Chapter 7

The Netherlands: Depoliticization of Homosexuality and Homosexualization of Politics

Gert Hekma and Jan Willem Duyvendak

This chapter on the gay and lesbian movement[1] in the Netherlands examines how government policies and strategies, changing social attitudes towards homosexuality, and other cultural, religious, social, and economic factors have affected homosexual activism since the sexual revolution (for Dutch gay history see Hekma 2004a and 2005, Oosterhuis 1999). It shows an interesting parallel development. On the one hand, homosexual activism has de-radicalized under the influence of a responsive, consensual political system. On the other hand, gender and homo/sexual politics have become increasingly central to Dutch politics and national identity. These two developments are deeply intertwined: de-queering Dutch homosexuality was the precondition for the centre stage position of 'homophilia' in the national self-image (Hekma 2004c, Mepschen et al. 2010).

In the realm of sexual politics, the Netherlands is deemed to be one of the most liberal countries in the world. A staunchly religious society with conservative sexual morals in the 1950s, two decades later the Dutch majority had embraced secular, liberal positions on divorce, pornography, prostitution, homosexuality, contraception, and teenage sexuality. This sea-change in the political and cultural climate was followed by legislative reform. Divorce was made easier, pornography and prostitution were decriminalized, and contraception was made widely available. The criminal law – which had enshrined in article 248bis different ages of consent for homosexual and heterosexual sex (21 and 16 years respectively) – was changed in 1971, when the age of consent was set for both at 16. Contraceptives were made available to all women as part of the general

1 In the remainder of the chapter, we will use 'gay' for 'gay and lesbian'. While we realize this does not sufficiently recognize the lesbian contribution, gay politics have often concentrated on male homosexuals and, perhaps rather amazingly, many young Dutch lesbians prefer the label 'gay' to an explicit one such as 'lesbian' that is used by only 13 percent of them (Keuzenkamp 2010: 137–38). They resist being clearly identified as such, differentiating themselves from an older generation that, they assume, did look for a lesbian identity, community and visibility, while at the same time trying not to distance them too much from 'normal', straight feminine females (Fobear 2010; Heugten 2010).

provision of medical care. These broader changes in sexual culture demonstrate that the gay movement was not the main agent behind this social transformation.

Furthermore, Amsterdam has been home to a vibrant gay culture since the 1950s. Twenty years later, and still by the end of the century, it was a 'gay capital'. Gays and lesbians have been allowed to serve in the Dutch army since 1973. The national homosexual rights movement, the COC, received royal approval that same year, meaning its directors were no longer personally responsible in case of bankruptcy. Following sixteen years of debate, an Equal Rights Law for gender, ethnicity, and sexual preference was enacted in 1993. Registered partnerships were legalized in 1997 for both same-sex and other-sex couples. In 2001, the Netherlands became the first country in the world to open marriage to same-sex partners. While many saw this as the endpoint for gay emancipation, legal equality did not necessarily mean social equality, let alone respect for sexual difference.

Over the years of struggle for emancipation and liberation, the movement and its participants were highly influenced by the – overall – rather supportive and responsive reactions by Dutch politics. From a movement that aimed for radical change in gender and sexual relations in the seventies, it has transformed into a movement for acceptance of homosexuality and legal equality. This 'normalization' of homosexuality did, in turn, influence Dutch politics. It facilitated the crucial positioning of (homo)sexuality in the debate on social integration of new (Muslim) immigrants: 'liberated' homosexuals became the embodiment of Dutch modernity and the opposite of 'backward' Muslim migrants.

