



## Sexual Politics, Orientalism and Multicultural Citizenship in the Netherlands

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### **ABSTRACT**

Sexuality features prominently in European debates on multiculturalism and in Orientalist discourses on Islam. This article argues that representations of gay emancipation are mobilized to shape narratives in which Muslims are framed as non-modern subjects, a development that can best be understood in relation to the 'culturalization of citizenship' and the rise of Islamophobia in Europe. We focus on the Netherlands where the entanglement of gay rights discourses with anti-Muslim politics and representations is especially salient. The thorough-going secularization of Dutch society, transformations in the realms of sex and morality since the 'long 1960s' and the 'normalization' of gay identities since the 1980s have made sexuality a malleable discourse in the framing of 'modernity' against 'tradition'. This development is highly problematic, but also offers possibilities for new alliances and solidarities in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) politics and sexual and cultural citizenship.

### **KEY WORDS**

citizenship / heteronormativity / homonormativity / Islam / multiculturalism / Netherlands / Orientalism / populism / sexuality

## Introduction

Europe is witnessing a wave of aversion to public Islam. Recent examples include legal measures against the veil and the burqa in Belgium and France, and the constitutional ban on minarets in Switzerland. Islam and multiculturalism have become subjects of heated debate in numerous European countries, including the UK, Denmark, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands (Brubaker, 2001; Ewing, 2008; Holmes, 2000; Joppke, 2004). Gay rights and women's sexual rights feature prominently in many of these debates and controversies (cf. Ewing, 2008; Fassin, 2006; Guenif-Souilamas, 2006; Jusová, 2008; Scott, 2009; Van den Berg and Schinkel, 2009).

This article examines the remarkable shift in the social location of gay politics and representations as they relate to the rise of anti-multiculturalism in Europe. We deliberately use the term 'gay' as opposed to 'queer' or 'LGBTQ'. 'Queer' alludes to a subject-position and politics that is marginal in the Dutch context (cf. Duyvendak, 1996), while lesbians and transgenders play a minor role in the discourses we examine. Gay issues have moved from the margins to the centre of cultural imagination, necessitating a rethink of the sociology of sex beyond post-Stonewall liberationist perspectives and identity politics (cf. Butler, 2008; Duggan, 2002; Puar, 2007; Seidman, 2002; Seidman et al., 1999). We do so here in line with Judith Butler's call to reconsider sexual politics in the light of the temporal politics implicated in our progressive narratives: apprehending sexual politics today requires 'a critical consideration of the time of the now' (Butler, 2008: 2). We agree. In order to unravel the entanglement of sexual politics with anti-Muslim discourse, we need to analyse how sexual liberation is used to frame Europe as the 'avatar of both freedom and modernity' (Butler, 2008: 2) while depicting Muslim citizens as backward and homophobic. Gay rights have been recast as an 'optic, and an operative technology' in the production and disciplining of Muslim others (Puar, 2007: xiii); cases of homophobia among Muslim citizens are highlighted, epitomized as archetypal, and cast within Orientalist narratives that underwrite the superiority of European secular modernity (cf. Butler, 2008; Haritaworn, 2008; Puar, 2007). While this focus on the relationship between gay politics and Islam is problematic, we argue that it also offers possibilities for the development of new alliances and forms of sexual and cultural citizenship – in religious communities, in mainstream LGBTQ movements, and in European societies more generally.

We focus on Dutch controversies around Islam and gay politics as they provide quintessential examples of the sexualization of European debates on the vicissitudes of cultural and religious diversity. In no other country have discourses of gay rights and sexual freedom played such a prominent role, as witnessed by the narratives that unfolded after the dramatic murders of the openly gay right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 (by an environmentalist) and of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 (by a young Dutch-Moroccan Islamist). Both 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 (cf. Buruma, 2006; [Van der Veer, 2006](#)).

