

# Racism in the Netherlands: A Social Scientific Analysis of the Dynamics of the Dutch Multicultural Backlash

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## ABSTRACT

Why did the Netherlands reject multicultural policies in the mid-2000s? This article identifies a two-stage process: First, a discursive shift preceding policy change, enabled by a synergy between developments in media culture and “celebrity politicians,” who championed an anti-Islam rhetoric which resonated with significant Dutch audiences because it rejected the “immigrant

other” on more socially acceptable cultural rather than racial grounds, and appealed to popular discourses on gender and sexuality rights. Second, open political opportunity structures and the absence of a developed public discourse on multiple racisms enabled translation of this discursive shift into policy. Finally, modes and cases of resistance to cultural racism in Dutch society are discussed.

Fortuyn and van Gogh were notorious for their opposition to multiculturalism: they expressed disgust towards the cultural habits and religious convictions of Muslim citizens, and argued that Dutch cultural and sexual freedoms were under attack. They embodied a palpable discomfort with and aversion to the “backward” other. (Mepschen et al. 963)

[By] November 2006 [...] [t]he new policy of the Dutch government had become so imbued with Fortuyn’s points of view that the “familiar” image of the open and tolerant Netherlands, such as in the case of aliens’ policy and social security, was no longer recognised abroad. (Margry 130)

I am grateful to *Frame*’s editors for their invitation to contribute to this issue on “Racism in the Netherlands.” As a foreigner who has recently written on the topic (Herbert 87–141), it is good to have a chance to join a national debate, and interesting as a social scientist to do so in a journal of literary studies. I have been working on the social and political consequences and challenges of religious diversity in Europe in the context of the “backlash against multiculturalism which has occurred across the continent since 2000” (Vertovec and Wessendorf). In relation to the Netherlands, the aim of my research has been to discover why, amongst the European nations most associated with policies of multiculturalism, the Netherlands has been the site of probably the most spectacular political developments and dramatic policy reversals. These have included the formation of three political parties on a principally anti-Islamic platform (*Leefbaar Nederland* [Liveable Netherlands], *Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, and *Partij voor de Vrijheid* [Freedom Party]), and measures including the cessation of ethnic monitoring of labour market participation, the withdrawal of national-level funding for minority group organisations, and the introduction of immigration processes which arguably discriminate against social conservatives (Meer and Modood 474; Butler 3).

The editors phrased their invitation to contributors in terms of examining a disconnection between on the one hand “post-war [...]

narratives of tolerance [...] [which] have been steadily nourished along with a highly mediated (and therein *Americanised*) understanding of what signifies as ‘racism,’” and on the other hand “racism in Dutch society” and the lack of a “Dutch discourse reflecting on its own history of institutional and societal racism.” My aim in this article is to shed light on this disconnection by examining the elements and dynamics which seem to me to help explain the reversals in Dutch institutional multiculturalism, and by drawing on recent survey results to locate Dutch social attitudes in a broader European and global context.

In outline, my argument is that while the Netherlands is not the most racist or xenophobic society in Europe, it is amongst the most de-traditionalised and sceptical of heteronomous authority claims, perhaps because of its relatively recent history of religious pillarisation (van der Veer). This context may have made the claims of a series of “celebrity politicians” promoting an anti-Islam message (which blamed “multiculturalism” for allowing and encouraging Islamic authoritarianism/extremism) more resonant than they might have been elsewhere. Furthermore, these politicians were aided by several structural features: a political system relatively open to new entrants; developments in media cultures; and perhaps also the lack of a coherent pro-multicultural discourse to oppose their claims—though the lack of a developed “Dutch discourse reflecting on its own history of institutional and societal racism” may be better. Hopefully, this volume will contribute to developing such a discourse.