Prelude to a Movement

Why these momentous, liberalizing changes took place in the Netherlands in the sixties and seventies is still not entirely clear. Below we will review some of the explanations that have commonly been proposed. The liberal sexual culture of the Dutch, many argue, is largely due to the country's political culture. Inherited from the French in the early nineteenth century, it is based on the separation of church and state, where sexual affairs are seen as the private business of citizens and beyond the purview of state regulation. While the Christian parties introduced stricter laws regarding sex when they came to power in the early twentieth century, they did not touch the liberal foundations of the Dutch legal system. Nor did they forbid sexual practices in the private realm, as was done in Germany and Britain. But since this is true for some other countries (Adam, Duyvendak, and Krouwel 1999), more reasons are needed to explain Dutch exceptionalism; particularly the rapid change from a conservative country until the mid-1960s into a frontrunner in sexual emancipation thereafter.

Commentators have traced the sexual revolution of the 1960s to the sudden and radical transformation of Dutch social organization; the so called 'de-pillarization' of society. Until the 1960s, all Dutch citizens were part of a distinct community or 'pillar' – Roman Catholic, Protestant, Labor or Liberal. The pillars

softened the strict bipolarity of the French model and created an interesting mix of republicanism and communitarianism. The pillars were all-encompassing for the individual. Each pillar had its own schools, churches, media, political parties, sport clubs and cultural institutions. This social structure, together with a proportional electoral system, promoted coalition politics (none of the four major groups ever had a majority) and informed the 'poldermodel' of lengthy discussions leading to compromise. But this community-based social order crumbled in the 1960s, due to increased social and spatial mobility, changing scientific views, individualism, creeping secularism, and the rise of national, post-pillarized media.

Social attitudes started to change in the process of de-pillarization, making gay emancipation possible. The reconsideration of sexual beliefs and values among the two social groups (pillars) most supportive of strict sexual morality – the Catholics and the orthodox Reformed Calvinists – was influenced by the work of psychiatrists and social workers. In 1951, the Catholic psychiatrist Cees Trimbos had discussed homosexuality in highly negative terms. Ten years later, having come to know gay men and lesbian women, he was praising their relationships. While Trimbos and others had previously compared gay sex to prostitution, they were now comparing gay love to marriage. As Trimbos in the early 1960s was one of the first specialists to discuss sexual issues on national radio, his opinions mattered beyond the Catholic pillar. Thanks to Trimbos and his allies – including a bishop – religiously orthodox groups relaxed their ideas on sexual morality. Both Catholic and orthodox Protestants published books full of understanding for 'homophiles' as persons, though homosex itself largely remained a sin. Changes in opinion among the more orthodox groups made it easier for the Dutch majority to support a more liberal sexual morality (Bos 2010, Keuzenkamp 2010, Oosterhuis 1992). It must be noted that the Catholic Church returned to its conservative tenets in the 1970s after Rome appointed more traditional bishops. They were, however, unable to turn the progressive tide among believers in the Dutch Church Province.

Along with the churches, psychiatry also changed its beliefs. In 1969, psychiatrist Wijnand Sengers (himself a gay man) declared that while homosexuals suffered from psychological problems just like heterosexuals, homosexuality in itself was hardly pathological. His research had not unearthed a single convincing case of a homosexual whose sexual orientation had been changed. It would therefore be better to help homosexuals adapt to their preferences and social situations, which included referring them to gay organizations. Sengers was not the first to declare that homosexuality was not a disease, but this time his profession supported the position (Hekma 2004b).

Questions in parliament on anti-homosexual article 248bis led the Minister of Justice to ask the *Gezondheidsraad* (Health Council) whether young people could become homosexual through seduction – the argument that had sustained the higher age of consent for homosexual relations. A committee of the Council answered that it not had been proven (Tielman 1982: 176). A Calvinist psychiatrist had already found facts against such a possibility in the late 1950s and the committee now confirmed this conclusion (Bos 1994). This assessment paved

the way for legal reform in 1971, which coincided with society's differentiation between homosexuals looking for adult partners and paedophiles searching for youths (these groups have been organizing separately in the Netherlands since the late 1950s).