Two aspects of the Dutch case resonate with contemporary developments in other Western European countries: the culturalization of citizenship and the escalating criticism of Islam, mounting to Islamophobia. We focus first on these Europe-wide trends before turning to three specific characteristics of Dutch social history that inform current developments: the remarkable extent of secularization in Dutch society and the enduring influence of the 'long 1960s', particularly in the realms of sexuality and morality, contributing to a 'normalization' of gay sexuality in recent decades. We suggest that these clashes concerning sex, religion and culture, as painful as they are, also point to ways out of the polarization between gay politics and multiculturalism. The prominence of sexual rights and freedoms within narratives of 'European' identity – while problematic when employed as technologies of control and exclusion – may yet provide ground for emancipation, recognition, and mutual learning, thereby counterposing essentialist representations and mutually excluding cultural (and sexual) representations.

### **European Tendencies: The Culturalization of Citizenship**

The 'culturalization of citizenship' in Western European societies (Geschiere, 2009: 130–68; [Tonkens et al., 2008](#)) denotes the increasing importance attached to culture and morality in shaping citizenship and integration policy (cf. [Schinkel, 2008](#)). Its proponents emphasize the problematic aspects of cultural diversity and the need to construct, defend and promote European cultural heritage as an alternative to non-western influence (cf. [Ceuppens and Geschiere, 2005](#); Holmes, 2000). Implicated in this process is a temporal narrative framing European modernity against Muslim tradition, where sexual freedom has come to stand, metonymically, for secularism and rational, liberal subjectivity (cf. Scott, 2009). The 'sexualization of citizenship' denotes a temporal politics shaping an imaginary of modern individualism against subjectivities embedded in tradition, community and family (cf. [Butler, 2008](#); [Puar, 2007](#)).

Sexuality's prominence within the 'culturalization of citizenship' is consistent with its central role in the constitution of modernity, the construction of the modern self, and the making and 'civilizing' of the other ([Foucault, 1990](#); Mosse, 1985; Stoler, 1995; [Van der Veer, 2001](#); [Weeks, 1981](#)). Views on sexuality have been crucial in enforcing ideals of respectability and gender normativity (Mosse, 1985: 25; Van der Veer, 2001: 83–105). The modern moral universe of bourgeois societies was strictly heterosexual: homosexuals were 'not only thought to symbolize the confusion of the sexes, but also sexual excess – the violation of a delicate balance of passion' (Mosse, 1985: 25). Homosexuals were the object of political and religious constraint and repression and were represented and produced as deviant, perverse, sick and criminal others (Altman,

1971; D'Emilio, 1983; Foucault, 1990; Seidman, 2001; Seidman et al., 1999; Weeks, 1981, 1999).

During the transformations associated with the 'long 1960s', sexuality was again pivotal in the development of forms of opposition to patriarchy and heteronormativity, and to the reshaping of regimes of self (cf. Altman, 1971; Foucault and Sennett, 1981; Meijer, 1996). The emergent feminist and lesbian and gay liberation movements employed new discourses and practices of self and reshaped political agency. These 'new social movements' reinforced an ethos of individual freedom, autonomy and enjoyment as alternatives to the authoritarian past (Duyvendak, 1999; Duyvendak et al., 1992; Tonkens, 1999; Van der Veer, 2006).

The struggle for gay rights has been relatively successful. Most (Western) European countries recognize lesbian and gay legal and sexual rights; several countries have legalized gay marriage and/or civil partnerships (cf. Adam, 2004). Moreover, sexual rights are now advanced within secular critiques of religion (Scott, 2009) and in the recasting of citizenship within multicultural contexts. In order to criticize Muslims as backwards and as enemies of European culture, gay rights are now heralded as if they have been the foundation of European culture for centuries (cf. Wekker, 2009). This instrumentalization of gay rights puts progressives, anti-racists, feminists, and lesbian and gay activists in an impossible position: taking up the defence of lesbian and gay rights and public gayness comes to be associated with Islamophobia, while solidarity with Muslims against Islamophobia is represented, especially by the populist right, as trivializing or even supporting 'Muslim' homophobia.

