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# “Saying Nothing Is Saying Something”: Affective Encounters with the Muslim Other in Amsterdam Public Transport

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Taking the Muslim other into consideration, this article investigates Muslims' everyday encounters within the (im)mobile spaces of public transport that entangle bodies with different histories, backgrounds, and imaginaries. Building on affective atmospheres, I propose an embodied understanding of othering practices and traveling with difference in public transport. Employing (auto)ethnography in Amsterdam, I present public transport as a cross-cultural meeting place with spatial negotiation of difference to study everyday travel experiences of young Muslims. Contributing to the field of mobilities studies, this article bridges the gap in the empirical evidence on the role of public transport, race, and religion in the othering of Muslims.

*Key Words:* affective atmospheres, Amsterdam, encounter, public transport, the Muslim other.

From Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat to a White man in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955 to the recent burqa and niqab ban in Belgium, The Netherlands, and France, public transportation has been a theatrical othering setting. As a social arena, public transport is a key site of tacit intercultural negotiations and intense embodied encounters with others (Wilson 2011; Koefoed, Christensen, and Simonsen 2017). It brings together people from a wide variety of age, gender, sexuality, ability, ethno-racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds in often crowded and limited spaces where encounters with fellow passengers or spectatorship of strangers are almost impossible to avoid (Fleetwood 2004; Officer and Kearns 2017). Encounters within public mobility spaces are loaded with histories, tension and anxiety, cross-cultural discomfort, and racist intolerance (Raudenbush 2012; Purifoye 2015; Rink 2016). Spaces of public transportation have been the sphere of power struggle, racial and class tensions, and replication of boundaries between “us” and “them” through which familiarity and difference are (re)established and maintained (Lobo 2014; Officer and Kearns 2017).

Mobilities studies have paid attention to different aspects of a passenger's journey, such as perceptions, experiences, affects, and emotions (Bissell 2008; Budd 2011; H. L. Jensen 2012; Ocejo and Tonnelat

2014; Merriman 2016; Lagerqvist 2019). There are studies on racialization (Raudenbush 2012; Purifoye 2015), gendered identities and sexual harassment (Law 1999; Gardner, Cui, and Coiacetto 2017; Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020), bullying (deLara 2008; Goodboy, Martin, and Brown 2016), and age (Westman et al. 2013; Honkatukia and Svyrenko 2019; Lagerqvist 2019; Van Hoven and Meijering 2019) that connect concepts of difference, exclusion, access, and justice with public transport. Although mobilities scholars have examined how different axes of social inequality such as gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity, or economic class create potentials for incivility, there is a lack of research in understanding the interface between religion and public transport.

Within the discourses of the Muslim other and the Muslim question, spreading White nationalism, populist xenophobia, and growing anti-Muslim racism, mobilities researchers have not paid attention to the religious aspects of public transportation. As Dunn and Hopkins (2016) argued, we need to study the everyday lives of Muslims and their lived experiences in the West if we want to recognize and tackle how racism and religious discrimination place limits on their social, economic, and physical mobilities. The primary objective of this article, therefore, is to provide an in-depth understanding of how young

Muslims experience othering within public transport as part of their everyday life and struggles to be mobile and participate in society.

Muslims experience a high level of othering and discrimination derived from their ethnicity, race, immigrant background, and religion (Itaoui 2016; Bila 2019; Warren 2019). They are highly visible within the everyday urban spaces of public transit, especially within Muslim-majority neighborhoods. Their presence is more or less noticeable, however, in other areas and modes of public transit such as inner-city bus and tram or (inter)urban trains. Yet we do not know how they experience these spaces. How do they experience riding a bus, metro, tram, or train? How is the Muslim other (re)produced and negotiated? Which emotions and affects do these everyday encounters generate? What are the cultural, social, and political relations activated in the mobile othering encounters? I highlight how othering discourse becomes part of the everyday travel experiences of young Muslims.

It should be indicated here that contrary to discourses in political debates and across various media outlets that racialize, essentialize, and homogenize Muslim(-looking) people, they are not the same (Itaoui 2020; Najib and Teeple Hopkins 2020). There are a wide variety of ways through which Muslims define and practice Islam. Muslims are more than a religious category, and Islam is not only a faith but also an identity and a practice. Additionally, despite the racialization of Islam or Muslim(-looking) bodies through which the materiality of the religion and aspects of bodily appearance are the basis for categorization (accurate or not) as Muslims (Love 2009; Sziarto, Mansson McGinty, and Seymour-Jorn 2013; Hopkins et al. 2017), there is no inherent prototypical Muslim body. Not all Muslims are publicly recognized as Muslims, nor are all Muslim-looking people Middle Eastern, and vice versa. Bodies focused on in this article, however, are the (Muslim-looking) people who are visibly, socially, and culturally recognized as Muslim; that is, women with the hijab and men with a beard.

By foregrounding and describing seemingly mundane events such as catching or alighting a bus, waiting for a train, and taking a metro seat that entangle Muslims with affective atmospheres of discomfort, fear, and anxiety, this article bridges the gap in the empirical evidence on the role of public transport, race, and religion in the othering of

Muslims. Emotional and affective approaches are productive because they provide a more expansive and embodied understanding of how othering unfolds in everyday events of mobilities that tap into potentials of racialization and global imaginaries of discomfort and fear (Ahmed 2007; Swanton 2010; H. L. Jensen 2012; Lobo 2014). I demonstrate how emotions, feelings, and affects of hate, anger, fear, stress, and discomfort are produced and practiced when Muslim(-looking) people are encountered in public transit. In this way, the article makes empirical contributions to cultural geographical works on affective atmospheres, the embodied experiences of mobility, everyday multiculturalism, daily negotiation of difference, and urban geographies of Muslim communities and identities in the West (Wilson 2011; Mansson McGinty 2012, 2018; Valentine 2013; Purifoye 2015; Bissell 2016; Itaoui 2016, 2020; Gokariksel 2017; Najib and Hopkins 2019a, 2019b; Hancock 2020).

This article takes an (auto)ethnographic approach in Amsterdam to explore young Muslims' complex and varied travel experiences emphasizing how public transport, religion, and othering interrelate. Interview data and observations accompanied by my own experiences of public transport focused on mundane events on the bus, metro, tram, and train shed light on how the Muslim other is (re)produced through affective encounters. In what follows, I first briefly embed the article within the literature on encounter, mobilities, affective atmosphere, othering, and anti-Muslim racism. After explaining the (auto)ethnographic approach, the findings are presented based on performative and affective otherings accompanied by my brief autoethnographic account.