Until the 1960s, homosexuality was generally considered a sin, a crime and a disease. Now, within a decade, it was none of these things for much of the population (Noordhoff et al. 1969). This essential change for gay emancipation paralleled the re-conceptualization of homosexual relations from situational and sexual (as in prostitution) to long-term and loving (as in marriages). Gay men began seeing themselves in this period as masculine rather than feminine and engaged in relations with each other instead of with the 'normal' (straight) men of the past, such as sailors, soldiers and other working-class young men. The butch dykes of an earlier generation gave way to more feminine lesbians. This, again, was the result of a broader change in which sexual desire was no longer seen in terms of inequality (husband–wife; butch–femme; queer–trade; man–boy; client–prostitute). This radical change, hardly restricted to the Netherlands, made equal gay and lesbian relations intelligible and acceptable, and anticipated the idea of 'gay marriage' (Hekma 2008). On the other hand, unequal sexual practices – paedophilia, bestiality, prostitution and patriarchal heterosexual relations – became more suspect.

The sixties finally witnessed the rise of youth, student and feminist movements that supported individualism, sexual choice and variation. Due to the Netherlands' late demographic transition – related to its recent conservative morality – there were large numbers of young people during this pivotal decade. The relative strength of the sexual reform movement and the lack of resistance by religious and political authorities resulted in a rather easy transition from a highly restrictive to a rather liberal sexual culture (Duyvendak, Koopmans, van der Heijden and Wijmans 1992, Kennedy 1995). The new social movements promoted the secularization of Dutch society (today half of the population are self-declared non-believers while only one-in-five regularly visit religious services). Since the 1980s, the Dutch are among the most 'post-materialist', liberal people in the world. A new moral majority with a clear progressive signature has supplanted the traditional Christian majority of the past (Duyvendak, Rijkschroeff and Pels 2009).

The Rise of a Movement

From 1912 to the German occupation in 1940, a homosexual rights movement – the *Nederlandsch Wetenschappelijk Humanitair Komitee* (NWHK, Dutch Scientific-Humanitarian Committee) – had lobbied for change in the criminal law and against social intolerance towards homosexuals. After the Second World War, the *Centrum voor Ontspaning en Cultuur* (COC, Center for Recreation and Culture, established in 1946 as the *Shakespeare Club*) followed in its steps and developed sub-cultural

activities. The movement generally favoured the aim of equal rights and social acceptance and, after 1970, social integration. The COC had its great successes in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1964, it was rechristened the *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Homofielen COC* (Dutch Society for Homophiles *COC*) and in 1971, the *Nederlandse Verening voor Integratie van Homoseksualiteit COC* (Dutch Society for the Integration of Homosexuality COC).

The COC grew into a serious cultural and political movement in the 1960s. Until then, it had been a rather timid oppositional force in Dutch society, with its leaders using pseudonyms. The support of a gay cultural elite favoured the visibility of homosexuality in the media. Benno Premsela, son of a sexologist and well-known in the Dutch art and design world, became COC chairman in 1962. Gerard Reve, who would become Holland's most famous writer, was for a short time co-editor of its journal *Dialoog* and regularly appeared in the media as a controversial but popular queer writer. The COC cooperated with the 200,000 members strong *Nederlandse Vereniging voor Sexuele Hervorming* (NVSH, *Dutch Society for Sexual Reform*), in those days the major proponent of sexual liberalization. In 1967, they established, with financial support from the government, the *Schorer Foundation* to provide psychological care to homosexuals.

The COC's aim of integration of the homosexual into heterosexual society did not go uncontested. The *Federation of Student Working Groups on Homosexuality* (FSWH) in the late 1960s as well as the *Red Faggots* and the lesbian groups *Purple September* and *Lesbian Nation* in the 1970s feared that integration would mean assimilation and were critical of integration being the movement's chief goal. Local FSWH groups organized demonstrations, dance actions (meaning gay and lesbian couples went dancing in straight discos), and parties where all sexual preferences were welcome. In 1977, Lesbian Nation initiated the first gay parade in Amsterdam. These more radical groups advocated that society – and not the homosexual individual – should change to create greater visibility and acceptance of sexual and gender variation. While these groups continued to exist until the early 1980s, they were by and large the last radical queer (flikker) groups in the Netherlands. Since then, the queer movement has been marginal while the major gay and lesbian movement COC and the leading gay journal, the *Gay Krant*, have become close associates of the government (Duyvendak 1996).