### **A Preliminary Question:**

#### **Is It Useful to Call Cultural Prejudice Racism?**

Before developing my argument, it is important to define what I mean by racism. Racism in the Netherlands, as in much of the contemporary world, is not primarily about prejudice against individuals on the basis of their skin colour, although that is not absent—8.2% of Dutch respondents to the World Values Survey 6th wave, (2010–14; WVS) said they would not like to have people of a different race as neighbours, compared with 2.8% of Swedes, 5.6% of Americans and 14.8% of Germans, for example. Rather, other, primarily cultural, markers are

used to categorise individuals as different and attribute negatively viewed characteristics to them on the basis of their perceived group membership. Some suggestion of the content of these markers is given by other WVS items. Thus 19.6% of Dutch respondents would not like “immigrants or foreign workers” as neighbours (compared with 3.5% of Swedes, 13.6% of Americans and 21.4% of Germans), and 14.5% would not like “people who speak a different language” as neighbours (compared with 3.2% of Swedes, 12.9% of Americans, and 13.4% of Germans).

Racism, then, as I am using the term, refers to all forms of prejudice which involve negatively pre-judging individuals on the basis of their supposed group membership or characteristics, whether the markers used to ascribe membership are physical or cultural; and to policy or practice rooted in such prejudgements. This is not to say—in relation to my title—that all opposition to multicultural policies is racist. The latter may be opposed for a variety of reasons not rooted in such prejudgements, and indeed some multicultural policies may themselves be so rooted. But, in this case, I would argue that the narratives promoted by Fortuyn, Hirsi Ali and Wilders, for example, are culturally prejudiced, and hence, in the terms I have defined, racist, specifically “culturally racist” (Wren).

Some may object that racism is neither the most precise nor helpful term to use here. In the Dutch context, others have used the terms “neo-culturalism” (Uitermark) and “culturism” (Schinkel) to label prejudice on the basis of cultural categorisation; below, I shall use “post-liberal” to contrast the arguments used by and political backgrounds of anti-Islam politicians with the traditional far right, and to identify widely shared Dutch values with which these arguments resonated. However, though these terms may be more precise, I think the term “racism” is also useful here, for three reasons. First, because the harms caused by the practice of biological and cultural racism are closely related—for someone insulted, attacked, or refused work because of their skin colour or because they are wearing a hijab the experience is similar, I suggest. Second, the similarities in the social psychological and structural processes shaping both forms of discrimination and exclusion means that it makes analytical sense

to group them together. Third, recognising prejudice on the basis of cultural categorisation as a form of racism may be practically helpful in building solidarity to oppose such exclusionary practices. However, the strength of the term could also endanger dialogue. In such cases alternative terms—culturist, neo-culturalist etc.—may be preferable, if these also make clear that cultures should not be assumed to be homogeneous, nor individuals judged on the basis of a presumed cultural template.

### Debates on the Causes of the Dutch Multicultural Backlash

Commentators disagree fundamentally (and passionately) about the causes of the backlash against multiculturalism in the Netherlands. Some, like Koopmans (1), argue that multicultural policies themselves are to blame—combined with a generous welfare state, they have made life too easy for immigrants, who have lacked the incentive to integrate. Others disagree: for Vasta (713) the answer lies in institutional and societal racism; she also contends that both Dutch and international commentators have exaggerated the extent and generosity of Dutch multiculturalism. Some have stressed the role of cultural memory (especially of the humiliations of Nazi occupation, and fear through images of militant Islam or fascism in another guise) in Dutch reactions (Eyerman). Others have emphasised the rapid secularisation of Dutch society, so that the Dutch people remember the oppressive “pillar” system [*verzuiling*], and reject anything that threatens the return of religious oppression (van der Veer). Still others attribute responsibility to politicians in setting the tone of public debate, producing a negative spiral in which elite discursive polarisation fed popular demands for assimilationist policies (Shadid 20).

This article is too brief to properly investigate all these arguments (see Herbert 87–141 for a fuller discussion). Instead, I shall summarise my reading of the debates, then discuss the factors I think are particularly important. First, the “over-generous welfare/multiculturalism hampers integration” argument fails because integration in the Netherlands actually improved in the 2000s across

a range of measures (e.g. higher minority labour market participation and educational achievement by minorities, lower residential and educational segregation; Musterd and Ostendorf); and if integration was increasing, it is not easy to see why its lack should trigger pressure for change. On the other side of the debate, while there is evidence of structural racism persisting in the Netherlands throughout the “multicultural period” (Vasta) and of shortcomings in multicultural provisions, Dutch multiculturalism still emerges as relatively generous in international comparison; so again, the sudden pressure to change the system is not explained.