## Embodied Encounters with the Other Body within the Spaces of Public Transport

Public transport offers a scene of everyday life. A crowd sharing a physically restricted space multiplies the possibilities of coming across people with different backgrounds, strangers who are spatially close yet socioeconomically, culturally, and politically distant (O. B. Jensen 2009; Wilson 2011). There are forms of intensive bodily encounters with random people in close proximity carrying a variety of social potentials. Kelley (1994) called public transit

“moving theatres” (55, cited in Fleetwood 2004, 37), referring to the rich social performances and the daily events in these vehicles. The fact that one’s company cannot be chosen makes public transportation a symbolic platform for struggles over space and rights (Honkatukia and Svyrenko 2019). The “throwntogetherness” (Massey 2005) of public transport and closeness with other bodies turn these spaces into an unavoidable site for the negotiation and recognition of difference.

Similar to these othering encounters, travel is inherently corporeal. Mobilities are experienced as embodied (Urry 2002). Cresswell (2010) claimed that “in the end, it is at the level of the body that human mobility is produced, reproduced, and, occasionally, transformed” (20). It highly depends, however, on whose body it is and on how that body is read by fellow passengers. Urban mobility is much more than getting from A to B (O. B. Jensen 2006), and based on whose body is “getting there” the experience and meaning of the trip change. In this sense, Cresswell (2006) conceptualized mobilities as movement + meaning + power with inevitable degrees of friction and turbulence (Cresswell 2014; Merriman 2016). Salazar (2014) also argued that mobilities are not equally meaningful for everybody. Meaning comes from the society, culture, politics, and histories within which the rider is embodied and embedded.

### Affective Atmospheres of Public Transport

Mobile embodied encounters are loaded with pre-occupations of the moment, moods, sensations, prior personal histories, and geopolitical imaginations that alter the quality of encounters (Augé 1997; Koefoed, Christensen, and Simonsen 2017). They are complex corporeal, sensorial, emotional, and affective experiences. The corporeal aspects of being with others in spaces of public transportation involve waiting for the vehicles, sitting or trying not to sit next to some passengers, avoiding them, and responding to their movements and objects they carry (Rink 2016). Riding with the other, furthermore, includes multi-sensorial practices to perceive space through looking, listening, touching, and smelling (Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen 2006; Officer and Kearns 2017). Navigating through the public spaces of transportation consequently requires multiple corporeal-sensory practices that are imbued with emotion and

affect (H. L. Jensen 2012; Koefoed, Christensen, and Simonsen 2017).

Emotional and affective encounters have performative and corporeal elements. They are practiced and expressed through the communicative body, such as physical aggression, shouting, blushing, or changes in the heartbeat. They also have a spatial dimension, a space within which we are emotionally touched and aware of its affect through fear, anxiety, anger, happiness, sadness, frustration, excitement, and so on (Conradson and McKay 2007; Koefoed, Christensen, and Simonsen 2017). They are not necessarily bodily actions, yet the body expresses or articulates them. A more passive side of emotional and affective encounters, however, is how the body is possessed by them; it is the felt sense of having been affected by the environment (Simonsen 2010; Merriman 2016). As Thrift (2005) averred, affect “acts both as a way of initiating action, a reading of the sense of aliveness of the situation and an inter-corporeal transfer of that expectancy” (139).

To differentiate between emotion, affect, and feeling, McCormack (2008) conceptualized “affect (as a prepersonal field of intensity), feeling (as that intensity registered in a sensing body), and emotion (as that felt intensity expressed in a socio-culturally recognizable form)” (426). Anderson and Holden (2008), by the same token, differentiated “affects as impersonal movements that constitute what a body can do, feelings as interpersonal expressions of affects, emotions as personal qualifications of feelings” (145). To solve the problem of distinction, however, affective atmospheres have been conceptualized as relational yet autonomous, emerging from practices, bodies, and materials (Anderson 2009; Bille and Simonsen 2019). As Anderson (2009) argued, affective atmospheres “emanate from the assembling of the human bodies, discursive bodies, non-human bodies, and all the other bodies that make up everyday situation” that are “spatially discharged affective qualities that are autonomous from the bodies that they emerge from, enable and perish with” (80).

Thinking through affective atmospheres, studies have sought to unfold the complex ways through which mobility infrastructures, environments, bodies, and objects are entangled and entwined. As Bissell (2010a) remarked, an affective atmospheric approach toward mobilities “prompts us to think about how different configurations of objects, technologies, and

bodies come together to form different experiences of ‘being with’ whilst on the move” (272). Although affective atmospheres are invisible and nonrepresentational (Thrift 2004, 2008), they compose the ubiquitous backdrop of everyday travel experiences through which particular suspicions or anxieties can emerge from encounters between fellow passengers and objects they carry (Bissell 2010a, 2016). The idea of the affective atmosphere is also related to the notions of topophilia and topophobia, when Tuan (1977) expanded the sensual, aesthetic, and emotional dimensions of space and the desires and fears that people associate with specific places. Regarding the affective experience, Massumi (2009) stressed that “it doesn’t have to be a drama. It’s really more about microshocks of the kind that populate every moment of our lives. For example, a change in focus, or a rustle at the periphery of vision that draws the gaze toward it” (2).

Recently, studies have focused on the affective experiences of traveling (Raudenbush 2012; Rink 2016), smells (Meij, Haartsen, and Meijering 2020), atmospheres (Bissell 2010a), affects (Budd 2011; Merriman 2016), emotions (H. L. Jensen 2012), and tensions (Purifoye 2015; Honkatukia and Ssynarenko 2019; Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020) that emerge through embodied encounters within public transit. These studies on the travel experiences of bodies with different sociocorporeal features (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality, and age), within everyday spaces of public transport, have contributed to our understanding of the negotiation of differences, justice, social (in)equality, and othering on the smallest of scales (e.g., facial expressions, body language, and glimpses) that define attitudes toward the other. Everyday spaces of public transportation thus are wrapped in power and privilege reproducing familiar bodies (safe, near, touchable) from the other (dangerous, distant, untouchable) through intercorporeal encounters (Ahmed 2000, 2002, 2007; Lobo 2014).

### The Muslim Other

Although different embodied and affective aspects of social inequality have been addressed by the mobilities turn in social sciences, less attention has been given to the encounters with and travel experiences of religious bodies. Religion and religious bodies are affective, yet they have not been considered

in transportation geography and mobilities studies. This article consequently embeds (perceived) religious bodies within the analysis of the social organization of mobility by looking at the everyday travel experiences of young Muslims.