Already, before the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, the movement had succeeded in becoming a part of public culture and a source of advice for governments. Gay and lesbian groups were established around 1980 within political parties, trade unions, universities, the army, police, medical facilities, and churches. Gays and lesbians now began their march through the institutions. Under the shadow of the AIDS crisis and its ripple effects throughout society, the government, medical authorities and representatives of the gay movement cooperated to establish a committee to prepare medical care, prevention activities, and counselling.

With the election of openly gay politicians and gay rights rising on the government's agenda, gays and lesbians increasingly entered the institutions of local and national government. The Pacifist Socialist Amsterdam city council

member Bob van Schijndel penned the first local 'homonota' in 1982. This was followed in 1986 by the national government's first report on homosexuality. Many of the local themes were similar to those witnessed today: care for elderly gays and lesbians, greater visibility for lesbians, more attention to gay (history) education, questions surrounding the police, gay cruising, anti-gay violence, STDs and medical care. The national report, signed by a Christian Democrat minister, provided for a civil servant responsible for issues of gay and lesbian emancipation, offered grants for gay and lesbian activities, and promised equality in the fields of housing, labour, education, and inheritance. The report favoured granting legal rights to homosexual couples – highly relevant for gay men struck by AIDS and lesbian women caring for children. Asylum seekers who were victims of anti-gay discrimination also received special attention.

Many of the national proposals that were more legal than social in nature were realized. It had already been decided before 1986 that the police should do more to protect gays and lesbians, particularly in cruising areas (which were said to offer closeted men access to gay spaces). This policy, followed to this day, has remained somewhat controversial. The police still occasionally raid cruising areas and fine gay men for 'public indecency'. While cruising places have moved from inner-city public toilets to highway stops, city parks have kept their old functions.

The necessity of police protection became abundantly clear in 1982. The annual gay parade had been moved outside of Amsterdam, following the logic that this demonstration of gay and lesbian visibility was more important in the provinces. When it was held that year in Amersfoort, close to the Dutch Bible Belt, unprecedented violence broke out as local youths attacked gays and lesbians. This led to a political and media uproar and the enactment of gay and lesbian anti-discrimination policies at both local and national levels. Since then, the gay movement – once a movement of opposition and contestation – has been strongly supported and partly co-opted by the government at various levels. Activists became politicians and civil servants who developed gay and lesbian friendly policies or dealt with topics related to the AIDS-crisis.

In many respects, AIDS proved to be a turning point, ushering in cooperation between the gay movement and local and national authorities. This collaboration followed the Dutch model of co-opting representatives of 'minority' groups into governmental bodies. In this case, gays and lesbians were appointed to take shared responsibility for political decisions regarding AIDS and gay rights. The system worked quite well, though it erased dissenting voices (Duyvendak 1995).

In 1977, the independent MP Coos Huijsen became the first openly gay man in parliament. Many more gays and lesbians would follow, among them in 1998 Laurette Spoelman, who had been chairperson of the COC. The gay and lesbian movement now emerged as a starting point for political careers. Eleven of the 150 Dutch Members of Parliament in 2000 were openly gay or lesbian. However, the question remains of what such political representation means for establishing real equality and acceptance. In the run-up to the 2002 elections, the most visible gay

Labor MP Peter Rehwinkel tumbled ten places on his party's list. He attributed this to his party's lack of interest in gay issues.

Alongside the subculture that had developed since the 1950s, a strong parallel leisure culture – catering more to gays than lesbians – grew during the 1980s. Gay sport clubs, for instance, were given a boost by the Gay Games held in Amsterdam in 1998. In general, it was the non-political groups that flourished: organizations for ethnic minorities, youths, elderly, hikers, dancers, lovers of classic automobiles, book readers, kinky and fetish clubbers, and so on. While the movement grew, the social and cultural wing prospered more than the political one. The liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s was narrowed down into a rather instrumental struggle for equal rights, taken care of by professionalized organizations such as the COC. One could even wonder whether the movement looks now more like an extension of the government than like a fully independent political movement.