Furthermore, continental European comparison suggests that Dutch prejudice against culturally distinctive minorities and Muslims in particular is not unusually high; surveys show this to be considerably higher in France and Germany, for example (WVS; Freidrichs and Yendell). In short, none of this evidence would seem to explain the intensity of Dutch arguments over multiculturalism, nor why Dutch institutional multiculturalism should have been so rapidly dismantled.

The other explanations summarised provide more to work with, though in my view require further development. I agree on the importance of cultural memory; following van der Veer, I argue that rapid Dutch de-pillarisation has produced a form of secularism hostile to conservative religion and especially to its playing any role in structuring social relations. Using WVS data I shall further argue that an unusually strong “post-liberal” values cluster in the Netherlands made Dutch audiences particularly receptive to Fortuyn, Hirsi Ali, and Wilders’ form of anti-Islam rhetoric. I also concur with Shadid in highlighting the responsibility of politicians, but will expand on the role of political opportunity structures and (most fully) on the role of the media in enabling them. Without these Fortuyn et al. would not have achieved their public impact, and the facilitating media structures in particular are both the most widespread and arguably least well understood factors here.

## Political Opportunity Structures

One of the reasons Fortuyn's ideas were able to impact mainstream politics so rapidly is the relative openness of the Dutch political system to new political movements, of which two aspects will be highlighted. First, the proportional representation system of election: by polling between 20 and 25% of the vote, political parties led by Fortuyn were able to have a dramatic impact on politics both locally (in Rotterdam in 2001; Cherribi 150) and nationally in 2002. In contrast, the UK's first-past-the-post system (which requires the representative to secure the largest share of the vote in a particular electoral unit) means that in spite of polling at a similar level to *Leefbaar Nederland* and *Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, UKIP has (at the time of writing) no Westminster MPs, and fewer local councillors than their national share of the vote would suggest. Like the UK, the US electoral system is also difficult for newcomers to enter.

Second, Dutch supporters of multiculturalism did not share a common, coherent "politically correct" discourse, organisational focal point, or charismatic leader, which arguably made it easier for anti-Islam challengers to effect a shift in public discourse, especially the reframing of Islam as intrinsically opposed to "European freedoms." Thus a recent study of the network properties of the integration debate in Dutch newspapers (Uitermark 47–60) found that "neoculturalist" leaders were able to shift the focus of public debate onto their terms because, although they received more negative comment than pro-multicultural contributors, this only tended to re-enforce solidarity amongst their supporters. This sense of solidarity under attack led neo-culturalist supporters to form a more coherent cluster than their opponents, and in defence of their position they showed stronger initiative, resonance, and solidarity, properties which enabled them to conduct the debate largely on their terms, and hence eventually to shift the terms of public discourse.

If, again, we compare with the UK, in the aftermath of 9/11 and later 7/7 the leaders of mainstream parties, largely supported by public broadcasters and broadsheet newspapers, fairly consistently distinguished between Islam as such, and radical, militant or terrorist appropriations of it, and correspondingly between "moderate"

Muslims, usually prefaced by “a majority of,” and “a minority of” radical/militant/extremist Muslims. Thus while not uncritical, a review of representations of Islam and Muslims in the British press between 1998 and 2009 concludes that:

on the whole we did not find a great deal of evidence of extremely negative and generalising stereotypes about Islam [...]. Most newspapers were careful to avoid making such claims, at least openly. (Baker et al. 255)

In contrast, in 2008 the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance concluded that Muslims in the Netherlands were:

the subject of stereotyping, stigmatising and sometimes outright racist political discourse and of biased media portrayal, and have been disproportionately targeted by security and other policies. They have also been the victims of racist violence and other racist crimes and have experienced discrimination. (ECRI 36–37)

