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10 Populism, Sexual Politics, and the Exclusion of Muslims in the Netherlands

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The discourses framing Islam as deviant and problematic for Europe described in Chapter 1 have had a loud expression in the Netherlands, where political leaders and public figures have reconfigured what had been values of universal liberal citizenship into national values of cultural distinctiveness: "Dutch values" versus "Islamic values." Some analysts join these public figures in arguing that "multiculturalism" was once the Dutch national model and is responsible for weakening Dutch values by adopting a soft position on Muslims and Islam.

In this chapter we examine the Dutch case as a particularly visible instance of a European exclusivist "neocultural" framing of migrants as outsiders who must either completely assimilate into or be actively excluded from the "modern" moral universe.¹ We use the term "neoculturalism" to identify a form of cultural protectionism, representing the world as divided into different, inimical cultures, and to distinguish this way of thinking from forms of cultural relativism.² Muslim citizens have become the most conspicuous objects of this neoculturalist discourse, portrayed as backward, intolerant, and incongruous with European secular modernity.

¹ Other notions for more or less the same discourses used in the context of the Netherlands include "culturalism," which Willem Schinkel (2007) conceptualizes as the functional equivalent of racism. Schinkel prefers the term above – "culturalism" – used by Uitermark (2012), as it can be easily confused with culturalist traditions in American anthropology and sociology. While American culturalists tend to believe in the equality of cultures, contemporary culturalist ideologies emphasize hierarchies. We propose the term "neoculturalism" to distinguish contemporary discourses from the cultural relativism of past culturalist traditions.

² Movements for cultural protectionism have proliferated in recent years throughout many parts of the world. In countries as diverse as Cameroon and Belgium, discourses of inclusion and exclusion have pitted autochthonous communities against outsiders with, allegedly, aberrant morals and devious intentions (cf. Geschiere 2009).

Preceding chapters have explored ways that schemas and boundaries concerning Muslims arise in particular institutional settings and how they articulate with more broadly national ideologies. Focusing on the Dutch case permits us to analyze the creation and manipulation of ideological elements as part of everyday politics. In particular, we show how the neocultural schemas that were introduced by politicians in the 1990s simultaneously referred to Muslims and to the liberal Dutch elite; this linking gave a political potency to a neoculturalist framing. In short, the rise of these specific schemas about Muslims and Islam was part of an intense struggle among Dutch political leaders. Ideologies grow out of specific institutional contexts – in this case, the complex context of local and national politics.

In our analysis, we identify two central schemas in neoculturalist discourse. First, neoculturalists employ a populist schema to challenge the political establishment in general and allegedly multicultural or leftist elites in particular. Dutch neoculturalists have used a transposed class discourse that pits the white working class against a state-entrenched progressive elite (Uitermark 2012; Mepschen 2012). The second neoculturalist schema targets Muslims in the name of progress and sexual emancipation.³ As we will show by zooming in on Dutch debates on gay rights, sexual freedom, and the alleged intolerance of Muslim citizens, European identities and nationalisms have become reimagined as progressive and tolerant while Muslims have become framed as homophobic, sexually backward, and stuck in traditional family and religious values. Although particularly evident in the Netherlands, this framing is Europe-wide.⁴

Analysts of neoculturalism and populism in Europe often overlook the extent to which cultural protectionists have appropriated feminist achievements and the discourse of sexual progress to frame Muslims as conservative and intolerant and as the “constitutive outside” of secular, modern, and “progressive” European national projects. The rise of neoculturalist populism in Western Europe is mistakenly analyzed as a shift toward conservatism. Instead, we argue that neoculturalists combine the discourse of sexual progress with anti-Muslim and anti-immigration perspectives. This logic has become increasingly hegemonic because it has salience beyond the populist, nationalist right. Even critics of neoculturalism can only show their commitment to progressive

³ The Netherlands are far from unique in this respect. In various European countries, discourses of sexual democracy (Fassin 2010) have come to play a prominent role in framing Europe as “the avatar of both freedom and modernity” (Butler 2008: 2), while depicting Muslims as backward, devious, and intolerant in terms of sexual freedom and gender equality (cf. Ewing 2008; Fassin 2010; Guenif-Souilamas 2006; Haritaworn 2008; Puar 2007; Scott 2009).

⁴ Among others, see Buijs et al. (2011); Butler (2008); Ewing (2008); Fassin (2010); Chorashi (2003); Haritaworn (2008); Jusová (2008); Mepschen et al. (2010); Puar (2007); Sabsay (2012); Van der Berg and Schinkel (2009); Wekker (2009).

values by distancing themselves from Muslims’ and migrants’ alleged sexual conservatism.

In this chapter we first examine the populist challenge of neoculturalism, after which we analyze the sexual politics undergirding neoculturalist discourse. Subsequently, we address the progressive dilemmas arising from neoculturalist sexual politics, to conclude with an examination of the implications of our approach for the study of perceptions and boundaries related to Islam and Muslims in the Dutch context.