Some U.S. and European Union events such as 11 September 2001, 7 July 2005 London bombings, the January and November 2015 Paris attacks, and the War on Terror have resulted in the growing anti-Islamic feeling. For example, since the murder of Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and film director Theo van Gogh in 2004, political debate has focused on the position of Islam and Muslims in The Netherlands and whether Islam and Islamic lifestyles are compatible with Dutch society (Gazzah 2010; De Koning 2013; Pertwee 2017). Islam is now seen as a signifier of otherness, the prime source of political, social, cultural, and (national) security problems in the West. Anti-Muslim discourses have portrayed Muslims as a threat to democracy and social cohesion of the Western modernity and culture of freedom and reproduced gendered stereotypes depicting all Muslim men as fearsome, villains, and potential terrorists and Muslim women as passive, helpless victims of oppressive patriarchal culture and religion (Bilge 2010; Van Liere 2014; Moghissi 2016; Gokariksel 2017). Furthermore, in the time of the backlash of multiculturalism, spreading White nationalism, strong xenophobia, and racist movements in the Global North (Listerborn 2015), media and political discourses represent Muslims not only as the religious other or the dangerous other but also as the ethno-national other who does not belong or integrate into Europe or North America, backward foreigners, unwanted immigrants, and part of a negative diversity.

Pain (2014, 2015; see also Smith 2012; Pain and Staeheli 2014), in this regard, conceptualized intimate geopolitics of fear to connect the themes of geopolitical and everyday in different global, national, cultural, and local contexts. For instance, place-specific events become subsumed by global geopolitics (e.g., 7 July is linked to the U.S.-led War on Terror). By thinking through fear as geopolitical, Pain and Smith (2008) connected intimate geopolitics to affect and emotion. They foregrounded how, through the circulation of fear from global to local or its movement from discourses and events to the bodies and feelings of individuals, global fears are grounded, operating through the racialization of

certain bodies in the West that heavily impact Muslim(-looking) communities.

The construction of the unwanted Muslim other and the racialization of Islam have resulted in the growth of hate crime, violence, and discrimination directed toward Muslims, particularly those with visible signs of Islamic belonging (e.g., beard, veils), as well as people who are perceived as Muslim (e.g., Arab Christians, Sikhs, South Asians, or Middle Easterners; Itaoui 2016, 2020; Hopkins et al. 2017; Najib and Teeple Hopkins 2020). Although Muslims span a wide range of racial and ethnic groups, the homogenization of Muslim(-looking) people creates a Muslim prototype not only through skin tone but also through clothing, language, and religious and cultural symbols, who are more often criminalized, as always already a security threat that is manifested in Donald Trump's "Muslim Ban" (Gokariksel 2017; Fritzsche and Nelson 2020).

Their visibility within everyday life, embodiments of faith, ritual observances, cultural expressions, and even their "brown" names often circulate feelings of suspicion; they are the imagined other whose presence poses a threat to the (imagined) national community (Ahmed 2000, 2007; Anderson 2006; Mikola, Colic-Peisker, and Dekker 2016; Warren 2019). The spreading Islamophobic climate and the rise of nationalism across the Western liberal democracies have given Muslims experiences of racism, ongoing racial profiling at airports, street and on-campus harassments, restricted mobility of veiled women, vandalism of mosques, and discrimination in employment and housing sectors (Gokariksel and Secor 2012, 2015; Dunn and Hopkins 2016; Mansouri, Lobo, and Johns 2016; Najib and Hopkins 2019a; Itaoui 2020). They are subject to what Mansson McGinty (2018) called "embodied Islamophobia," anti-Muslim ideas and actions that are lived, experienced, and embodied within everyday (urban) life, within particular public spaces, and through particular encounters. In this light, Itaoui (2016) discussed the spatialization of Islamophobia that limits young Muslims' mobility and engagement with public spaces across their cities based on their spatial imaginaries or mental maps of Islamophobia to reduce the possibilities of racial attacks in public spaces (also Itaoui and Dunn 2017; Itaoui 2020).

There is, however, a clear lack of research in understanding how mobile spaces shape daily social interactions between Muslims and the society within

which they live, between the disadvantaged and privileged. I address this gap to show what happens at the intercorporeal level of encounter when cross-religious groups interact on mobile spaces. By identifying particular bodily practices through which the Muslim other is (re)produced within the everyday spaces of public transit, this article offers new insights into the sensorial, corporeal, and affective experiences of being a passenger. By thinking through the relation between bodies, movement, and space I touch on how othering is practiced in minutely meaningful yet fully felt and viscerally realized sensations, moods, and affects (Adey et al. 2014).

## Method

I explore how young Muslims experience, feel, and live affective othering encounters within everyday spaces of public transport. Young Muslims have been selected as the target group because the intimate geopolitics of Islamophobia mostly revolves around this demographic group. They are growing up in a political climate where they are often seen as either a victim or a villain who causes trouble. Their occupation of space, community relations, social cohesion, and integration alongside their sense of belonging and identity of being Muslim and Dutch are problematized and questioned (Hopkins, Botterill, and Sanghera 2018; Itaoui 2020). Consequently, as Bayat and Herrera (2010) argued, the feeling of otherness among young Muslims is strong, because despite being legal citizens of the nation, they are seen as outsiders.

Amsterdam is the (auto)ethnographic site to reflect on religious diversity, particularly the visibility of Islam and its followers. The city today encompasses 350 different religious communities from 180 nationalities (Beck 2013), making it one of the most religiously diverse cities in the world. Islam is highly visible in urban and public transport spaces, which is related to the high presence of the Muslim population; more than 120,000 Amsterdammers are Muslim (~12 percent of the population; CBS 2016). In addition, Amsterdam offers a wide variety of public transport modes (e.g., bus, tram, train, metro, and ferry), which turns the city into an interesting site in which to investigate the everyday othering practices toward Muslims within such spaces.

The article builds on data gathered in fieldwork undertaken between January and October 2019 in Amsterdam involving verbal (informal and formal individual and group interviews), visual (observations, photographs, and taking field notes), and autoethnographic (reflective journaling) methods. As the primary method, a set of semistructured in-depth (serial) interviews was conducted to elicit young Muslims' knowledge, perception, or embodied experiences of mobile othering processes. Observation additionally enabled me to observe and record how Muslims were treated by their fellow passengers and transit staff, as well as the ways through which they use, manage, or negotiate their bodies within different modes and spaces of public transit. Being brown, bearded, and Middle Eastern, autoethnography offered me a close engagement with the (im)mobile travel spaces to explore how my own body was read and treated differently, how I felt the affective atmospheres of public transit, and how I affected and was affected through intercorporeal encounters. This assortment of methods combining in-depth interviews, observations, and autoethnography forms a methodological triangulation that enhances the validity of data.

## Interviews

Given the fact that Muslims do not form a homogeneous community in Amsterdam, I aimed to find respondents from diverse backgrounds in terms of gender (eight women and ten men), socioeconomic status (from working class to upper middle class), occupation, education (from high school to PhD), Islamic branches (Sunni and Shia), religious involvement (from orthodoxy to liberal), generation (native, first, and second), and national origin (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, The Netherlands, Somalia, Egypt, Bangladesh, and Cameroon).

