaa, Shirin, Chen, Cheng, Sina, Fabini, Shirin, Kate.

The class was wondering why I wrote down the names of some students, but not the names of others. They would never understand that skin color and descent in the Netherlands can be an "issue." Here, at the university, nobody dares to ask a student where his or her parents are from, what language they speak at home, what religion they live and whether they sometimes return to their homeland. No one allows himself or herself to make the coarse remark: "Oh, you speak good English. How long have you lived in America?"

We do this in the Netherlands. In the 21st century we're still occupied in this country with idiotic terms like immigrants and natives. Only two months ago we put one step forward and now try to use the word "newcomers." Europe has gotten old. Europe no longer interests the students, they don't see their future there.

Europeans can no longer develop an iPhone or an iPad, or conceive of something like the internet. A European can no longer get it into his head to go make a walk on Mars possible.

Europe has become afraid and reactive. Europeans no longer believe in their own strength. They cannot believe the strength of their immigrants. The Netherlands can't do it, Germany, France, Belgium and Denmark also can't.

Denmark is just able to make a few cartoons.

The Netherlands can produce types like Geert Wilders.

We in the Netherlands put a major obstacle in the way of the sons and daughters of immigrants, by means of which they can't fully use their talent and strength. The Netherlands insults our first, second and third generation immigrants.

I realize that now, now that I have met and spoken with the Turkish, Moroccan, Iranian, Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Indonesian, Afghan and Iraqi students at the major U.S. universities.

But I have good news. The sons and daughters of immigrants work hard, in order to make the Netherlands more beautiful than it is. They think of senior positions at Shell, Philips and Heineken, and they will take positions within fifteen years as Foreign Ministers, Finance, Interior Affairs and Justice. The time of Prime Minister Balkenende is over; the time of Geert Wilders has been over for decades past. I know some smart young immigrants with dark skin who have their sights focused on the turret.

In that atmosphere Kader Abdolah writes the 2011 Book Fair's publication for which he was selected.

He is proud and wants to write the best Book Week publication ever.

He sees it as his duty and he believes in the Netherlands.

## The Dutch Immigrants

Marie Louise said cheerfully: "I immigrated to America in the late sixties. In the Netherlands as a student I couldn't find a room. At that time the Netherlands was full, everywhere I looked. There was not a room for a small woman like me. I find it extraordinary that the country has offered shelter to so many immigrants since that time."

Marie Louise went last Friday to the Dutch consulate in San Francisco with the other Dutch immigrants to celebrate Queen's Day. I unfortunately wasn't able to take part in the party, later that afternoon I flew back to the Netherlands.

I have met many Dutch Americans recently. I visited them and I ate with them. They were special people, to be Dutch and then American creates something beautiful. These Dutch Americans were open, cheerful, social, and became many-sided compared to their compatriots in the Netherlands.

### Face

A Dutchman often has two faces. He shows a different face than he shows at home. The Dutch in America have become more themselves. They are proud of the fatherland, but nobody ever thinks about going back.

The Netherlands is still a monoculture; Calvinism has kept the country narrow. For example if you have a plan in America and you talk to your American friends about it, everyone says "Wow, what a great idea, we'll do that with you."

In the Netherlands you wouldn't dare share your plan with anyone, because once you open your mouth, they set a cup of black coffee in front of you and say, "How did you get that crazy idea, just go about your business, then you are already crazy enough."

During a lunch with a few famous Berkeley professors, I asked them to invite Geert Wilders to come live for a while on this extraordinary campus among the students, professors and residents of the city.

Wilders has remained small, one-sided, in Berkeley he will grow and that will do the Netherlands well.

### Croquettes

Orange remains the favorite color of the immigrants and they should continue to insist on croquettes, waffles, a framed portrait of the young Queen Beatrix, and the first two stanzas of the *Wilhelmus*, the Dutch national anthem, as their cultural heritage.

After a lecture in Bloomington we sat at a table with four writers - two Israelis who came from Jerusalem, a Palestinian from Gaza, one Lebanese and me. It was so unreal that we sat together, the silence was heavy, and not to be broken.

Then the cell phone of one of the Israelis rang.

"Excuse me, my daughter, in bed, in Jerusalem, she wants a goodnight kiss," he said and spoke lovingly with his daughter.

"Give her my regards," I said.

He handed me his cell phone and said, "You can say it yourself."

With his assistance I said in Hebrew, "Shalom, sleep well child."