Equal Rights and Same-Sex Marriage

Since the co-option of the gay and lesbian movement within social and political institutions in the 1980s, two gay and lesbian issues have continued to divide Dutch society: an Equal Rights Law and relationship rights, colloquially known as 'gay marriage'.

Due to the opposition of orthodox Christians who feared they would be forced to accept gay and lesbian teachers in their schools, it took sixteen years to establish an Equal Rights Law addressing gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Christians sent thousands of letters to parliament in their campaign against the law. As the government in these years was a coalition of Christian Democrats with either Liberals or Social Democrats, it was difficult to find a solution, as Christian Democrat MPs feared alienating their not-so-gay-positive supporters. A solution was finally found: gays and lesbians could not be discriminated against for the 'single fact' of being homosexual. However, it was never made clear whether this 'single fact' also covered the freedom to speak about one's homosexuality, to introduce lovers, or to discuss homosexuality in class. Jurisprudence suggests that these are not included, meaning (educational) institutions – particularly schools with a religious basis – can continue to discriminate against gay teachers and students. Problems with the 'single fact' construction continue to this day, with the European Union criticizing the Dutch government for tolerating discrimination in 2009.

Although Christians and their organizations have long seen this legislation as a defeat, schools have been able to continue to reject openly gay people. The topic resurfaced in 2009 when a teacher at a Dutch Bible Belt school was discharged for his sexual orientation. The Equal Rights Law was accompanied by a Committee on Equal Treatment empowered to judge relevant cases, but not to impose sanctions. The committee has proven rather unhelpful for gay and lesbian issues since few

cases have been heard, though it has dealt more successfully with issues of gender, ethnicity and religion (see www.cgb.nl).

'Gay marriage' has a long history in the Netherlands. When the issue of homosexuality and marriage first hit the Dutch media in 1968, it was estimated that about 90,000 homosexuals were living in straight marriages. Doctors had previously often advised homosexuals to marry to rid themselves of their homosexual desires. At that time, the *Homofielenpartij* (Party of Homophiles) proposed same-sex marriage. The mainstream of the gay movement, however, considered marriage as an oppressive institution. Members of the movement thus pleaded in the 1970s and 1980s for the individualization of social benefits, and opposed placing the focus on the couple.

But through AIDS and the urgent medical and social problems it created, gay men learnt the importance of their relationships being legally recognized for issues such as housing, social security, hospital visits, pensions, and inheritance for themselves and their intimate partners. Lesbians were also interested in such rights for their 'families of choice', in particular for legalizing children born or adopted in their relationships, or brought in from earlier heterosexual partnerships. These two factors have considerably contributed to the struggle for 'gay marriage', but cannot explain why the Dutch have been the first to grant this right (since AIDS and children in gay families were, and are, just as relevant in other countries). We suggest that the particularity of the Dutch (and other north-western European) case(s) can be understood by the devaluation of the institute of marriage itself. To give gays and lesbians the right to marry is less of a victory in a country where many (heterosexual) people do not marry or do not think marriage is 'sacred' in religious terms. This is quite a different situation compared to highly religious countries such as the US where the percentage of married people is significantly higher than in the Netherlands and where marriage is still very much linked to ideas of procreation (Badgett 2009). In the Netherlands, since the 'long 1960s', relations are primarily understood as 'love relations' based on equality, irrespective of the gender of the two partners involved (Hekma 2008). Political opportunities for gay marriage opened up with the coalition of Labor with Liberals in the 1990s (the first government without Christian Democrats since 90 years), these non-religious parties looking for new voters, as Labor would welcome the upcoming gay group to add to its declining constituency of blue collar workers, and liberal parties could show their homophile liberalism by defending same-sex unions and marriages (Paternotte 2008).