Multiple recruitment strategies were employed, including contacts with gatekeepers at mosques, universities, and educational institutions, as well as networking and snowballing. Lasting in total forty-four hours, thirty-four in-depth, semistructured, multistage interviews with eighteen young Muslims were conducted about their everyday lived (travel) experiences to highlight the challenges that the religious minorities experience within public transit. Interviews were mostly sequential, up to five

sessions; only five interviews were one-off. Twenty-eight interviews were conducted with individuals and six interviews were in groups of two. Five participants (two men and three women) were either busy or because of their beliefs or discomfort did not want to be interviewed in person. Consequently, alternative data collection methods such as phone, Skype, and e-mail interviews were employed.

My gender turned out to be slightly problematic. Many young Muslim women declined my interview invitations or preferred not to be interviewed in person but via phone, which reduced some of the nuances of face-to-face conversation, such as facial expressions and body language. I was seen as an insider, though. My social locations, a unique mix of gender, race, class, and age characteristics, had significant effects on gaining more intimate insights from my participants (Mullings 1999). My name, age, ethnicity (Persian), socioeconomic background (working class), some shared experiences of Islamophobia, and even my hobby (calligraphy) helped me during the recruitment phase and the interview sessions. Although the power dynamics between me and the participants are difficult to grasp, my insider position aided the establishment of rapport, facilitated a deep engagement and openness by the participants, and enhanced the quality of the empirical data.

To uncover Muslims' varying embodied travel experiences, their stories, anecdotes, and original accounts of making different modes of (inter)urban trips were audio-recorded. The questions were about their personal experiences of encounters within public transit such as passenger-passenger, passenger-driver, or crew interactions; waiting for the vehicles; catching and alighting the vehicles; and taking a seat or standing throughout the trip. Next to the extreme episodes of verbal and physical violence, they were asked to recollect any incident that made their travel experience unusual, "sticky" (Ahmed 2010), or worth remembering; the feeling these encounters generated; and the ways they reacted to such othering practices. Special attention was paid to the role of language and words charged with emotion, affect, and feeling, such as hate, disgust, fear, anger, danger, shock, frustration, indifference, awkward, weird, judgmental, unwelcome, and so forth (Wierzbicka 2003; Conradson and McKay 2007; McCormack 2008; Bissell 2010a).

## Observations

During the fieldwork, I was predominantly using public transport as a useful means to observe encounter with “different” bodies. I spent a considerable amount of time within these spaces (i.e., stations and vehicles), more than 400 hours, as I undertook more than 260 (inter)urban journeys lasting a maximum of two-and-a-half hours for the purpose of autoethnography and observation but also engaging in conversations with strangers, recruiting participants, and visiting interviewees. I was not only “going somewhere” (Salazar 2014) but also a participant-observer reflecting on and recording the practices of my fellow passengers. I was particularly interested in bodily encounters (facial expressions as “affect in process” [Thrift 2004, 61], movements, stillness, postures, and gestures); attentive to sensing smells, sounds, and haptic sensations; and concerned with different emotions, feelings, and affective atmospheres generated and changed through these (ephemeral) intercorporeal encounters that interlock mobility and immobility (Bissell 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2010a, 2010b; Wilson 2011; Sheller 2014; Rink 2016; Officer and Kearns 2017). As Benediktsson et al. (2020) conceptualized, I was “a passive form of flâneur—a mild and reflective form of curiosity about fellow passengers” (116).

## Autoethnography

I do not embody the white male flâneur, however. I am brown, bearded, and Muslim-looking, embodying Middle Eastern facial features, with dark hair. I was not only the gazer but also the gazed. My bearded racial-ethnic body drew attention: On many occasions, I received “weird” looks; on many trips, no one was sitting next to me; or I was randomly, double, or triple checked. While I was looking at the other, I was looked at as the other, which gave me a mixture of anxiety and curiosity. Self as data, placing myself as the subject (Wall 2008), provided a closer evaluation of how affect and emotion were played out within the social contexts of public transit. This autoethnographic approach placed me, the researcher, into the position of a participant, a (typical?) passenger, to gain an embodied and affective understanding of being the other while traveling, whose observations and encounters resonated with points made by participants. Regarding my objectivity, it should be argued that (auto)ethnography is a

“patchwork of feelings, experiences, emotions, and behaviours that portray a more complete view of ... life” (Wolcott 1999, 10). By reconsidering traditional ideas about objectivity, my (auto)ethnographic account is just “a way of seeing, not *the way*” (Wolcott 1999, 137; see also Wall 2008). In addition, as Harding (1986, 1992, 1995) and Hartsock (1983) argued, the production of knowledge from the point of view of the othered offers the greater motivation of these groups to understand the views of the privileged or perspectives of those in positions of power.

The Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, approved the research project on which this article is drawn. All participants were informed about the research procedure and how research outputs would be disseminated. They were provided with an information sheet and written consent forms were obtained. They were also given the list of interview questions in advance. I have masked my participants, giving them pseudonyms and age bands to minimize their identification risk. All verbatim transcribed interviews and organized (auto)ethnographic field notes were inductively coded to draw out themes, patterns, and resemblances regarding mobile othering within NVivo (Version 10, QSR International, Melbourne, Australia).

## Embodied Encounters with the Muslim Other in Amsterdam Public Transport

Mobility spaces are caught up in affective relations and atmospheres (Merriman 2016). Because different bodies possess different affective capacities (Tolia-Kelly 2006), intercorporeal othering encounters are charged with emotion and affect within atmospheres entangled and entwined within complex assemblages of bodies, objects, signs, auras, and histories so that any change in the assemblage changes the affective capacity of atmospheres.

Spaces of public transit for all participants and me have been a stage of social drama, exclusion, discrimination, and racialization, where intercultural encounters fail, the threshold of tolerance is crossed, and bodies are read and judged based on race, beard, veil, dress, gender, age, size, language, and objects they carry (Fleetwood 2004; Wilson 2011; Lobo 2014). Within such physically limited spaces, sensory perceptions are sharp, so bodies have an increased awareness of their surroundings. It turned out that it



is not only their own bodies that young Muslims have to deal with while traveling but also the uncomfortable embodiment of their fellow passengers, particularly their panoptical othering gaze. A group of Muslim women enters the platform, a passenger (bearded, veiled) joins a queue to catch the vehicle, a (Muslim-looking) traveler enters the carriage, someone searches for a “proper” seat or after a tiny hesitation prefers not to sit at all, or a (Muslim-looking) passenger carries a bag. These and many other face-to-face and body-to-body meetings constantly create and change affective atmospheres within which discomfort, irritation, anxiety, curiosity, suspicion, anger, or aggression might emerge. These are the moments where othering is embodied, felt, lived, and put into motion within everyday spaces of public transit.