Third, it may also be, anticipating the discussion of media factors, that the more fragmented Dutch broadcast media (based on the historic “pillar” model in which confessionally identified communities subscribe to “their” channel) offered less consistent representations of minorities than their British equivalents. Thus, whatever the analytical problems with a “good Muslim, bad Muslim” distinction (Mamdani 2004), its consistent deployment may have offered more effective resistance to essentialist anti-Islamic discursive reframing. Thus it may be that, if an important aspect of democratic politics is to keep the barriers to entry to the public sphere and political arena low, one of the risks that must be guarded against is the susceptibility of politics to sudden discursive (and hence policy) shifts, risks that may be increased by recent media developments. A strong public discussion reflecting critically on the history of racism in a society is one defence against such vulnerability.

## Media Roles and Representations

[T]he media [...] do not have the power to set an agenda that is not [already] broadly shared by their audience. (Entzinger 827)

[M]ediatisation has transformed the relationship between government and civil society in this neighbourhood. (Uitermark and Gielen 1326)

As Entzinger illustrates, in spite of a large body of evidence on media framing and agenda setting, an influential view persists that the media do not significantly re-shape public opinion or set political agendas, but rather only amplify or circulate views originating elsewhere. This view needs challenging, as it is a major obstacle to understanding social change and political process in contemporary media-rich societies. This account will challenge it by demonstrating a range of ways in which the media is profoundly implicated in both public opinion formation and political processes.

First, representations: I have already quoted the ECRI report, which found that Dutch Muslims were “the subject of stereotyping, stigmatising and sometimes outright racist political discourse and of biased media portrayal”; these include the media’s use of words such as *tuig* (meaning “scum”) and *Islamieten* (pejorative term; no English equivalent) to describe Muslims (Cherribi 142, 148), “the painful overexposure in the Dutch media of Moroccan Dutch individuals who break the law,” such that Moroccans and criminality become reflexively linked in the public imagination (Leurs et al. 165), and a range of ways of representing minority (especially Muslim) groups as a threat. For example, minority self-organisation through social media has been described as “ghettos on the web” (Hulsman 33), and linked with radicalisation (Ostveen 38) and hate speech (Pietersen). Moreover, this process of “othering” arguably extends beyond the media to mainstream political and official public discourse:

[T]he terminology of “autochthonous” (read white) people versus “allochthonous” (read black, migrant, refugee) people, steadily maintained by Dutch politicians, government officials and mainstream news outlets, is fraught with meaning as an exclusionary practice [...]. [T]he label “allochthonous” allocates positions to groups of people considered non-Dutch others, and, like a long tail that cannot be shed, the label is not only applied to first-generation migrants but also to the subsequent generations that are born in the Netherlands. (Leurs et al. 156)

A detailed study of newspaper coverage of Geert Wilders’ video compilation *Fitna* shows that Islam and Muslims tended to be negatively represented in journalism by politicians, experts, and citizens alike (Scholten et al. 4).

Second, developments within the media industry arguably aided the popularisation of anti-Islam discourse by a series of high profile media personalities, three of which (Fortuyn, Hirsi Ali, Wilders) had considerable success in translating their media profiles into political capital. This process was enabled by the commercialisation of news, because intensified competition between rival news broadcasters impacted on journalistic practices (e.g. “proactive news-making”) and news genres (importing entertainment formats into news and current affairs programming) in ways that favoured more conflictual, sensationalist, and simplified representations. Both can be seen in the rise of Pim Fortuyn, a pivotal figure in popularizing anti-Islamic, culturally racist discourse (Cherribi 134–53).

### **Media and the Rise of Pim Fortuyn**

While Fortuyn was not the first Dutch politician to gain a popular following on an anti-immigrant platform (Fritz Bolkestein had done so a decade before), he was the first to re-shape the political mainstream, and hence policy. Moreover, while he was only the first in a succession of celebrity politicians (e.g. Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders) and public figures (e.g. Theo van Gogh) in this period to popularise an anti-Islamic stance, he was a path-breaker for those that followed, and provided the

public platform on which they have built; hence the emphasis on him here. Fortuyn succeeded in broadening the appeal of an anti-immigrant and specifically anti-Islam message beyond the traditional constituency of the far right because he argued from what I term a “post-liberal” stance. Such a position is hostile to the public influence of religion in general and of Islam in particular, and to culturally different minorities in general and to Muslims in particular, but not on ethno-nationalist or socio-economic grounds, but rather on cultural grounds and specifically in defence of putatively “European” freedoms and equality, emphasising gender and sexuality. This shift in grounds arguably gave Fortuyn broader appeal, enabling him to influence mainstream politics and hence, albeit posthumously, impact policy. But he would not have been able to do so without the aid of the media.