## European Tendencies: Islamophobia

Anti-Muslim sentiments are on the rise in several European countries (Butler, 2008; ECRI, 2008; Ewing, 2008; Murray, 2006; Pitcher, 2009; Scott, 2009). The Netherlands is a case in point: as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) argues, Muslims in the Netherlands are:

... the subject of stereotyping, stigmatizing 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, 2008: 36–7)

Half of all Dutch citizens are reported to express aversion to Islam (Motivaction, 2006), while 80 per cent consider the integration of Muslims in society to have failed (TNS-NIPO, 2003). According to researchers Kromhout and Smits, the majority of Dutch feel that Muslim immigrants threaten national identity; 50 per cent of Dutch citizens consider Islam incompatible with 'Dutch' Jewish-Christian and humanist traditions and feel the admission of immigrants has been the country's biggest historical mistake (Kromhout and Smits, 2008). These feelings and convictions are most prominently represented and exploited

by Geert Wilders' populist Party for Freedom (PVV), with over 15 percent of the popular vote the third political force in the country.

These trends, while particularly salient in the Netherlands, are part of broader European developments. We now examine three more specifically Dutch developments in order to arrive at a more detailed understanding of the mobilization of gay sexual politics within citizenship and anti-Muslim discourses in the Netherlands.

### **Dutch Context: Rampant Secularization**

The extent of secularization in Dutch society is remarkable ([Van Rooden, 2004](#); cf. [Verkaaik, 2009](#)); in one generation, the Netherlands transformed from one of the most religious societies in the world to one of its most secular ([Van Rooden, 2004](#)).

Dutch Christianity died when the collective, ritual and irreflexive religious practices in which it had articulated itself [...] gradually became less important in the lives of believers, in the wake of the popularization of the discourses and practices of the expressive and reflexive self. ([Van Rooden, 2004: 22](#))

This dynamic was part of a broader historical process of 'de-pillarization' – the crumbling of the hierarchically organized religious and socialist subcultures ('pillars') composed of their own media, schools, organizations, social and cultural institutions and political parties ([Lijphart, 1968](#)). These pillars, which formed the basic mode of social organization in the country, faded away after the 1960s ([Kennedy, 1995](#)). Virtually all institutions associated with the old order were attacked as traditional and authoritarian; de-pillarization and secularization were thus experienced and interpreted as a break from oppressive, paternalistic structures (cf. [Duyvendak, 1999](#); [Tonkens, 1999](#); [Verkaaik, 2009](#)). Today, the Dutch 'feel that they have recently freed themselves from Christian conservatism only to be confronted again by Islamic injunctions' ([Van der Veer, 2006: 120](#); cf. [Verkaaik, 2008, 2009](#)). Muslims, [Van der Veer](#) argues, remind the Dutch of 'the Calvinist ethos of frugality and moral strictness' of their own past ([2006: 118](#)).

### **Dutch Context: Sexual Freedom**

Compared to other Western European countries, the Dutch authorities' corporatist and consensual style afforded greater political influence to the new social movements ([Duyvendak et al., 1992](#); [Kennedy, 1995](#); [Kriesi et al., 1995](#)). The 'long 1960s' (cf. [Righart, 1995](#)) had far-reaching effects – especially in the realms of morality and sexuality – and led to the country's 'liberal' policies on drugs, euthanasia, abortion and lesbian and gay rights ([Kennedy, 1995](#); [Meijer, 1996](#); [Righart, 1995](#)). After an initial period of cultural polarization, large segments

of the Dutch population have distanced themselves from moral traditionalism (cf. Arts et al., 2003; Duyvendak, 2004; Halman et al., 2005; SCP, 1998; Uitterhoeve, 2000). The percentage of Dutch citizens who agree with the proposition that 'homosexuality is normal' and who support gay marriage exceeds that in other countries (cf. Gerhards, 2010). The white Dutch majority holds rather uniform moral views (Achterberg, 2006: 55).