THE POPULIST POLITICS OF NEOCULTURALISM

The progressive movements and idea dominant during the period of state expansion of the 1960s and 1970s had a lasting effect on the forms and functions of the Dutch state (cf. Duyvendak 1999). This is particularly true for policies related to minorities, which have traditionally been the province of left-leaning administrators, professionals, and civil associations (Uitermark 2012). However, in this context, leftist or progressive should not be equated with multiculturalist.⁵ While commentators in and of the Netherlands have spoken of a dramatic shift away from multiculturalism toward policies aimed at assimilation, the Netherlands never pursued a multiculturalist policy. Few intellectuals espoused multiculturalist principles, nor were policies justified in terms of multiculturalism. Specifically, the protection and preservation of minority cultures – a central component of any coherent multiculturalist discourse – was never a goal of policy in itself. The aim of the Dutch “minorities policy,” and of the “integration policy” following it, was precisely to prevent the process of minority formation, routinely conceptualized as the formation of an ethnic underclass (cf. Van Amersfoort 1974; Penninx 1988; Scholten, 2007). Policies thus exclusively targeted stigmatized ethnic groups in lower class positions. By incorporating minority representatives and associations into governance networks, it was hoped that minority groups would find it easier to integrate into Dutch society.

⁵ Policies were not simply “multiculturalist” but also did not become “assimilationist.” Although it is certainly true that, after the emergence of Fortuyn, there were more administrators who wanted to force migrants to integrate, at the same time there was an intensification of efforts to assist or force minorities, and especially Muslims, to identify, organize, and express themselves. It is understandable that researchers have used the lingua franca of international comparative research to categorize the Netherlands, but when we examine the Dutch case (and probably any other case), it becomes apparent that these concepts tend to reify what is better understood as a dynamic field where different actors push in different directions.

It is essential to understand this prehistory of integration politics to appreciate what is new about neoculturalist schemas. Those who use these schemas did not introduce the idea that migration causes problems, that migration had to be curtailed, that migrants had to become autonomous citizens, that unemployed and unskilled labor migrants had to become productive workers, or that some cultural practices (such as forced marriages or domestic abuse) had to be ended. All of these ideas were well established by the late 1980s and the early 1990s.⁶ The designers and defenders of the minorities policy and integration policy sought to put these ideas into practice through a combination of paternalism and “poldering” (the term denoting the “Dutch tradition” of social conflict resolution by means of dialogue and cooperation, invoking ways of collectively draining lands). Because they want to deal with integration issues as practically and efficiently as possible, we refer to these actors as pragmatists. While multiculturalists would view diversity as something to be valued and preserved, pragmatists view it as something that needs to be carefully managed to prevent problems. Consequently, they have put in place an extensive infrastructure to monitor and intervene in ethnic and religious relations. Researchers, advisors, and managers within this field have emphasized the need for policy development on the basis of careful research and dialogue with stakeholders. Their discourses are characterized by technical sophistication, and they argue there is a need for moderation and management rather than passion and drama.

Pragmatist discourse has been formulated to have maximum effect in the policy field, not in public debate. This is what neoculturalists primarily challenged: the pragmatist way of conducting politics with its focus on consultation, moderation, and expertise – in short, the polder model itself. While parliamentary elites and their associates in civil society were firmly committed to pragmatism, actors on the margins were sowing the seeds of the symbolic revolution that would occur after 1991. Intellectuals attacked discursive moderation (redefined as political correctness), radical-right politicians played into xenophobia, and far-left politicians argued that the influx of foreign workers merely served to strengthen the position of capitalists vis-à-vis workers. However, for a long time these were marginal and disunited discourses. The breakthrough of neoculturalism came in 1991, when Frits Bolkestein, at the time the parliamentary leader of the right-wing liberals, argued that Western civilization was fundamentally different from – and vastly superior to – Islamic civilization. He unfolded his vision at a meeting of European Liberal parties in the Swiss city of Luzern on September 6, but his opinion article in *De*

⁶ Tijdelijke Commissie Onderzoek Integratiebeleid, 2004, pp. 436–445.

Volkskrant (Bolkestein 1991) became the debate’s focal point (cf. Bracke 2011; Prins 2002). Its central message was that the government should take robust measures to prevent or reduce the formidable problems arising from migration. He also argued Islam is a source of backwardness:

Islam is not just a religion; it is a way of life. And as such it is at odds with the liberal division between church and state. Many Islamic countries have hardly any freedom of speech. The Salman Rushdie affair is perhaps an extreme case but it shows how much we differ from one another in these matters. (Bolkestein 1991)⁷

Bolkestein saw himself as an exponent of the Enlightenment and Western civilization, praising the achievements of intellectual icons like Goethe and Plato. But he also presented himself as belonging to the “ordinary people” – those who had to shoulder the consequences of mass migration (Prins 2002). Bolkestein observed that Dutch natives were developing a popular counter discourse, outside of the realm of public discourse:

There is an informal national debate that is not held in public. Voters feel that politicians are not sufficiently aware of their problems. The minority issue is constantly discussed in places like bars and churches. If this is not sufficiently represented in The Hague [the seat of parliament] people will say: why should I vote anyway? (Bolkestein, cited in Prins 2004: 28)

Bolkestein himself was from the elite, but nevertheless presented himself as a redeemer of unjustly marginalized working-class voices: “a representative who ignores the people’s concerns is worth nothing” (ibid.). He thus enlisted “the people” in a critique of accommodation and consensus politics. “The people” here specifically refers to Dutch natives living in disadvantaged neighborhoods: people with experience, forms of knowledge and discourses that were not sufficiently valued in public and political arenas. Far from being the perpetrators of racism, Bolkestein presented these people as victims – the “autochthonous [native] minorities in poor neighborhoods in the big cities who are living in the midst of an allochthonous [foreign] majority” (ibid.).⁸ In his assessment of

⁷ All translations from Dutch to English by the authors.

⁸ The Netherlands does not have an explicit race discourse, but the state and statisticians do categorize people along ethnic lines. The categories currently employed are: “autochthonous,” used for people whose parents and grandparents were born in the Netherlands; “allochthonous” (used for people not from the Netherlands, but from Western countries; and “non-Western allochthonous” (people with a relatively recent genealogy in non-Western countries like Turkey, Morocco, and the former Dutch colonies). For an extensive analysis and critique

the transformation of Dutch society and politics, Ian Buruma (2006: 58) quotes Bolkestein saying: "You should never underestimate how deeply Moroccan and Turkish immigrants are hated by the Dutch. My political success rests upon the fact that I have listened to these feelings."

This transposed class discourse frames the autochthonous, Dutch working class as a victim of cultural rather than economic liberalism and consequently espouses cultural rather than economic protectionism. Bolkestein appealed to the populace in a strategy to challenge his political competitors. The state, in his view, should not accommodate a diversity of interests through extensive consultative structures but rather discipline migrants into the moral-cultural universe of the nation.

Bolkestein's attack on the minorities policy paralleled his critique of the "Rhineland model," a corporatist model for socioeconomic regulation that was prevalent in Northwest Europe and that afforded a larger welfare state and more leeway for state intervention than the "Anglo-Saxon model." According to Bolkestein (1996), this model lacked flexibility and was burdened by too many consultative and regulatory structures. More generally, neoculturalists' discursive assaults were, as a rule, not just aimed at minorities but also at the political culture and institutions of consociational corporatism, a political model based on bringing together different blocks for shared governance (Lijphart 1988). In neoculturalist views, an expansive and complex network of interest groups and stakeholders had smothered political debate. They had cultivated a political culture where conflicts were managed among elites rather than sharply debated in public. Especially in the field of integration, neoculturalists would employ their critique of migrants and minority cultures to target the entrenched elites who had grown accustomed to working out differences without causing public consternation.

Bolkestein was the first to successfully challenge his competitors through a provocative integration discourse, but he was surely not the last. The populist politician Pim Fortuyn and the parliamentarian Ayaan Hirsi Ali also incorporated schemas of a divide between "the West" and Islam into their political rhetoric. And they, too, did not just discursively assault minorities but also the political culture and institutions of consociational corporatism. Fortuyn and Hirsi Ali shared an antipathy toward Islam and a strong drive to challenge the culture of consensus. As Hirsi Ali (2003) argued: "I ... realized that Fortuyn had not only been correct about Islam but also with respect to the condition of established politics. We are still going round in the same little circles. Still.

of the use of these categories and the production of populations that are part and parcel to them, see Geschiere (2009); Yanow and Van der Haar (forthcoming).

We avoid any risk, we do not want to offend or upset anyone. Everything is in the service of harmony."

Hirsi Ali sought to break with a consensus-based integration policy and extract Dutch politicians from the slumber of the polder model. These examples illustrate that when central players in politics articulate positions in opposition to Muslims or Islam, they also position themselves in relation to their political adversaries, who are usually not Muslims. When Bolkestein claimed that he was realistic and frank on Islam, he positioned himself in relation to an entrenched liberal elite that inherited and embodied a style of politics characterized by discursive moderation, especially toward minorities (often referred to as political correctness). The framing of Islam has become a battleground where an ascendant coalition of cultural protectionists confronts entrenched pragmatist elites and consensus politics.

Geert Wilders, the leader of the populist right Freedom Party, is the most recent and most extreme reincarnation of a politician who dissociates himself from the entrenched and "corrupted" liberal elite by drawing a dividing line between the West and Islam and by voicing a fear of mass immigration. He argues that the differentiation between the "two Netherlands" is most apparent in this field:

The difference between the beliefs of the Dutch people and of the elites are nowhere more glaring than when it comes to mass migration. Almost sixty percent of the Dutch people view Islam as the greatest threat to our identity. Another sixty percent view mass migration as the biggest mistake since the [Second World] War. But here, in parliament, no more than six percent holds these views.⁹

While Wilders has been part of parliamentary life for more than two decades, he stokes a populist hatred against the elite, a rhetoric that appeals to sections of the electorate who have grown disenchanted with liberal elites and their policies (cf. Mouffe 2005).