From the 1980s Fortuyn had been active in using the media to create a profile to support his long-stated political ambitions (from the early 1990s he was publicly saying he wanted to be prime minister). From the late 1980s he was a regular contributor to the right-wing news magazine *Elsevier* and from the mid-1990s he gained a regular spot on the Sunday television programme *Business Class* (Cherribi 150). In this context, Fortuyn developed the rhetorical skills that were to prove so useful in his later televised encounters with politicians.

A key event conditioning public opinion before Fortuyn’s campaign was the *El-Moumni* affair. On May 3, 2001, *Nova*, the flagship current affairs discussion programme of public broadcasting channel *Nederland 3*, aired an interview with Rotterdam-based imam Khalil El-Moumni. Though arranged on the topic of crime involving Moroccan youth, the interviewer had added the question: “What do Muslims think about homosexuality,” to which El-Moumni replied: “It is a sickness.” There followed a question on gay marriage, provoking the response “If men continue to marry men, and women marry women, then Dutch society will disappear” (Cherribi 144). Public controversy snowballed, in which the stance of Muslims on homosexuality was widely (and negatively) depicted across the journalistic spectrum, from the liberal newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* to the populist *De Telegraaf*, which opined that the imam’s views could only be found in the “medieval deserts of North Africa” (8 May 2001; in Mepschen 967).

The episode was widely represented as an attack by a Muslim spokesman on gay rights, even by academics writing later. For example, Joppke states:

only when *provoked* by a prominent Dutch–Moroccan Imam’s statement that homosexuality was a “disease” did Fortuyn *retaliate* that Islam was a “backward” culture. (249, emphasis mine)

But El-Moumni’s statement was a spontaneous response to an unexpected question, not a deliberate provocation (and Fortuyn was hardly acting in self-defence, having already published *Against the Islamization of Our Society* in 1997, deliberately publicising his anti-Islamic views).

The incident illustrates the journalistic practice of pro-active news-making; under pressure for ratings, the journalist sought not to follow a story but to “make news” by generating a controversy, first by obtaining controversial material in an underhand way, then by circulating previews via social media before broadcast to generate publicity and boost ratings (Cherribi 146). It demonstrates the powerful role that mass media, here amplified by social media, can play in framing an event for public consumption, shaping subsequent discussion but simultaneously concealing its own role in manufacturing the event. This incident also articulated another powerful media-driven phenomenon, the personalization of politics, because it helped set the stage for the launch of Fortuyn’s political career (Cherribi 150ff.).

### **Mediatization Across the Social Spectrum: The De Baarsjes’ “Contract with Society”**

Scholars who study the influence of media campaigns on politics sometimes argue that media effects are greatest amongst the least politically engaged—for example, this was the finding of Kleinnijenhuis et al. in the case of the 2002 Dutch general election campaign in which *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* scored its most spectacular success. Such studies usually seek to measure the impact of specific media representations on beliefs and voting intentions. However, while more politically engaged

media audiences may be less susceptible to such direct effects, other evidence suggests their media awareness may influence their political judgment, and hence the political process, in even more profound and disturbing ways, as a study from a slightly later period—the aftermath of the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh (2004)—will illustrate (Uitermark and Gielen).