In this context, expressions of homophobia have increasingly been represented as 'alien' to secular, Dutch 'traditions of tolerance'. When Khalil El-Moumni, a Moroccan imam working in Rotterdam, insisted on national television in May 2001 that homosexuality was a dangerous and contagious disease, widespread commotion followed (cf. Hekma, 2002; Van der Veer, 2006). The imam had trodden on one of the cornerstones of Dutch cultural self-representation. The Dutch Minister of Integration grilled El-Moumni and other imams in a meeting in which 'Dutch values were explained'. He and others stated that legal action against El-Moumni should not be ruled out. Sociologist Gert Hekma recalls that the Prime Minister used 'the full 10 minutes of his weekly interview [...] to tell Muslims to respect the Dutch tolerance of homosexuality', although the Prime Minister himself was clearly uncomfortable speaking about the issue in public (2002: 242).

'Homosexuality is tolerated in the Netherlands. Shouldn't the role of imams', asked the liberal daily broadsheet *NRC Handelsblad*, 'be to promote tolerance and acceptance?'.<sup>1</sup> In a poll on the website of a mainstream gay and lesbian monthly, 91 per cent of respondents agreed that 'newcomers should tolerate our tolerance or should leave' (cf. Prins, 2002: 374). In responding to El-Moumni, even authors critical of simplistic representations of modernity versus tradition – including the chairman of the Christian Democratic Party – referred to Dutch values and traditions of tolerance.<sup>2</sup> The Amsterdam branch of the leading free-market liberal party (VVD) published a pamphlet in which 'liberal values' and 'gay rights' were delineated as Dutch society's 'basic values',<sup>3</sup> while a commentator in the populist daily *De Telegraaf* argued that El-Moumni's views could only be found in 'the medieval deserts of North Africa'.<sup>4</sup>

The emotional condemnation of El-Moumni is telling, especially when the episode is compared to the debate on the Gay Games in Amsterdam in 1998, only three years earlier. Examining that earlier debate shows how the recent 'public embrace' of gay rights in the Netherlands has become entangled with anti-Muslim discourse. In 1998, public homosexuality seemed far from commonly accepted among white Dutch commentators. Muslims then did not intervene in the debate; 'Islam' was not an issue. On the other hand, several Dutch pundits actively opposed the public display of queerness. In his weekly column, the conservative critic Gerry van der List 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!'.<sup>5</sup> Three years later, Van der List had embraced gay rights as exemplary of 'Western gains and ideals'.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the columnist Sylvain Ephimenco in 1998 approved of Van der List's 'deep disgust of male-to-male-love'.<sup>7</sup> But by 2001,



he was angrily responding to similar remarks made by El-Moumni, publishing an 'open letter' in which he called Islam a sickness<sup>8</sup> (cf. Verkaaik, 2009: 154).

Pim Fortuyn – the charismatic, ex-Marxist sociologist who made his ascent on the political stage as the leader of a new, populist anti-immigration movement – played a central role in entangling antipathy towards Islam with the politics of sexual freedom (cf. Pels, 2003; [Van der Veer, 2006](#)). His party won almost 35 per cent of the vote in his hometown of Rotterdam in the March 2002 municipal elections, and 17 per cent 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 painted the Muslim community as a threat to Dutch freedoms ([Van der Veer, 2006: 115](#)). 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, the equality of men and women. Fortuyn described Islam as a backward culture and a threat to his personal way of life: 'I refuse to start all over again with the emancipation of women and gays'.<sup>9</sup>

Fortuyn capitalized on the trope of sexual freedom as inherently Dutch and was pivotal in ingraining it deeper into the Dutch self-image ([Van der Veer, 2006](#)). Fortuyn presented himself as a liberated gay man whose way of life and cultural gains were threatened by 'backward' Muslims and leftist immigration policies (cf. [Van der Veer, 2006](#)); he '(homo)sexualized' discourses of Dutchness versus Muslim alterity. Fortuyn employed the style and idiom of international gay culture to present himself as the embodiment of liberated Dutchness ([Mepschen, 2009](#)). He successfully connected sexual liberation and secularization as markers of the modern, individualistic character of Dutch (national) culture and opposed them to a supposedly backward Muslim culture. The erotics of Fortuyn's political aesthetic and his radical, sexual Orientalism helped shape a tangible sense of community with clear boundaries vis-a-vis outsiders ([Mepschen, 2009](#)). As a flamboyant, openly gay man, Fortuyn embodied (sexual) liberation from a past that the Dutch felt they had left behind (cf. [Houtman and Duyvendak, 2009](#); [Van der Veer, 2006](#); [Van Rooden, 2004](#)). Lesbian and gay rights and women's sexual rights became symbolic of this sexual liberation.