Then we raised our glasses to our children in Israel, in Palestine, Lebanon, in Iran and of course in the Netherlands.

Salam, to all Dutch people who live far from home. It was necessary to have met you.

## Bibliography

The following 50 columns, published between 1996 and 2010 in the Dutch

newspaper *De Volkskrant*, were used by Kader Abdolah in the classes he gave during his trip to the United States. He generously supplied all originals in order to make the publication of this book possible:

1. Pak die kans
2. Een leeg graf
3. Een vreemd vaderland
4. Het weer en het woord
5. Mijn kleine oorlogen
6. Niet ruilen
7. Onvermijdelijk
8. Egra!
9. Praten
10. De angsten van een publicist
11. Wat wilde hij zeggen?
12. Help
13. Wie veel praat
14. Dappere mensen
15. Feliciteren
16. Opvoeding en integratie
17. Djal en Roedabe
18. In Afrika
19. Uit!
20. Devil
21. Tirannie

22. Bin Laden
23. De elementjes van bier
24. Vrouwen zonder mannen
25. Simorg
26. De cultuur van de vader
27. Het maakt niet meer uit
28. Kutmarokkaan!
29. Jahjahs droom
30. De pen van de gastarbeiders
31. Al-Haram Al-Sharif
32. Minaretten
33. Sluier in Parijs
34. Moderne bewakers
35. Abu Ghraib
36. De duiven vliegen weg
37. De kerncentrale
38. Auschwitz
39. De weblogs
40. Parijs
41. De nestbevuilers
42. Mohammad was een gewoon mens
43. Halal
44. Abdullah Gul
45. Toon geduld
46. Geert Wilders
47. Shirin Ebadi, een nobele vrouw
48. Ik dank het leven
49. In Berkeley
50. De Nederlandse Immigranten

## Contributors

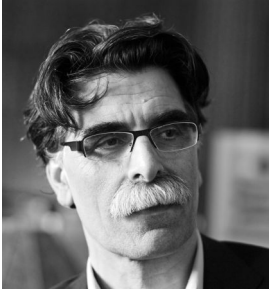
"I Won't Trade," "Unavoidable," and "Eqra! Proclaim!" were translated by the students Saul Allen, Meleah Auten, Daniel Birchok, Micky Byrnes, Sarah Doorn, Sipkje Pesnichak, Leah Vandermark and John Westra from the Dutch Studies Program at the University of Michigan under the direction of Ton Broos.

"The Weather and the Word," and "My Little Wars" were translated by the students Mary Godec, Gary Low, Ika Nurhayani, Judy Park, Jacob Shell from the Dutch Studies Program at Cornell University under the direction of Chrissy Hosea.

"Brave People," "Veils in Paris," and "Auschwitz" were translated by the students Jenny Bowen, Jessica Fox, Alex van Gils, Desirée Van der Kleij, Sebastian Rudolph and Joe Shipley from the Dutch Studies Program at the University of Indiana under the direction of Esther Ham.

The translation of all remaining columns, as well as the entire review, were carried out by Donald E. Backman.





## Kader Abdolah: How Europe is Changing

The author of the columns presented in this book was born in 1954 in the city of Arak, Iran. As a university student in Tehran he joined an underground leftist movement that first rebelled against the Shah and later against Khomeini. For his clandestine publications, he adopted the alias Kader Abdolah in honor of two of his comrades in the underground — Kader and Abdolah — who were assassinated by Iran's successive regimes of oppression: one of them died in his fight against the Shah, the other in his fight against the Ayatollahs.

In 1988, he reached the Netherlands where he received political asylum. Little by little, he began to master the Dutch language. Abdolah's literary career in Dutch began in 1993 with a selection of short stories. His debut was an astonishing success and paved the way for a career that would lead him to the top of contemporary Dutch literature. Abdolah's international breakthrough came in 2000 with the publication of the autobiographical novel *Spijkerschrift*, which has been translated into over twenty languages, including the English translation *My Father's Notebook*.

In addition to his work as a novelist, he has written the weekly column *Mirza* (Persian for "chronicler") in the Netherlands' *De Volkskrant* since 1996. Fifty of those articles appear here. Spanning the full scope of his time as a columnist, the material he discusses provides a cross-section of a changing Europe. Kader Abdolah is widely seen as one of the most original and thought-provoking voices in the debate on the profound transformations that are taking place in Europe as a consequence of the massive immigration in the last decades.

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