THE SEXUAL POLITICS OF NEOCULTURALISM

The preceding section has shown that the entrenchment of liberalism – in the field of integration politics and in the state generally – has created the conditions in which populist cultural protectionists attempt, with considerable success, to mobilize disenchanted voters against established political culture,

⁹ Wilders, Geert (2008) Parliamentary debate 2009. Available at: http://www.pvv.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1288.

its institutions, and its dignitaries. Neoculturalists challenge an entrenched liberal tradition of pragmatist policy and moderate language by marshaling and organizing audiences through affect, focusing on a fear of Islam and distaste with mass immigration. In the Netherlands, and in Europe in general, sexual liberties and feminist achievements have come to play increasingly pivotal roles in these dynamics. As Francisco Panizza (2005: 11) argues, there can be “no populist leadership unless there is a successful constitution of new identities and of a representative link with those identities.” As we shall show, neoculturalist and populist leaders in the Netherlands have depended on and have reinforced the proliferation of discourses of sexual progress to constitute new identities, establish a “representative link” with them, and thus make a new kind of populist imagination and politics possible. To come to a closer understanding of this dynamic, we turn our attention to the sexual politics of Dutch neoculturalist populism.

Discourses of feminist and sexual progress have been pivotal to the ascent and growing entrenchment of neoculturalist perspectives in the Netherlands.¹⁰ Muslim immigration is delineated as a threat to the stability of the Dutch progressive moral order, and cultural protectionists have set out to guard Dutch cultural and sexual liberties against the dangers allegedly posed by Muslim immigrants (Van der Veer 2006; Verkaaik and Spronk 2011). Gay rights and gender equality have thus offered a normative framework and a set of specific schemas to shape the critique of Islam and multiculturalism. This framework renders Muslim citizens “knowable” and makes them objects of critique. The central tropes of this discourse – individualism versus the lack thereof; “tolerance” versus “fundamentalism” – frame an imagined modern self against an imagined traditional (Muslim) other. Such tropes are especially powerful because they put progressives and pragmatists who oppose neoculturalist discourse, but who are, on the other hand, attached to the achievements of sexual and feminist progressive politics, in a rather serious bind. Taking up the defense of lesbian and gay rights comes to be associated with anti-Muslim cultural protectionism, while solidarity with Muslims against Islamophobic rhetoric is represented as trivializing homophobia of conservative Muslim communities.

The power of discourses of sexual progress to create a wedge between allegedly conservative Muslim and migrant minorities and supposedly progressive Dutch people came into full effect in May 2001, when a conservative imam in Rotterdam, Khalil El-Moumni, caused a commotion in a television interview in which he commented on the introduction of gay marriage laws in the

¹⁰ See the analyses in Bracke (2012); Ghorashi (2003, 2010); Josuá (2008); Mepschen et al. (2010); Schinkel (2011); Van den Berg and Schinkel (2009).

Netherlands. “What Islam says about homosexuality,” the imam argued, “is known among all Muslims. It is a sin.” The Dutch reporter responded by asking El-Moumni if Islam was capable of accommodating to “the Dutch mentality.” The imam responded:

Islam forces us to integrate in every society, as long as we don’t act in discordance with our faith, culture and morality. I agree with integration at the level of science, education and work Homosexuality is harmful to society in general and in particular for the Dutch, I think. If this phenomenon is spreading among the young, both among boys and girls, this will lead to extinction. As far as I know, there are more elderly than young people in the Netherlands. When elderly are no longer active in reproduction, who will make children when men and women can marry each other?

Homosexuality, argued El-Moumni, was a contagious disease that had to be contained, although he condemned violence against gays – an important part of the interview that was omitted from the television broadcast. A moral panic followed the broadcast (Hekma 2002; Mepschen et al. 2010). El-Moumni had tread on one of the cornerstones of Dutch cultural self-representation. He was at the center of media attention for weeks. The debate showed a broad consensus about the incompatibility of the imam’s views with Dutch society. The sociologist Gert Hekma recalls, for instance, that even the prime minister used “the full 10 minutes of his weekly interview ... to tell Muslims to respect the Dutch tolerance of homosexuality,” although he was clearly uncomfortable speaking about the issue in public (Hekma 2002: 242). The Dutch minister responsible for integration, Rogier van Boxtel, invited El-Moumni for a session in which Dutch values were explained. The liberal daily NRC Handelsblad rhetorically asked: “Homosexuality is tolerated in the Netherlands. Shouldn’t the role of imams be to promote tolerance and acceptance?”¹¹ A poll on the Web site of a mainstream gay and lesbian monthly showed that 91 percent of respondents agreed that “newcomers should tolerate our tolerance or should leave” (Prins 2002: 15). The Amsterdam branch of the leading free-market liberal party (VVD) published a pamphlet titled “We also want to live in freedom and without fear” in the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool*:

As in other centuries, our society is still being enriched by new cultures and religions. However, this should not be a one-way process. Moreover, the principles of the liberal free state, equality, tolerance and non-discrimination, are elements of a culture that newcomers can be enriched by. The comments

¹¹ NRC Handelsblad, May 9, 2001.

of the imams are an active call for intolerance and discrimination against gay men and lesbians. This is blatantly ignoring the basic values of Dutch society.¹²

A commentator in the tabloid *De Telegraaf* argued that El-Moumni's views could only be found in "the medieval deserts of North Africa."¹³

One reason for the performative power of El Moumni's remarks is the wide support among the Dutch of lesbian and gay rights (see discussion later in the chapter). This contributed strongly to the framing of El-Moumni as a backward bigot. But perhaps more important was the fact that El-Moumni could be construed as a religious and cultural outsider, a framing move that played a key role in inciting a moral panic concerning the nation's sexual boundaries (compare Fassin 2010). Some native Dutch commentators had spoken out against public homosexuality in much the same way as El-Moumni, but their words had not elicited a similar societal response. Three years before the El-Moumni-affair, in 1998, a rather harsh debate about public homosexuality accompanied the Gay Games in Amsterdam, a large sporting and cultural event organized by and for international lesbian and gay communities. In that debate, Muslims had not been vocal and had also not been construed as uniquely homophobic. White Dutch conservatives were, on the other hand, very vocal about their antipathy toward gays (cf. Mepschen et al. 2010). In fact, the conservative critic Gerry van der List was fired as a columnist for one of largest Dutch broadsheets after writing a column in which he spoke of "an Amsterdam orgy" and argued that gay men were "obsessed with sex," led "a horrendous lifestyle," and should return to "their darkrooms" and "orgies of sperm": "Good riddance!" (Van der List 1998). Some years later, Van der List (2004) had embraced gay rights as exemplary of "Western achievements and ideals." Similarly, the columnist Sylvain Ephimenco in 1998 wrote an article in which he defended Van der List's right to express his "deep disgust of male-to-male-love." But in 2001, Ephimenco responded to El Moumni's similar homophobic excesses by publishing an "open letter" in which he called Islam a sickness (Mepschen et al. 2010). Now that Muslims became identified with conservative views on sexual freedom and gay rights, formerly conservative commentators suddenly embraced progressive values.

The successful populist politician Pim Fortuyn, who emerged on the political scene in 2001, capitalized on the trope of sexual progress as essentially Dutch and managed to ingrain it deeper into the Dutch self-image. Fortuyn

was openly and flamboyantly gay, and spoke of Muslims as backward and rural. In the slipstream of the El Moumni affair and, more dramatically, of 9/11 and the ascent of the "war on terror," he argued that he saw his sexually expressive lifestyle and his liberties and joys as a gay man threatened by backward Muslims (cf. Van der Veer 2006). Fortuyn managed to reframe the Dutch political landscape by entangling traditionally "new left" themes – secularism, gender equality, and gay liberation – with a neoliberal and anti-immigration, populist agenda. Fortuyn thus successfully entangled antipathy toward Islam with a politics of sexual freedom (cf. Pels 2003; Van der Veer 2006). His party won almost 35 percent of the vote in his hometown of Rotterdam in the March 2002 municipal elections (see Uitermark and Duyvendak 2008), and 17 percent nationally in May of that year in elections held only days after his assassination. Fortuyn attacked the established political right for not heeding the widespread frustration with refugees and immigrants. He proposed to close the borders to most asylum seekers and promoted a tough approach toward the Muslim community (Van der Veer 2006). Unlike Islam, Fortuyn argued, Judaism and Christianity had been transformed by "the Enlightenment," during which essential "Western" values had developed: individual responsibility, the separation of church and state, and the equality of men and women: "I refuse to start all over again with the emancipation of women and gays."¹⁴

Framing Muslims in terms of gender and sexual equality has remained publicly salient since Fortuyn was dramatically shot dead in May 2002. Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2005) pointed out frequently that Islam constituted a violation of the rights of women, homosexuals, and children. Neoculturalist political leader Geert Wilders has repeatedly evoked the number of violent antigay incidents in large, multicultural cities in the Netherlands to score points against Muslims, Dutch-Moroccan young men, and cultural diversity. It has become almost impossible to discuss lesbian and gay emancipation without it being associated with migration and the "problem" of multiculturalism. Indeed, this practical schema is so well entrenched that it has become "common sense" in the Netherlands to represent homophobia, even homophobic violence, as alien to white Dutch culture and society and as the unique possession of young Dutch-Moroccan men and Muslims. Whereas lesbian and gay rights have a rather short history in the Netherlands, they are nonetheless now mobilized as exemplary of a Dutch "tradition of tolerance" (Mepschen et al. 2010; cf. Bracke 2012; Jivraj and De Jong 2011; Wekker 2009).

¹² *Het Parool*, May 12, 2001.

¹³ *De Telegraaf*, May 8, 2001.

