Laurens de Rooij (post-doctoral research fellow, University of Cape Town) completed his PhD at Durham University, UK, in 2017. His present research analyzes how the media discourse on religious minorities (particularly Muslims and Islam) affects how they are conceptualized, understood, and treated. This work is based on the research supported in part by the National Research Foundation of South Africa. He was a visiting researcher and scholar at Jakarta’s Graduate School Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (March-April 2013), Duke University’s Department of Religion (fall 2013), the University of Colorado-Boulder’s Centre for Media, Religion, and Culture (spring 2014), and at Brazil’s Fundação Joaquim Nabuco (summer 2016).

Non-Muslim understandings of Islam and Muslims in the Media

Inspired by the apparent overtly negative coverage of Islam and Muslims by the mainstream press, this thesis asks the research question: In what ways do depictions of Muslims and Islam in the News inform the thoughts and actions of non-Muslims in Europe?

As the media plays an important role in society, the analysis of the influences of the media on a person’s ideas and conceptualisations of people of another religious persuasion is an important social issue. News reports about Islam and Muslims commonly relate stories that discuss terrorism, violence or other unwelcome or irrational behaviour, or the lack of integration and compatibility of Muslims and Islam with western values and society. Yet there is little research on how non-Muslims in Europe engage with and are affected by media reports about Islam and Muslims. To address this gap of knowledge, a content and discourse analysis of news stories was undertaken and then verbal narratives or thoughts and actions of participants were elicited through fieldwork using focus groups.