Fortuyn's impact remained palpable after his death, as seen in the constant evocation of gay rights in anti-Muslim discourse. The controversy was fuelled by actors on different 'sides' of the debate. The populist imam Abdullah Haselhoef caused considerable commotion in 2001 when he argued that men caught in the act of anal sex should be put to death, but only if 'the abomination' had been witnessed by four reliable men.<sup>10</sup> In 2003, the Flemish Arab European League (AEL), led by Dyab Abou Jahjah, founded a Dutch satellite organization that espoused Arab Muslim cultural politics while taking pride in conservative sexual views.<sup>11</sup> A pivotal moment in the ongoing controversy was the publication, by the Amsterdam El Tahweed Mosque in April 2004, of a book arguing that gays should be put to death. In response, conservative liberal

MPs demanded legal action and called upon the responsible authorities to close the mosque. The book also led to tensions in the neighbourhood of the mosque. One neighbour reportedly said: 'Around the mosque we as women feel like black people living next to a Ku Klux Klan office'.<sup>12</sup>

These instances of homophobia triggered indignation. The Iranian-Dutch professor of law Afshin Ellian published a lecture in 2002 in which he argued against 'the relativism of the Dutch state in dealing with Muslim homophobia'.<sup>13</sup> Ellian asked: 'Do we want to transform Muslims into citizens on the basis of the constitution? Or do we want them to become citizens of a political Islam which violates human rights?' The conservative liberal MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali – a former Muslim – contributed greatly to anti-Muslim and anti-multicultural discourse in the country (cf. [Ghorashi, 2003](#); [Jusová, 2008](#); [Snel and Stock, 2008](#)). She argued that whereas western modernity was governed by individualism, the rule of law, and a secular and democratic constitution protecting the rights of (individual) citizens, Muslims were governed by the Koran, organized religion and communal pressure. The Muslim community, Hirsi Ali argued, was backwards, as shown in its aversion to sexual diversity.<sup>14</sup> The road to freedom thus lay in full assimilation to modern, secular Dutch culture. In 2002 the Dutch-Moroccan author Hafid Bouazza added to this chorus, arguing: 'At stake is the survival of a valuable civilization, the Dutch civilization. This must be respected. If not, Dutch society will slip further and further into a nightmare from which there is no awakening.'<sup>15</sup>

In November, 2004, filmmaker and columnist Theo van Gogh was murdered by a young Islamist. Van Gogh was a close friend of Hirsi Ali, with whom he had made a short film on Islam's oppression of women (cf. [Jusová, 2008](#)). The assassin left a note on Van Gogh's body addressed to Hirsi Ali. As Judith Butler notes, Van Gogh posthumously became a symbol for the 'principles of political and artistic freedom' (2008: 4). A website run by young Dutch-Moroccan Muslims (<http://www.elqalem.nl>) nevertheless opined in a by now familiar sexual language: 'Why would we mourn the death of an Islamophobic director who called the prophet a paedophile and Allah's pimp?'. The website also blasted the 'submissive' role played by first generation Muslims in the Netherlands:

If you want bootlickers, find our parents. They even commemorated Theo van Gogh in several mosques. [...] Our community is full of scaredy cats and hypocrites, who spread their legs for a bit of government subsidy. They are more fearful of unbelievers than of the wrath of Allah.<sup>16</sup>

Days after the murder, the website published a pamphlet protesting public homosexuality – in order to 'provoke like Van Gogh' one more time.<sup>17</sup>