¹⁴ Pim Fortuyn in the Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*, February 9, 2002. Available at: <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2824/Politiek/article/detail/611698/2002/02/09/De-islam-is-een-achterlijkke-cultuur.dhtml>

This entwinement of sexual freedom with neoculturalist discourse has deep roots in the structural transformation of Dutch society since the 1960s. The Netherlands changed from one of the most religious societies in the world to one of its most secular (Van Rooden 2004). Discourses of sexual freedom have played cardinal roles in these transformations. As shown in surveys, large segments of the Dutch population after the 1960s distanced themselves from moral traditionalism (cf. SCP 1998; Uitterhoeve 2000; Arts et al. 2003; Duyvendak 2004; Halman et al. 2005). The percentage of Dutch citizens who now agree with the proposition that “homosexuality is normal” and who support gay marriage exceeds that in other countries (cf. Gerhards 2010). More than most other Europeans (not to mention Americans), the Dutch disagree with conservative survey items such as: “women must have children to be happy”; “a child should respect its parents”; or “we would be better off if we returned to a traditional way of life.” Surveys show that the Dutch are among the most ardent supporters in Europe of the right to freedom of speech and expression (Inglehart and Baker, 2000; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005) and civil rights for sexual minorities and gender equality. These opinions differ little by level of education. When it comes to ideas about sexual freedom and gender equality, the Netherlands are now among the three least-polarized countries in Europe (Achterberg 2006, 55). Polarization at the level of cultural values declined as a progressive consensus came into being, in which people distanced themselves from moral – sexual, family, and gender – traditionalism (Duyvendak 2004; Houtman and Duyvendak, 2009).

Dutch migrants – especially Muslims – form a tangible, visible “constitutive outside” (Panizza 2005; Mouffe 2005) of this Dutch majority and as such play a key role in constituting and reinforcing the Dutch self-image of cultural and sexual progressiveness. Moreover, the discourse of Dutch sexual tolerance plays a central role in transposing homophobia onto the migrant and religious other; a transposition that successfully erases the recent homophobic past and the continuous heteronormativity of Dutch society from the national imagination. Recent research of the Netherlands Institute for Social Research has nonetheless shown that homophobia remains virulent. Young Dutch lesbians and gays struggle, disproportionately, with exclusion, bullying, and depression (SCP 2010). When, in early 2011, a popular soap opera staged a sex scene between two men, the response on social network sites like Twitter was overwhelmingly homophobic. And research in the province of North Holland has recently shown that half of young people there considered homosexuality “abnormal.” The discourse pitting Dutch progressives against Muslim conservatives has rendered these difficult facts and developments increasingly obscure. Once the schemas become deeply held, contrary evidence makes little headway.

Many Dutch citizens now demand that migrants adjust to an official discourse of sexual and moral “progressiveness.” In this respect, the Netherlands is characteristically similar to Denmark. In other words, when it comes to issues of public morality and personal values, citizens in liberal countries do not always value diversity in opinions and cultural repertoires (e.g., Lægaard 2007; Wikan 2002). Indeed, sexual progressiveness and tolerance may be employed as discourses of power (cf. Brown 2006; Butler 2008; Puar 2007), producing migrants and religious minorities as cultural others and excluding them by redrawing the contours of the national community.

THE PRAGMATIST PROBLEMATIC

Framing homophobia (and antigay violence) as a migrant or Muslim problem places pragmatists in a difficult situation. Pragmatists need to avoid accusations of not caring enough about antigay violence and homophobia, but they also wish to avoid stigmatizing ethnic or religious minorities. Pragmatists want to convey that they care as much for the safety and rights of gays as do neoculturalists, but their castigation of migrant perpetrators of violence is necessarily more nuanced and less uncompromising. Neoculturalists renounce such pragmatist efforts as attempts to create understanding where only passionate rejection is morally legitimate. Pragmatists have thus been forced into a defensive position and have not yet found a way out. By way of their commitment to feminist achievements and sexual progress, pragmatist politicians and public intellectuals have been “drawn into” neoculturalism.

That said, it must be emphasized that the critique of cultural appeasement has not been limited to the new right, but in fact also has a genealogy in the social-democratic wing of Dutch politics. In 2000, the prominent social-democrat Paul Scheffer published a landmark article in which he argued that the Netherlands were in the midst of a multicultural drama, and which contained a strong plea for acknowledging and promoting Dutch national identity as a first step toward a more strict integration policy targeting migrant communities (Scheffer 2000; cf. Uitermark 2012: 66–67). Lodewijk Asscher, a very prominent member of the Labor Party, recently remarked that Geert Wilders should be seen as “the bad consciousness of the Labor Party. He points to the things that we have neglected.”¹⁵ With this remark, Asscher followed up on an older, already established trope within social-democracy and demonstrated that neoculturalist representations extend far beyond the populist right.

¹⁵ ‘Geert Wilders is het slechte geweten van de PvdA ... Hij wijst op de dingen die wij hebben verwaarloosd.’ *De Volkskrant*, January 21, 2012.