The interviewed people and I have encountered a wide variety of “bad experiences” within public transit. An assortment of feelings such as anxiety, fear, discomfort, and disgust; symbolic violence and harassment in the form of gestures, whispers, scrutiny, and “bitter” looks; avoidance including standing, sitting, or moving away from them; and poor or no service provision by public transport staff, verbal abuse, and physical aggression are some examples. Although the boundary is blurry, I have classified such othering experiences into two categories: performative and affective. *Performative* aspects are the corporeal and representational sociospatial practices of exclusion, those lived moments that are tangible to bodies. *Affective* othering, on the other hand, points at micro, subtle, and nonrepresentational experiences, those “sticky” short-lived feelings that cause tension. The categories and othering encounters considered here are by no means comprehensive but provide examples of some episodes of everyday mobility practices of Muslims in Amsterdam that touch on a more nuanced account of the everyday public travel, anti-Muslim encounters, and living (in this case riding) with difference within public spaces.

### Performative Othering

The most repeated example of othering is the “seat drama.” Although seats are often selected based on gender, age, and ethnicity or race (Koefoed, Christensen, and Simonsen 2017), an empty seat next to a veiled, bearded, or Muslim-looking body,

especially when the vehicle is packed with passengers, clearly exemplifies othering. As Moosa, a working Muslim student in his early twenties, recalls, he experiences the seat drama, particularly on the bus:

Interviewer (I): Do people sit next to you?

Moosa (M): I don’t remember that ever happened, no ... but yeah, it happens, people of color tend to sit next to me.

Me: People of color?

Moosa: Yes.

Me: But White folks?

Moosa: No, never.

Hafez, a bearded working man in his early thirties, remembered a similar story:

I wore my *dishdasha* [the ankle-length garments for men]. ... I always sit next to the window, which means there is always a place next to me for other people. So when I sat there, no one sat next to me and the train was almost full. It was very interesting to see and experience that you are not belonging to somewhere.

What Moosa and Hafez said, the refusal of being seated next to them, refers to an obvious othering practice. Similar to everyday open urban spaces, everyday racism on public transportation is enacted through a variety of avoidance techniques. They involve particular practices, decisions, and interactions based on particular feelings and affects that resonate between bodies. Bodies are read and judged based on likeness and difference produced through embodied encounters. Certain bodies, however, are subject to extra caution, alter the affective atmosphere of the carriage, and provoke certain emotions such as disgust and fear that dictate modification of interactions and behaviors. Similar to almost all of the participants, difference in Moosa’s and Hafez’s stories was synonymous with the anxiety derived from their male racialized bodies that renders them as the dangerous other. Such an othering act within the limited spaces of public transit requires a spatial bodily negotiation through “tactics of placement” (Koefoed, Christensen, and Simonsen 2017) to find the safe sitting or standing place away from the other.

Next to the spatial organization of bodies within a carriage, blunt verbal and visual otherings were

repeated by participants. Sara, a working veiled student in her mid-twenties, has been exposed to both of them:

Some people look, some people in a good way, some in a bad way. I know that because I'm very aware of my surrounding. I try to stay away from my phone so I observe people and then I realize people are also observing me. Some people look very hesitant like I'm hiding something under my hijab and waiting for the right moment to blow it. ... Once someone yelled at me whilst I was waiting for the train, like, Jesus is going to burn me in hell. ... I think that happened after *Charlie Hebdo*<sup>1</sup> and the wave of Islamophobia.

In these encounters, Sara has experienced two different modes of othering, visual and verbal, and both are charged with emotion and affect rendering her body out of place. In physically reduced mobile spaces, passengers, particularly minorities, have sensorial perceptions attuned; their bodies are aware of their surrounding environment, objects, and bodies of their fellow travelers. Moreover, as a veiled woman, her body carries additional othering elements and it could be argued that othering and (micro-)aggressions within public transport are gendered. In comparison to Moosa and Hafez, the mere fact that people did perform verbal othering toward Sara might mean that there is a power play reproducing the stereotype of passive, powerless, or victim Muslim woman where her veiled body can receive unwanted comments, whereas with Moosa and Hafez, the stereotypical criminal or villain Muslim men, fellow passengers did not seek to engage with them at all.

The intersection of gender, race, and religion has provided Sara with what Fanon (1986) described as a third-person consciousness: "I'm very aware of my surrounding." This awareness has allowed her to read how other passengers are interpreting and responding to her presence (Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020). The "language of the eyes" informs her about the gazer's intention (McCrackin and Itier 2019): "Some people look, some people in a good way, some in a bad way." She often becomes a terrorist because becoming a terrorist demands having a particular skin tone, clothing, religion, and language (Swanton 2010), and she embodies them all. The body of the veiled woman in a racialized visual regime turns Sara into a terrorist and, consequently, she was yelled at after the *Charlie Hebdo* incident. Ahmed (2004b) argued that particular "histories are

reopened with each encounter, such that some bodies are already read as more hateful than other(s)" (33). Katz (2007) would call this violence *banal terrorism*, a nationalist discourse that not only otherizes Muslims but also frames them as part of an international terror regime. For Smith (2012; also Pain and Staeheli 2014; Pain 2015), such othering practices are intimate geopolitics through the entanglement of the geopolitical with the intimate. The geopolitical violence is diffused through its presence in the intimate, and the intimate violence persists precisely because it has roots in other sites, memories, and histories. Within the confined onboard spaces of public transit, such Islamophobic performances are not "backstage" (Goffman 1959), but "prejudices are potentially solidified and perhaps further intensified" (Wilson 2011, 641).

Yusuf, in his mid-twenties, is a bearded, highly educated, newly married man who works for an international consultancy company. He remembered that his most extreme othering experience happened on a train:

There was a guy from the occupier group [Occupy Wall Street movement]. I saw him having a discussion with some of the occupier people. I just wanted to understand what they stand for. He knew I am a Muslim and was like, "You Muslims, you ruined the world." You could really see he was attacking me, he even touched me. I think that was the most annoying experience I've ever encountered. You could really see he was shouting like, "It is because of you the world is this madness."

Yusuf has experienced an abject encounter (Wilson 2017), an encounter beyond the scope of tolerance. Here Yusuf's bearded body reopens some histories and intensifies the affective atmosphere of anger, mistrust, and frustration generated by the ideas and bodies of that particular occupier group. This action-potential affective atmosphere (Duff 2010) transformed Yusuf not only into an other but also into an object of hate that, because of the isolated and intimate space of the train, quickly escalated into physical violence (Ahmed 2004b; Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter 2020). Yusuf was dehumanized, blamed, and scapegoated for insecurity, terrorism, and even global economic inequality due to his traits and religious and cultural practices. Yusuf's lived experience of intimate geopolitics is another example of how international and global and everyday, intimate, and



**Figure 1.** Two veiled women sitting and waiting in between train compartments. Photo by author.

local are tightly interwoven and how such relations function in different settings.