Months later in Amsterdam, the American gay journalist Chris Crain was badly molested by a group of Dutch-Moroccan young men. On the weblog of the *Washington Blade*,<sup>18</sup> Crain stated that he never expected to be beaten up in 'the most gay-friendly city in the world'. He suggested that the 'country's legendary reputation as open and tolerant' was under threat due to the presence of immigrants. Crain received over 700 responses from the Netherlands,



where the issue was hotly debated. A Dutch woman wrote: 'This kind of behaviour is exactly why the Dutch would like to see the Moroccans go back home rather sooner than later [...] because they are miles apart from Dutch culture'. Someone else wrote: 'You seem to think that those Moroccans hate gay people? Forget it! They hate everyone who isn't Moroccan. For years our government is telling us to be tolerant, to try to understand our new Dutch. This is where it leads.' Crain himself blamed the attacks on a 'culture war' raging in Dutch society. This view was echoed by the president of the gay and lesbian association COC, who reproduced the temporal politics of the modernity-versus-tradition paradigm: 'Immigrants originate from a culture in which homosexuality is less accepted. In the Netherlands, the individual comes before the group. In cultures where Islam dominates, the group is more important.'<sup>19</sup>

As Fortuyn understood and demonstrated, discourses of sexual freedom offer a rich grammar to represent and reinforce an imaginary of Dutch 'liberated' modernity versus Muslim oppressed tradition. As Jasbir Puar puts it, the 'freedom from norms' suggested by queerness 'resonates with liberal humanism's authorization of the fully self-possessed speaking subject [...] rationally choosing modern individualism over the ensnaring bonds of family' (2007: 23). Gay rights discourses are so powerful in the Netherlands precisely because gay men – as unattached and autonomous subjects – stand for the ideal citizen of neoliberal modernity.

This malleability of (gay) sexuality as a discourse of inclusion and exclusion is of course not restricted to the Dutch case (cf. [Butler, 2008](#); [Fassin, 2006](#); [Haritaworn, 2008](#); [Kuntsman, 2008a, 2008b](#); [Massad, 2007](#); [Puar, 2007](#)). Nor is it restricted to anti-Muslim discourse, as Gloria Wekker shows in her work on the diversity of migrant sexual and gendered identities, and on the intersections of sex, ethnicity, class and gender in Afro-Surinamese women's sexual cultures (1994, 2006, 2009). Nevertheless, the performative power and scope of the entanglement of gay rights with Orientalist discourse – as well as with Occidentalist responses ([Buruma and Margalith, 2004](#)) – is remarkably salient in the Netherlands.

### **Dutch Context: Normalization of Gay Sexuality**

Gay rights discourses have thus offered a language for the critique of Islam and multiculturalism – an idiom that underscores an Orientalist discourse that renders Muslim citizens knowable and produces them as objects of critique. Sexuality offers a prism through which cultural contrast comes to be perceived, temporally, as the difference between modernity and tradition. The central tropes of this discourse – modernity versus tradition; individualism versus the lack thereof; tolerance versus fundamentalism – frame an imagined modern self against an imagined traditional other. Whereas lesbian and gay rights have a rather short history in the Netherlands, they are nonetheless mobilized as exemplary of a Dutch 'tradition of tolerance'.

A third facet of Dutch social history is pertinent here: Dutch gay identity and politics have undergone a far-reaching process of ‘normalization’ that has stripped sexual politics of its deviant and radical character in a more profound way than in many other ‘western’ countries (cf. [Duyvendak, 1996](#)). The Dutch gay community has been deeply affected by the emergence of what Lisa Duggan refers to as a ‘new homonormativity’ (2002): articulations of lesbian and gay identity that no longer threaten but replicate and underscore heteronormative assumptions and structures. This is an important development within European and North American gay culture more generally (cf. Duggan, 2002; [Puar, 2007](#); [Richardson, 2005](#); [Seidman, 2001](#)). However, in the Netherlands, an ‘assimilationist’ strategy focusing on equal rights rather than ‘queerness’ or radical social change characterized the movement almost from its inception. ‘The Dutch gay and lesbian movement has accommodated itself to the parameters of the political, cultural and power balance’ (Schuyf and Krouwel, 1999: 161). Duyvendak (1996) has shown how, unlike in countries such as France and the USA, the Dutch state in the 1980s gave gay men a significant role in managing the HIV/AIDS crisis affecting their community. The radicalization of AIDS activism that shaped the French, US and other ‘queer’ movements was thus avoided in the Netherlands, where radical articulations of queer activism remain marginal (cf. [Duyvendak, 1996](#)).