After Paul Scheffer's article in 2000, the good consciousness of the Labor Party has most conspicuously, albeit not uniquely, been voiced by social-democrats with a migrant and Muslim background, like Ahmed Aboutaleb (the Labor Party mayor of Rotterdam) and Ahmed Marcouch (Labor Party MP). These Labor Party leaders have been particularly vocal about the need to defend tolerance, gay rights, and sexual progress, even if that means being critical of Muslim and migrant communities. Ahmed Marcouch, formerly the district chairman of the Amsterdam borough Slotervaart and currently a member of parliament, has developed a discourse that serves as an alternative to neoculturalist discourse without negating its central premise that sexual and gender intolerance are mostly Muslim or migrant problems. Marcouch argues that neoculturalists are right when they maintain that a large taboo rests on sexuality in general and lesbian and gay sexuality in particular in Dutch Muslim communities. In an interview on Amsterdam's local television station he pointed out: "Take into account that there is hardly a positive vocabulary to speak about lesbians and gays in Dutch Muslim circles. I was recently at a school and I asked kids there what would happen if they would talk about gayness at home. They said: 'The first thing that would happen is that we would get slapped.' It is a dirty word that you are not supposed to use in public."¹⁶

Marcouch combines a defense of Islam against neoculturalist attacks with a politics of (sexual and gender) emancipation, and as such attempts to bridge the gap between pragmatists and neoculturalists. Like neoculturalists, Marcouch posits that homophobia among Muslims should be passionately and uncompromisingly countered. His political agenda is rooted in a belief in the necessity of a moral and strong state:

When it comes to rights of women and gays and lesbians, the reality in many Muslim families and communities is far from ideal. The political sphere, government and society must be unequivocal about this and speak clearly about this. When laws are being broken, we need to act. Muslim women and Muslim gays and lesbians who want to emancipate and fight for their rights must be morally and practically supported. (Marcouch 2008)

Marcouch thereby bridges classic social-democratic passions – a moral state, emancipation – with important elements of neoculturalist discourse. But at the same time, he and others destabilize the secularist imperative in Dutch neoculturalist integration discourse by transcending the taken-for-granted contradiction between religious (Muslim) subjectivity and ideals of

¹⁶ AT5, February 21, 2009. Available at: <http://www.at5.nl/artikelen/13152/uitgebreid-interview-met-marcouch-over-homobeleid-in-slotervaart> (accessed February 28, 2011).

sexual progress. For Marcouch, defending gay rights is a question of being a good Muslim in the contemporary Dutch context. He says: "We as Muslims are not barbarians, we can talk about homosexuality. The right of a Muslim to be Muslim is the right of a homosexual to be a homosexual."¹⁷ The debate over sexual emancipation and gender equality thus has had a strong impact on how Muslims have framed their own situation in the Netherlands. First of all, pragmatists are drawn into the logic of neoculturalism, which represents Dutch society in terms of an opposition between sexual progress and Muslim moralities. The investments of pragmatists and social-democrats in the discourse of sexual and feminist progress have made it increasingly difficult for pragmatists to find a language to negate neoculturalist framings of Muslims as traditional and intolerant. Second, the position of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders and women within Muslim communities has become a rallying point of self-proclaimed progressive Muslims, like Ahmed Marcouch, who reinforce the framing of Muslims as sexually conservative as a way of relating politically to the hegemony of the neoculturalist framework.

CONCLUSION: POLITICAL CULTURE AND NEOCULTURALIST POLITICS

We have shown how discourses about and policies toward ethnic and religious minorities in the Netherlands have changed in recent decades. While in the past cultural differences were settled through a politics of accommodation, more recently the integration of minorities has become a political and cultural battleground (Uitermark 2012). These changes in discourses and balances of power raise important questions, not least with respect to the ways in which framing contests are analyzed. It is often assumed that the framing of Muslims emanates from "national models." Those who analyze Dutch policies and actions as reflecting a national model of "multiculturalism" argue that the Dutch state applied its long-term tendency to institutionalize cultural pluralism, believing that the cultural emancipation of immigrant minorities was the key to their integration into Dutch society (Duyvendak and Scholten 2011).

These analysts often make a connection between claims about "multiculturalism" and the peculiar Dutch history of "pillarization," referring to the period from the 1920s to 1960s when most of Dutch society was structured according to specific religious (Protestant, Catholic) or sociocultural (socialist, liberal)

¹⁷ Speech during a public meeting, 'Jezelf kunnen zijn in Slotervaart'. Amsterdam, May 31, 2010.

pillars (Lijphart 1968). Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007), for example, claim that the multiculturalist labeling of collective identities inadvertently deepened sociocultural cleavages in society rather than bridging these differences. They trace the presumed Dutch approach back to the history of pillarization: "The Netherlands has always been a country of minorities thanks to the power of religion to divide as well as unite" (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007: 13). Joppke adds that the Dutch changed their policies because they found that previous multicultural policies had been a failure: "Civic integration is a response to the obvious failure of one of Europe's most pronounced policies of multiculturalism to further the socioeconomic integration of immigrants and their offspring." If multiculturalism tended to "lock migrant ethnics into their separate worlds, the goal of civic integration is migrants' participation in mainstream institutions" (Joppke 2007: 249). Koopmans (2005) makes the additional claim that strong path dependency is at work, leading the Dutch to continue the policies of pillarization as multiculturalism, and even today, despite apparent policy shifts, to continue to base policy on ethnic identity.