Histories, however, are inclusive and mobile encounters reopen some heard and read stories for Muslims. Nour, a working veiled student in her mid-twenties, said:

When I'm on the train platforms, I always take two or three steps backwards and I won't wait right before the line because you never know what may happen and [there are] some crazy people; who knows. The reason I do this is because of the stories you hear from other countries where people have been pushed over the platforms because of their faith. ... I have never seen anyone getting pushed on the platform but I've heard it and know that there are some crazy people out there. So just in case.

Nour and some other respondents noted anxieties and fear while waiting for a bus or train. Within the in-between spaces where movement is paused, slowed, or stopped, othering lurks. Being on the intersection of Black, veiled, and female, as well as the limited space of the train platform, turns Nour's body highly visible, thus increasing vulnerability to violence. In return, the need for hypervigilance while waiting for transit is grave; this is the moment that heard stories and revisited histories sharpen her perception of the train platform. She takes two or three steps backward, "just in case." Nour's story also touches on Itaoui's (2016) mental maps of

Islamophobia. She knows that being visibly Muslim in certain public spaces as well as on and around public transportation increases risks to the body. Such spatial imaginaries of othering reframe normal and everyday space of a train platform into a dangerous space for Nour. Moreover, because this is a train platform, the danger is fatal and highly differentiated from the other prior stories; thus, she needs to (re)negotiate her body within space. Nour's story illustrates that moments of waiting and quiescence demand corporeal self-awareness, an awareness of one's own body in space (Bissell 2007; Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020). This is what Hage (2009) argued as the politics of waiting, "a politics around who is to wait. There is a politics around what waiting entails. And there is a politics around how to wait and how to organise waiting into a social system" (138). Thus, stillness and waiting (Figure 1) have the potential to "certain features of a social process that might have been foreshadowed by others or entirely hidden" (Hage 2009, 4).

I saw Fatima [a university student and a teacher at a high school, a visibly Muslim woman in her early twenties] and we had an informal conversation. When I showed her the picture of two Muslim women sitting on the in-between train compartment [Figure 1], she said that she does so, too. She prefers sitting there because in this way "people mess with you less." (Field notes, Monday, 17 June 2019, Amsterdam)

Muslims, particularly veiled women, are concerned about their everyday security and potential exposure to violence (Najib and Hopkins 2019a, 2019b). This has led toward the incorporation of politics of mobility and immobility. This observation touches on a carefully spatial arrangement of bodies within the mobile spaces of waiting and its politics. Although there are plenty of seats available inside the compartments, Fatima and the Muslim women in Figure 1 prefer to sit and wait within the liminal space of the train. Specific sitting and waiting places are imposed on the Muslim other, which they are supposed to deserve, where the hierarchy and inequality are represented directly spatiocorporeally. The other is made through a dialectical spatiocorporeal relation with sitting and waiting. The Muslim other is (re)produced through the “where” of the sitting or they prefer that “where” because they are the othered. Consequently, the space between the carriages transforms spatiotemporally the travel experience for the Muslim women: temporality or how “waiting” might be a notable part of liminality as a zone of survival, “people mess with you less”; spatiality or how Muslim sittings are segregated and othered spatially by dominant groups. It gains its meaning based on a hierarchical othering process in which some bodies are privileged morally, culturally, spatially, and politically over the other (Marotta 2020). The mobility of some bodies comes at the expense of the mobility of the other (Massey 2012; Bissell 2016; Straughan, Bissell, and Gorman-Murray 2020).

The othering encounters, however, are not limited to passenger–passenger interactions. Participants have several stories regarding the discriminatory practices by public transport staff. During the second session of the group interview with Fatima and Nour, they discussed the following:

Fatima: I’ve had the time like when I was on the train from my parents to Amsterdam. Everyone had to show their travel card or their tickets. I also showed mine. The person in charge, she was with everyone like, “Thank you, thank you, here you are, thank you.” She was saying that to everyone and she came to me sitting at the end of the cabin. She just looked at me, I gave her my card, and she walked away. She said not a word. It wasn’t radical but saying nothing is saying something.

Nour: I’ve had, like, several times when I was waiting for the bus and standing at the bus station. Then the

bus would approach and I would wave at it and the bus driver would just drive away. I looked at them in the eyes but the driver just went. ... It happens a lot also to my friends.

Fatima: Or when you step into the bus, like a couple of weeks ago other people were going on the bus and when I had to step in, he [the driver] closed the door. I was in the middle and he closed the door. I saw he closed the door when I wanted to get in but I just managed to jump in. Or I was waiting for a bus and when the bus came he just ignored me. It’s like a normal human thing, you wake up on time, you do everything, and now the bus driver just ignores you and that’s why you’re coming late.

Nour: When I step into the bus, I always greet people because it’s just normal and polite. Sometimes when I say “Good morning” to the bus driver, the person would look at me like ... and I would be like, okay ... it’s just so awkward; you say “Good morning” to someone and the person doesn’t reply. Then when I step out of the bus, I don’t say “[Have a] good day.”

Fatima’s and Nour’s accounts are instances of when they felt discriminated against by public transit crew. Although their examples do not contain any specifically anti-Muslim terms, Fatima, Nour, and some other participants indicated that they have indeed perceived these poor or lack of service provisions as discriminatory acts. Additionally, Fatima’s bus story was an experience of physical danger where she might have been hit by the bus door. Their time was also put at risk as they were left standing at bus stops instead of being picked up. These vignettes are various forms of social sanctions (Purifoye 2015) through which everyday (anti-Muslim) racism is enacted via avoidance techniques. Racially marked bodies experience more shunning instances or physical avoidance within spaces of public transport not only by fellow passengers but also by staff members (Nayak 2010; Carr 2016; Benediktsson et al. 2020). These various descriptions of unspoken othering and silent encounters, moreover, echo Glenn’s (2004) conceptualization of silence as a form of violence. She has argued about the oppressive power relation in the use of silence and claimed that silence as rhetoric is substantive and meaningful, “an absence with a function” (Glenn 2004, 4), which can be employed intentionally as both a tool for protecting authority and a means of punishment. Silence, indifference, the seat drama, saying nothing, or ignoring the passenger are the ways in which Muslims are

transformed into the other within everyday social spaces of mobility.

### Affective Othering

As Bissell (2010a) explained, the communication between passengers happens mostly through affective rather than discursive, conversational registers. Affective atmospheres are central to everyday othering encounters within which exclusion and anti-Muslim racism occur on the move. These atmospheres facilitate or confine particular practices and evoke particular feelings. As Fatima put forward:

And because it's a feeling people can't see it or touch it and sort of can't be proven. And this is where the problem comes. When you want to tell someone that you feel excluded they can easily tell, "No, you are feeling it, it's in your head" ... but at some point, you say, "No it's not in my head otherwise I would be a psycho."