What exactly happened in the Netherlands? In the late 1980s, some gay men, especially those associated with the conservative-liberal *Gay Krant*, began to campaign for gay marriage. Deeming the marriage agenda conservative, the COC only joined the fight for same-sex marriage in the early 1990s. The opposition against same-sex marriage largely came from Christians and some conservative liberals, while most of the media heartily endorsed it. After several years of steady social and political pressure, 'registered partnerships' were established for both same-sex and other-sex couples in 1997 by the Labor-Liberal government. That

these partnerships were available to both homo- and hetero-couples was due to the Dutch insistence on equal citizenship rights. One wanted to follow the French republican model rather than the 1989 Danish model that gave partnership rights specifically to gay and lesbian couples, but granting full marital rights was too bold for the Labor-Liberal government of the time. It feared foreign reactions to such a step.

Three years later, the second Labor-Liberal cabinet decided to open marriage to same-sex couples, giving them nearly the same rights as other-sex couples. The first gay and lesbian marriages were celebrated in Amsterdam on 1 April 2001 eliciting at the time more interest from international than national media (the Dutch that weekend were obsessed with the engagement of the Crown Prince with the very popular Argentine who would become Princess Maxima). The transformation of marriage from an (in this case royal) family arrangement to a love affair, so visible that weekend, contributed to the public acceptance of gay marriage as a relation of affection between two adults. There were, however, three main differences between gay and straight marriages. Tellingly, the reigning king or queen was barred from same-sex marriage as royal marriages were traditional institutions to guarantee biological reproduction and bonds between larger groups. The second was the denial of adoption from states that did oppose Dutch same-sex couples adopting children from their country, so as not to endanger adoption for Dutch heterosexual couples. The most fundamental exclusion was denial of the 'biological fiction' to same-sex families. Children born in wedlock in straight marriages are considered the biological offspring of the father, but this was not extended to gays and lesbians. This created legal problems for homosexual couples as it meant that they always had to deal with a third party, the 'biological' father or mother. The latter exceptions have now been struck from the law (the second one only for lesbian adoption), but the royal exception still stands.

The large majority (about 82 percent) of the Dutch population now supports same-sex marriage. Support for adoption by gay and lesbian couples is lower at 65 percent. Ethnic minorities in the Netherlands register stronger objections, with 55 percent of Turkish-Dutch rejecting same-sex marriage (Keuzenkamp, Bos, Duyvendak and Hekma. 2006: 40–41, 48). Even the Christian Democratic Party, which initially opposed the law, now generally accepts it. A recent point of controversy has been whether officials responsible for solemnizing marriages are allowed to refuse their services to same-sex couples. Although civil servants are obliged to perform all duties that come their way without making distinctions, the Christian–Socialist government (2007–2010) decided to allow those with problems of conscience to refuse to celebrate same-sex marriages.

Most recently, some straight people suggested that gay men, now that they can marry, should restrain their sexual exploits. The cruising areas, dark rooms and saunas that were so controversial during the high tide of AIDS in the 1980s have once again become so. In sum, gay questions have become themes of sexual culture and mutual respect, with a large majority of the population supporting sexual relations between equals in monogamous relationships, thus confirming

the ideology of sexual equality. Opening marriage to gay and lesbian couples caused a further 'normalization' and 'mainstreaming' of homosexuality. But does this imply the final 'de-politicization' of homosexuality? The situation in the new millennium is more complex as politics itself has become more (homo)sexualized in the Netherlands.

A New Century: Homosexualization of Politics

After the opening of marriage to same-sex couples, most people – gay and straight – felt that the heyday of the gay movement was over. The COC claimed that emancipation still remained necessary within small orthodox Christian and Muslim pockets that would not accept homosexuality, and that gay movements in countries where discrimination still ruled had to be supported (Hekma 2011a). Alongside the COC (which for a long time has depended more on government grants than membership fees), NGOs became recipients of government grants to help non-Western gay movements. The government also supports gay organizations within ethnic and orthodox Protestant minorities, as it desperately needs homosexual points of access in these communities.