As these quotes suggest, some scholars and politicians use the phrase "multicultural model" to normatively disqualify certain past and present policies that they think have failed. However, it turns out that Dutch policies were not developed to celebrate cultural differences, as is often assumed. Preserving cultural identities of some minorities was thought to be useful for instrumental reasons. Those pointing to path dependency are correct – but in a more limited way than they sometimes claim. Pillarization did indeed shape responses to Muslims, but these new minorities never achieved the level of organization and separation that national minorities achieved in the early twentieth century. Jan Rath (1999: 59) states that "in terms of institutional arrangements, there is no question of an Islamic pillar in the Netherlands, or at least one that is in any way comparable to the Roman Catholic or Protestant pillars in the past." Integration policy was never oriented toward the construction of minority groups as pillars, nor was there ever a "national multicultural model."

The key assumption informing our analysis is that framing contests over Muslims have to be understood as part of more fundamental and encompassing discursive conflicts occurring at the cultural fault line of contemporary politics. Like their counterparts in the United States (Teles 2007), cultural protectionists in Western Europe claim that they represent the "authentic" voice of "ordinary people," protecting the cultural traditions of their country against liberal elites, who – supported by state institutions – try to impose their agenda from above. This cleavage is culturally defined but has strong class undertones: cultural protectionists suggest that "limousine liberals" or "the leftist elite" favor migrants and betray the autochthonous working-class people

who are simultaneously construed as more deserving than either the unassimilated migrants or the hypocritical elites. This populism attacks a political culture that is considered deeply elitist and cosmopolitan. As Kriesi et al. (2008: 164) note for Fortuyn: "[He] attacked the consensual Dutch politics He wanted to free the people from paternalistic governance structures and elite cartels. ... He criticized the paternalistic culture of the Dutch elite ... with its autistic elements, with its very special world view, and even with a jargon of its own that is hardly comprehensible for outsiders."

The populism and transposed class politics of Dutch cultural protectionists resembles the rhetoric of the neoconservatives in the United States in many ways. Like cultural protectionists in Europe, Tea Party Republicans rebelled against the political culture of an entrenched liberal elite, portrayed as betraying and threatening hardworking, ordinary people who comprise the nation's cultural heartland. However, whereas American neoconservatives oppose progressive values, neoculturalists propagate lesbian and gay rights and gender equality.

In recent analyses of new political cleavages in Western Europe, the pivotal role played by the propagation of sexual and gender progress is often overlooked. In fact, the rise of neoculturalist populism in Western Europe is often mistakenly analyzed as a shift toward conservatism, as if protectionists at both sides of the Atlantic want to conserve the same "culture."¹⁸ This misunderstanding is caused by a conflation of progressiveness and pro-immigration viewpoints. Our analysis shows, however, that neoculturalists combine the framing of Dutch national culture as morally progressive with a virulent anti-immigration agenda. When Kriesi et al. (2008: 171) conclude that the "cultural liberalism of the most educated has declined quite considerably ... [it] probably reflects ... the general hardening of the Dutch attitude to immigration," they miss the cardinal point that Dutch anti-immigration discourse goes hand in glove with a rhetoric of sexual emancipation and gender equality. The rhetoric of sexual progress plays a key role in the representation of migrant and Muslim communities as culturally other. Progressive values are espoused these days from the far left to the populist right, making the Netherlands into one of the most homogeneous countries in terms of expressed values and attitudes on sexual and moral issues. Dutch neoculturalism should thus not be equated with cultural, ethical, and moral conservatism.

The irony is that Dutch Muslims are framed as if they were American conservatives – as averse to sexual freedom and prone to censorship. A further

¹⁸ For instance: "The whole configuration of the Dutch party system shifted in a culturally conservative direction" (Kriesi et al. 2008: 181).

irony is that the populists' electorate have been treated somewhat like minorities. Neoculturalists often claim that left-wing elites shy away from criticizing minorities because of a deeply entrenched yet misplaced sympathy for the underdog. The argument may have validity for pragmatists' relationship to migrants but it may also hold for their relationship to the supporters of new Dutch populism. Pragmatists' nominal commitment to inclusion and equality constrains is holding them back from speaking out against the xenophobia and Islamophobia of populists and their supporters. Pragmatists' nominal commitment to inclusion and equality prohibits them from speaking out against the xenophobia and Islamophobia of populists and their supporters. Rather than passionately countering the ideological claims of their opponents, pragmatists seek to accommodate conflicts through dialogue and understanding. It appears they have not been doing very well. Neoculturalists have dominated the debate, and pragmatists have internalized many of the criticisms directed against them, thereby implicitly recognizing neoculturalists as the consciousness of the nation and the people.

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