It is the affective atmospheres of hate, fear, anxiety, and discomfort, the vague sense of "something's wrong," that has altered Fatima's field of feeling. This sticky bothering "somethingness" of affect emerges through the combination of specific objects, bodies, and practices at a particular time in a particular space. This is the moment in which othering surfaces from the background, is registered in the sensing bodies of passengers, making Fatima "feel" excluded and simultaneously causing her fellow passengers to feel annoyed or anxious. Myriam, a veiled Muslim woman in her mid-twenties who was finishing her bachelor's degree at the time of the sequential phone interviews, has experienced that:

There is a feeling that people are looking at me weirdly but they didn't act on it. So it's a feeling that we get from other people but nothing has ever happened, like I was called out or anything.

Within the affective atmosphere of surveillance, stigma, and uncertainty (Elfenbein 2019), Muslims, particularly veiled women, are affected in relation to the bodies of others, which leaves certain feelings and emotional impressions behind. Myriam felt "weird" looks from her fellow transit riders due to her veiled body within the limited space of the train car. Next to this spatial dimension, there is also an intercorporeal aspect of affect. Passengers have been affected by Myriam's appearance, her veiled body, and the geopolitical imaginaries of discomfort. This is another form of intimate geopolitics where

anxieties are mapped onto the spatial presence of Muslims where the locality—public transport in this case—and globalism of Islamophobia are entwined. Such an entanglement communicates and calls for a response. She affected them and they replied to her through the "weird" looks (Nayak 2010; Simonsen 2010). Myriam's affective visual othering, however, differs from Sara's, explained in the previous section. The affective atmosphere that Myriam experienced did not modify passengers' possible field of actions, whereas, in the case of Sara, the temporal aspect of affect played an important role. The *Charlie Hebdo* incident had recently happened, which intensified the othering encounter and heightened the capacitating dimension of action. Sara was affected by more than just a feeling of being looked at. The *Charlie Hebdo* incident enabled an action; Sara was yelled at. She had another sensorial affective encounter:

I hated that because they serve alcohol but not because of alcohol but because of its smell; that bothers me. I hate the smell of beer and I always end up with people sitting next to me in the train drinking beer.

The smell (of beer) has the capacity to alter the sensory experience and affective atmosphere, generating specific emotions; in this case, anxiety and hatred. The religious prohibition of alcohol consumption has affectively charged not only the alcohol but also its smell for Sara; she is uncomfortable. Smell here is an affective artefact, material or nonmaterial object that has the power to change the affective composition of the atmosphere (Piredda 2020). The interesting point here is the sensory dimension of mobile spaces of public transit where the smell can evoke bodily discomfort and particular feelings. Several other female interviewees also described the heightening anxiety that emerges tied to alcohol. For them, alcohol is related to the drunk men who might cause sexual or racist harassment (Valentine 1989; Lagerqvist 2019).

Similar to the smell, objects that Muslims, particularly men, bring to public transportation alter affective atmospheres. For instance, Ahmad, a young working Muslim man in his early twenties, during one of the group interviews with his close friend, Fouad, a working man in his mid-twenties, explained how his backpack has caused him some troubles:

Ahmad: Sometimes when I'm at Schiphol [airport] or the train stations and I have a little bit longer beard

and leave my bag to a friend or something, everyone is looking at my bag like what is happening here; everyone is scared. Or if I have to go to the toilet on the train and leave my bag behind, everyone is like, “NOOOOO.”

Fouad: I always feel awkward when I’m in public transport with my backpack maybe I think people think I’m a terrorist. I get this feeling and it’s not like someone has said it to me.

These vignettes demonstrate how the affective artefacts contribute toward othering of Muslims. As Sedgwick (2003) argued, “Affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any other number of other things, including other affects” (19). “Everyone is scared” is grounded in racialized discourse and media representation of a single affective idea that Muslim men are a security threat and the objects they carry are potentially risky. Ahmad’s and Fouad’s stories are clear examples of how the Muslim other is never far away from the figure of the terrorist. This notion affectively charges their bodies and the material consequences of such embodiments as well as the affective atmospheres that emerge in the relations between these bodies and objects. Although he has had nothing to do with any kind of violence whatsoever, Fouad feels “awkward” in mobile spaces because his bearded, racialized body and the backpack he carries within atmospheres of suspicion and mistrust have affected him, turned him into a terrorist, an object of fear and anxiety, a dangerous other. Consequently, object, bodies, ideas, imaginations, sensations, and the relations between them have the capacity to affect the physical and psychological states of the transit users (Budd 2011). Moreover, atmospheres that the Muslim other creates or alters can affect a large group of riders:

There was an issue and we had to stay at Almere Station until the problem was solved. There was a huge crowd talking whilst waiting for the restoration. Two women in full black chador [a type of hijab] alighted a train that arrived at the station. For a fraction of second, there was a drop of conversation, a tiny silence. The fully veiled bodies of Muslim women suddenly changed the affective atmosphere of the platform. (Field notes, Wednesday, 9 October 2019, Amsterdam)

Brennan (2004) noted that although affect has social or psychological origins, its transmission “is also

responsible for bodily changes, as in a whiff of the room’s atmosphere, some longer-lasting. In other words, the transmission of affect, if only for an instant, alters the biochemistry of the subject. The ‘atmosphere’ or the environment literally gets into the individual” (1, cited in Bissell 2010a, 273). The affective capacity of the sudden presence of the veiled women alighting a train was strong enough to not only change the affective atmosphere of the platform but also shut down everyone’s act of talking for an instant. That microshock “got into” the passengers, altered their biochemistry, and drew their gaze toward the veiled Muslim women. That affective atmosphere not only captured the emotional feel of the platform but was action-potential: people stopped talking. It could be argued that the affective capacities of the Muslim other derived from their “different” embodiments are present in everyday life yet come to the fore at particular nodes of the everydayness that make their otherness more intensely felt.

### A Brief Autoethnographic Account

For my fellow passengers and transit crew, I was another brown, bearded, Muslim-looking traveler. My ethno-racial body was the first read identifier to which public transport riders and staff would respond. Similar to Purifoye’s (2015) autoethnographic account on the public transport system in Chicago, I experienced the seat drama and was avoided, gazed at disapprovingly, identified, commented, and othered. My travel experiences demonstrate that as a participant in mobile spaces, I could not escape from racialization, criminalization, and Islamophobia. My experiences also serve as additional evidence to the othering practices within spaces of public transportation.

It was a busy morning. Going to Amsterdam from Groningen, I was sitting on a train, the second-class compartment. Two White Dutch women, one older than the other, came in and sat but not next to each other because there were no empty seats available next to each other. The younger woman sat on a seat on the left side of the aisle and the older woman sat next to me. The interesting thing was that just before they sat, there was a tiny hesitation from the older woman. For an instant, she stood still, then she asked the younger woman to sit next to a White Dutch older man. Another interesting thing was her body language and posture. She was not talking to the younger

woman but still tilted towards her. (Field note, Thursday, 14 March 2019, Amsterdam)

Within the limited spaces of public transportation, racial-ethnic boundaries are accentuated, which makes the avoidance and active disengagement more visible. My body was read through a quick affective judgment that focuses on color, ethnicity, gender, and age. For that woman, I, being a brown man with a beard, had the “wrong body” with “traces of dubious origin” (Ahmed 2007, 162) that rendered me as the dangerous other. My body affected her, opened a possible field of actions; she turned and moved her body in response to my bodily presence. In return, her tiny pause, that instant of quiescence, as well as her posture, were rich in affect: “My body automatically replied and found myself tilting toward my right armrest next to the window.” That haptic othering, the awkward space between my body and hers, demonstrates that affect does something; it leaps from one body to another, evokes action, and projects feeling.