The 'normalization' of homosexuality runs deep. Even though recent data may show broad acceptance of homosexuality, this acceptance depends on certain conditions being met. These conditions are that gay men should not be too visible, sexual or un-masculine. And it is not only straight youths who wish queers to remain invisible; this has become the attitude of many gays as well. Due at least partly to social pressure, they will not 'flaunt' their preference in public, except within the gay scene. Many adult gays state that their sexual identity is only a small part of who they are, and prefer to keep it low-key. This is even more the case among youth and ethnic minorities (Keuzenkamp 2010).

Although the Dutch claim that they accept gays and lesbians, this acceptance remains problematic. While 95 percent may say they have no problems with homosexuality, 45 percent indicate however that they dislike seeing two men kissing in public (38 percent for two women and less than 10 percent for a straight couple). Insults like 'queer', 'gay', 'homo', and 'sissy' are still prevalent in schoolyards, while schools and teachers rarely take such offensive language seriously. Much of the acceptance of gays depends on keeping physical distance and creating a watertight dichotomy between gay and straight, for example by relying on theories of biological difference (Keuzenkamp, Bos, Duyvendak and Hekma 2006, Keuzenkamp 2010).

The hot issue today is the presumed homophobia of ethnic and religious minorities, most often Muslims (Keuzenkamp 2010: 209–319). While it is clear that these groups are more negative on gay issues and young – mainly Moroccan – males are over-represented in anti-gay violence, the opposition created between these minorities and gays is problematic, since there are obviously gay, lesbian, and gay-friendly Muslims while many white orthodox Christians reject homosexuality (Buijs et al. 2009). Besides, gays and lesbians with an ethnic or Muslim background have

created a variety of organizations that offer support, arrange 'dialogue' meetings and parties and opened the gay bar *Habibi Ana*.

However, it is in the context of the growing controversy over Islam, that 'normalized' Dutch homosexuality plays a pivotal role. The political right, which has long opposed gay equality, has now embraced gay men as a way to criticize Muslims for their alleged homophobia. Populist politician Pim Fortuyn – and later Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders – have all used gay rights as a stick to beat Muslims. As the (declining) pillars in the 1960s competed to tolerate homophiles, left and right today compete to be the most supportive of gays. And while the left does not attribute homophobia solely to Muslims, the right does so while praising an invented Dutch history of tolerance that, for gays, is only very recent and remains rather superficial (Hekma 2002, 2011b).

While almost all political parties denounce each case of anti-gay discrimination, few concrete long-term policies have been developed to counter it. As stated above, issues of visibility and education have been proposed by the gay movement since the 1980s. Nevertheless, little progress has been made. Gays instead have become pawns in the struggle between white and non-white, between Muslim and secular Dutch – an unpleasant situation for them and for the Muslims who are often collectively seen as culprits (Mepschen et al. 2010).

Conclusion

The relationship between the state and the gay movement in the Netherlands has changed dramatically since the sexual revolution. Homosexuals are no longer abject individuals suffering under discriminatory laws and police harassment. The timid homophiles of the 1950s became the proud homosexuals of the 1970s, members of a victorious minority that has made enormous progress. Gays are now widely accepted in society, and even serve as a litmus test for the tolerance of others, in particular of new immigrants. Oppositional attitudes have been replaced by cooperation, and gay organizations are now more dependent on the government than on their members. Besides, few radical activists remain in 2010: Dutch gays maintain a low profile and are definitely not queer (Duyvendak 2001).

The confusion experienced by many gay men and lesbian women – of being considered the ultimate embodiment of progressive Dutchness while being discriminated against and having their sexuality 'normalized' – mirrors the gay movement's loss of direction. With legal advances in mind, one-third of Dutch gays and lesbians think emancipation is proceeding in the right direction; another third, pointing to the lack of social progress or the alleged rise of anti-gay violence, remain pessimistic. A final third does not know: they are probably as confused about the sexual and political state of the Netherlands as are many Dutch (Keuzenkamp, Bos, Duyvendak and Hekma 2006: 227).