The Amsterdam locality of De Baarsjes was the site of earlier disturbances involving Moroccan youth—though not of Islamic radical activity—so local policy makers were keen to avoid trouble following van Gogh’s death. They therefore initiated a “Contract with Society” in which local mosques were invited to sign up to show their support for integration, and to generate publicity to demonstrate their pro-active stance to other residents. In media terms the strategy was successful, producing high local and national visibility. But it proved less successful in building bridges between local Muslims and other residents, and was divisive amongst local Muslims. Most worryingly, the policy did not respond to local conditions, but rather to the anticipated media impact on majority voters:

The government acted against radicalism not because it observed radicalism in the neighbourhood, but because it sensed there was a demand amongst media audiences for images and narratives of the struggle against radicalism. (ibid. 1340)

Thus local politics became “mediatised” in the strong sense that policymakers’ anticipation of media audience demands overrode any actual assessment of local conditions, especially of the impact of the policy on minorities and minority-majority relations.

### **From Media Effects to Mediatiation and Refeudalisation**

In these cases—from Fortuyn’s rise to prominence as a celebrity current affairs commentator, to the “Contract with Society” spun from anticipation of negative media representations—the media played a central role in the construction of social and political life. Hence we can

rightly talk of politics and society becoming “mediatised,” as the media “have infiltrated into the rhythms and practices of everyday life, as well as systems of governance [...] of societies” (Cottle 9). Mediatisation in these cases also involves something resembling Habermas’ concept of “refeudalisation,” in which symbolic representation substitutes (as in medieval societies) for public deliberation: “The [...] public sphere readopts feudal qualities in proportion to its formation by public relations [...]. The integration of mass entertainment and advertising [means that] the state has to ‘appeal to’ its citizens like consumers” (Habermas 292).

Recent media developments have intensified this process. However, not all media change tends towards refeudalisation; social media can also provide a forum for public deliberation and minority organisation (Leurs et al.). Furthermore, the media changes which enabled these events are not specific to Dutch society; rather they are the widespread result of the restructuring of national media markets under competitive pressures. Why, then, the extent of controversy and multicultural reversal in the Netherlands? Political opportunities are part of the answer, but we also need to consider Dutch values.

### **Dutch Cultural Values – a Distinctive Pattern?**

Analysis of WVS data from the fifth and sixth waves (2005–9 and 2010–14) provides some evidence of Dutch distinctiveness. For example, compared with other advanced industrial societies, in 2005–9 fewer Dutch respondents considered someone for whom “tradition is important [...] to follow the customs handed down by one’s religion or family” to be somewhat or very much like them: less than a quarter did so (24.4 %), compared with 32.8% in Germany, 34.7% in France, 36.9% in Sweden, 43.5% in the US, and 47.8 % in Britain. By 2010–14 the Dutch figure had dropped to 16.5%. While it is not necessary to consider following tradition important to respect others’ right to do so, the reduction of those who value tradition might reasonably be seen as diminishing society’s stock of understanding of those who do, and hence potential support for this right, particularly if it comes to be seen to conflict with more popular rights claims.

Similarly, “confidence in the churches” might be thought to contribute to a related stock of cultural capital, and again in 2005–9 the Netherlands (27%) was lower than Germany (35.3%), Britain (41.8%), France (45.8%), Sweden (54.9%), and the US (64.1%). Religion was also rated “very or somewhat important” by a relatively small proportion of the Dutch, 30.2%; while Sweden (29%) was lower, Germany (33%), Britain (40.1%), France (40.8%) and the US (71.4%) were all higher, and by 2010–14 the Netherlands (25.2%) had dropped below Sweden (27.2%). Reduction in this combination of values—which might be labelled “support for religion and tradition,” suggests that Dutch society has less cultural capital available to draw on for an empathetic response to those for whom religion or tradition are important.

Dutch attitudes towards family life, social conformity, respect for authority, and the value placed on free speech also stand out. Amongst the comparison countries in 2005–9, the Dutch had least confidence in the police and the armed forces, ranked the importance of family lowest, and least trust their family members (third lowest in the world; only drug crime-ravaged Columbia and Mexico scored lower). The Dutch were also the second least confident in government (only Germany, still facing the challenges of reunification, was lower), and had the second lowest proportion prepared to fight for their country (again second lowest to Germany, with its historical legacy of World War II). Also in 2005–9 more Dutch than any other nationality ranked “protecting free speech” as their first choice personal aim (43.4 %, compared with Germany 13.2%, US 17.5%, France 21.2%, UK 26%, and Sweden 30.2%).