There was a shooting today in Utrecht. It has been the second event recently: first in Christchurch, New Zealand and now this one in Utrecht. Going to Groningen from Amsterdam, the train was full of security guards. I was ID'd three times during the trip. My bearded Muslim-looking Middle Eastern body raised suspicion, begged for extra scrutiny and surveillance. (Field note, Monday, 18 March, Groningen)

Here the temporal, the Utrecht shooting, and the biological component of affect (i.e., color and beard) created an atmosphere of suspicion. The construction of my body as suspicious was a response to the affects of fear I was posing. Suspicion, fear, and mistrust did something; they redrew the distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface (Ahmed 2004a). As another form of intimate geopolitics, I was stopped and randomly checked three times. As Ahmed (2007) averred, “Being stopped is not just stressful: it makes the ‘body’ itself the ‘site’ of social stress” (161). My fellow passengers were looking at me, anxious as if I had something to do with that incident. I was stressed and caused stress. I created an affective atmosphere, affected the passengers, and was affected by them. Anxiety and stress, moreover, are embodied through subtle movements that carry deep meanings:

At first-class compartments, I am receiving more lengthy, weird looks from my fellow passengers. I have

also noticed that when I enter the carriage, passengers sometimes grab or hold tighter to their purse, bags, or backpacks as if I am going to steal something. (Field note, Monday, 18 March, Groningen)

The intersection of the big three—gender, race, and class—created affective atmospheres of fear, discomfort, anger, and disgust within the first-class train compartment where the trusted, regular business-class travelers with higher economic capital would sit, not a place for a racialized, criminalized Muslim-looking traveler unless “he” is into something. When othered, I was assigned to additional labels; whereas in the previous episode I was a shooter, here I became a thief. Koefoed, Christensen, and Simonsen (2017) dubbed this “little racism”: The small, subtle, or brief act of bodily gestures such as gathering the hem of the coat, holding tighter to one’s belongings, judgmental looks, or changing postures are a sign of racism or disgust. These tiny acts are not singular; they generate the feeling of being an unwanted other.

## Conclusion

Public transport is a stage for social drama. It is filled with intense encounters where different bodies with different race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, class, ability, appearance, size, culture, religion, and citizenship come across each other within the limited mobile spaces. It is within these shared public spaces that multiculturalism is lived and experienced. Not every meeting is positive, though; there are many instances of risky and traumatic experience, failed intercultural encounters, discriminatory harassment, racism, and sexism. These othering encounters are located within the spectrum of proximity and distance, dialogue and intolerance, appreciation and repulsion.

In this article, I have addressed an underresearched dimension of everyday travel experience: religion. Employing an (auto)ethnographic approach within everyday spaces of public transportation in Amsterdam, I have focused on complex and varied travel experiences emphasizing the instances in which the Muslim other is (re)constructed and anti-Muslim racism is foregrounded. The othering encounters considered here are by no means exhaustive and I do not aim at generalization. These stories do, however, provide rich narratives and arguments regarding the importance of religion in the corporeal

aspects of the travel experience. These snapshots help us better understand that anti-Muslim racism is not contained in communities, neighborhoods, or urban spaces but is enacted in the everyday (im)mobile spaces of interactions with Muslims. Understanding Muslims' experiences of public transportation consequently sheds light on their everyday life and struggles to be mobile and participate in society.

I have analyzed the othering encounters of Muslims within the affective atmospheres of public transit because these spatiotemporalities of affect prompt us to consider what the body of a Muslim passenger can do instead of what such bodies are assumed to be. I have shown that affects are crucial in understanding how a particular atmosphere associated with anger, discomfort, anxiety, fear, stress, mistrust, suspicion, or frustration erupts in a particular space at a particular time, changes passengers' field of feeling, and modifies their capacity to act. Through this affective atmospheric approach, I have paid attention not only to the performative, more concrete, instances of othering that Muslim people experience but also to those subtle, unintentional, embodied acts of othering that operate below the conscious perceptions and subjective emotions of travelers.

The experience of harassment and discrimination on public transit, the ongoing fear of verbal and physical violence on train platforms or at bus stops, and the stress and anxiety of using such public spaces affect the participants' decisions to take certain trips, use certain transit modes, or travel through certain urban geographies at certain times. The othering experiences of participants while attempting to use public transit therefore suggest the crucial importance of working toward ensuring transport justice. As Lubitow, Abelson, and Carpenter (2020) argued, transport justice is not just about increasing accessibility to transportation but is also about considering the ways through which certain characteristics and modes of travel exclude certain groups of people. Transport justice is not only important to peoples' right to mobility but also central to enabling the right to the city. Public transport provides people with access to urban space to live and work and to participate in the political life of the city (Sheller 2014; Bissell 2016; Gardner, Cui, and Coiacetto 2017; Lagerqvist 2019). As Adey (2010) averred, "To move is to be political" (131).

In this regard, transport justice can be improved through some small-scale practices. Next to tackling

the structural foundations of (anti-Muslim) racism in everyday life, reporting the local instances of such othering practices within (im)mobile spaces is vital. The majority of hate crimes remain unreported (Listerborn 2015) and only a small fraction of all discrimination incidents are reported because, as participants argued, for many Muslims discrimination is part of their everyday lives, and they see no added value or trust in reporting them. Next to raising public awareness about the problems that Muslims face in their everyday (im)mobile life, there is clearly a need for improved trustworthy reporting mechanisms given the level of underreporting of othering encounters. In addition, transport companies can promote hate crime policies by training their drivers and staff to pay attention to the diversity and safety of their passengers as well as the willingness to intervene, not just how but when, in a problematic situation. Educational and promotional signs can also be displayed on public transit vehicles that broaden the representation of not only faith but also race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, class, ability, appearance, and size, to serve to normalize the diversity of passengers and to ask them to pay attention and support their fellow riders to reduce harassment and dissuade such discriminatory acts. Such recommendations open up new avenues for future (applied) research on transport justice. Such investigations should be promoted to understand the ways through which material, affective, atmospheric, and policy aspects of public transport encourage or hinder the right to mobility.

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## Note

1. Referring to a shooting on 7 January 2015 around the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris where two armed men killed twelve people and injured eleven others.



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