The de-radicalization of the movement is in line with a certain normalization of gays and lesbians themselves – from sissies who like trade and lesbians who

love femmes to gays and lesbians who fancy partners like themselves. Gay men now flaunt their masculinity while lipstick lesbians prefer to remain feminine. While they have changed their gender identity and their preferred sexual partners, quite a few straight people continue to see the sissies in macho men and the dykes behind the lipstick. Homosexuality is accepted in the Netherlands but only under certain conditions: gays must not be too sexual, un-masculine or visible, and certainly should not approach straight men with erotic intent. Homosexuality may have become normal but male heterosexuality still sets the norm. Gay men cannot be sissies, lesbians cannot be dykes and heterosexual women cannot be sluts. The straight male subject position denies others equality as desiring subjects.

Social processes have been as important in the acceptance of homosexuality as political opportunities. The change from sin, crime and disease to something normal was the result of a mix of religious, scientific, social and, eventually, political and legal changes. The sudden and radical process of 'de-pillarization' was particularly important. However, these social and political changes as such did not create gay emancipation. To do so, these changes had to be perceived as real opportunities, as did a growing group of gays and lesbians who became socially visible – as patients, sorrowful Christians, the gay boy next door, or as artists coming out of their closets. On the national stage, civil society – in particular the academic, religious, and cultural professions – have played an essential role. The media were important as well in portraying homosexuality. The courageous gays and lesbians who made homosexuality visible – both in the past and the present – remain essential as they show what otherwise remains hidden or can only be talked about in whispers.

Regarding the role of the state and social institutions, we saw that it was the medical specialists and psychiatrists as well as the pastors and priests who spearheaded sexual change within their pillars and professions. Politicians were not the first to take up the issue. However, the moment they started to react, they did this in a responsive and supportive way: some legal changes were implemented and gay and lesbian friendly policies developed. In the strong Dutch tradition of consociationalism, gay and lesbian organizations became part of the governmental field, e.g. in the case of AIDS policies (Schuyf and Krouwel 1999). As we have argued, all this resulted in a rather moderate movement and normalized forms of homosexuality: the norms of the margins mirror the margins of normality (Duyvendak 1994).

Paradoxically, this de-politicization of the movement was not accompanied by a de-sexualization of politics, but by its opposite: a 'normalized' homosexuality plays a pivotal role in the sexualization of the Dutch national identity. In the new century, politicians have reframed gay emancipation through their seemingly permanent critique of the 'backward' attitudes of Muslims living in the Netherlands. Gay emancipation now elicits a lot of noise from both left and right – homosexuals are celebrated as the ultimate embodiment of modernity: highly individualized, free, and 'non-conformist'. This last point is highly ironical, since homosexuality is only accepted on the condition of being normalized (monogamous, gender-

conforming, and not too sexual …). And young people strongly resist being identified as gay, lesbian, or gender non-normative (Buijs and Hospers 2010, Fobear 2010, Hekma 2011a, Heugten 2010, Keuzenkamp 2010).

In the European context, the Netherlands has been a forerunner in gay emancipation. The country therefore had no problems with the EU's rather liberal policies; it indeed helped to formulate them. Only recently has the Netherlands come in for EU criticism over the 'single fact' construction in its Equal Rights Law. Otherwise, Dutch progressive politicians have been the first to point to discrimination against homosexuals elsewhere, particularly in Eastern Europe. The 'single fact' construction painfully captures the Dutch ambivalence on equality. While the major change of the past decades – the redefinition of desire through the lens of equality – may have elevated gays from an abject to an even praiseworthy status, this equality is rather selective: Christian schools have still the right to exclude homosexual teachers whereas Muslims are portrayed as totally 'backward' for not accepting homosexuality as the core of Dutchness …

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