The impression is of an individualistic culture marked by scepticism towards any heteronomous authority claim, whether made by religion, tradition, the family, the military, police, or government. In this context, Islam, with its social conservatism and family-oriented culture is likely to be regarded sceptically; add, then, (as we have seen) media stereotyping of Islam and Muslims and sustained focus on issues of difference and conflict, backed by the claims of celebrity politicians aided by developments in media culture, and the contours of a plausible way in which this scepticism has been converted into support for the dismantling of institutional multiculturalism begin to emerge.

## Conclusions

What actions or measures does this analysis suggest might be effective in countering the influence of cultural racism in Dutch society? At the level of argument, anti-Islamic essentialism can readily be challenged without being an expert on Islamic sources, by showing the diversity of opinion amongst Muslims on many issues. Likewise, the essentialist link between European culture and support for rights can be countered by highlighting their recent widespread acceptance (e.g. of gay rights), and the lack of current unanimity amongst “autochthonous” Dutch people (Mepschen et al.). But having good arguments is not enough; media developments, and the presence of politicians able to take advantage of them, were conducive to the spread of anti-Islamic essentialism, and political opportunity structures enabled this discursive shift to translate into policy. It seems unlikely that current trends in media culture can be reversed; but the opportunities that web 2.0 developments present for activism to resist anti-Islamic essentialism should also be noted.

While much social media debate can tend to become polarised, it has also been used to organise protest against anti-Muslim policies (e.g. the Muslim women’s protest against Wilders’ proposed headscarf tax organised using the social media site *Hyves*, Leurs et al. 151–52); and to build solidarity between Muslims and other opponents of Islamophobia (e.g. new media lab *Mediamatic*’s “hactivist” campaign against Wilders’ video compilation *Fitna*, in which protesters from Muslim and non-Muslim backgrounds posted clips apologising for Wilders’ film using the same hashtag, Van Zoonen et al. 1288–89). Such developments provide channels for the emergence of new ways and new voices to challenge cultural racism. Furthermore, if Uitermark has correctly identified the logic of discursive revolutions, then if cultural racism has become dominant in Dutch policy discourse, it too should in time lose its anti-establishment appeal, and become vulnerable to new radical challenges. Concerning political opportunity structures, Dutch openness enables responsiveness but has proved vulnerable to sudden shifts; live critical discussion of the forms of racism is needed to guard against future discursive, and hence policy, swings. Protests like that against the proposed headscarf tax organised on *Hyves* and that led by *Mediamatic* against *Fitna* show that there are ways and people willing

to challenge negative stereotyping and culturally essentialist policy proposals in public forums, though their impact on mainstream public spaces appears to remain limited.

The interaction between mass media produced discourses (national and transnational), rapidly expanding social media, and on the ground local community relations is currently an under-researched field. More work here could help identify the conditions under which, for example, malicious rumours “go viral,” with damaging repercussions potentially at many local sites, and conversely when social media communication might play a protective role in reducing the potentially damaging impact of international news reporting (e.g. at the present time, the growth of the so-called “Islamic State” and its recruitment of European Muslims) on local community relations. A new Norwegian Research Council funded project *Cultural Conflict 2.0* is seeking to examine these kinds of dynamics in ethnically plural neighbourhoods in cities in Norway and the Netherlands (Herbert, Trysenes and Uitermark). This research will seek to identify local sites and modes of resistance to culturally prejudiced discourse and policy from the “bottom up.” Other research which could contribute to developing a Dutch discourse reflecting critically on its own history of institutional and societal racism might include work on how curricula in Dutch schools represent, for example, Dutch colonial history, draw on the experiences of students and parents from post-colonial backgrounds, or reflect on how the legacy of the pillar system might still shape Dutch social institutions, such as the broadcast system and the development of policy responses to cultural diversity. In each of these fields, a key challenge is how to communicate the findings from such research, and hence raise awareness amongst a wider public.

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