‘Normalization’ does not imply that heterosexual normativity has been surpassed ([Seidman, 2001: 2002](#)). Rather, the popular representation of gay identity has changed from a deviant other to the mirror image of the ideal heterosexual: ‘Normalisation is made possible because it simultaneously reproduces a dominant order [...] [L]egitimation through normalisation leaves in place the polluted status of marginal sexualities and all the norms that regulate our sexual intimate conduct’ (Seidman, 2001: 326). Homonormativity produces ‘a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative forms but upholds and sustains them’ (Duggan, 2002: 179). Paradoxically, it is the depoliticized character of Dutch gay identity, ‘anchored in domesticity and consumption’ (2002: 179) that explains its entanglement with neo-nationalist and normative citizenship discourses. Dutch gay identity does not threaten heteronormativity, but in fact helps shape and reinforce the contours of ‘tolerant’ and ‘liberal’ Dutch national culture. This conjunction of Dutch normalized gay identity with Orientalist representations underscores Puar’s argument that ‘instead of retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative (all of which queerness importantly is and does)’, we need to ‘underscore contingency and complicity [of queerness] with dominant formations’ (Puar, 2005: 121–2). Queerness does not necessarily challenge the national order (cf. [Kuntsman, 2008b](#)) but can be implicated in it and can, in particular circumstances, even be mobilized to shape and reinforce (neo-)nationalist and Orientalist projects and politics.

### **Conclusion: Cultural Citizenship as a Learning Process**

The singling out, highlighting and generalizing of Muslim homophobia is part of a global politics in which, as Butler argues, ‘a certain conception of freedom is

invoked precisely as a rationale and instrument for certain practices of coercion, and this places those of us who have conventionally understood ourselves as advocating a progressive sexual politics in a rather serious bind' (2008: 3). We agree with Butler, but argue that the prominence of the themes of gay rights and gay identity also create opportunities for new alliances. To paraphrase Puar (2007), Dutch gays are 'folded into' Dutchness. While this normalization is problematic and sometimes all but inclusive, the flip side of this process is a remarkable 'normalization' of the defence of gay rights. It is no coincidence that the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs Maxime Verhagen, a prominent member of the Catholic wing of the Christian Democrats, initiated with his French colleague in 2009 a United Nations declaration to decriminalize homosexuality worldwide.

The politics of sexual freedom and diversity contains potential beyond its use as an operative technology for the exclusion of Muslim citizens and the celebration of Dutch or European 'exceptionalism' (cf. Puar, 2007). While we are opposed to the high-jacking of queer sexual politics by nationalists and xenophobes, we remain attached to sexual freedom and diversity, both public and private, as basic human rights to be nourished and protected against arguments founded in reaction (Nussbaum, 2000). It is possible to promote sexual freedom in an inviting, inclusive manner, without dismissing Muslims or Muslim cultures and in solidarity with those who struggle for justice and equality within these and other communities. New articulations of sexual freedom and expression are developing in the Netherlands, including in circles where LGBTQ individuals and communities are still marginal. Orthodox Christian lesbians and gays have started organizing themselves to discuss and negotiate their sexuality within both the gay community and their religious communities. A growing number of organizations and support groups have become active in solidarity with immigrant and refugee lesbians and gays. Amsterdam houses one of the world's first Arab gay bars, *Habibi Ana*, while the Dutch *Yoesuf Foundation* has worked for years on issues of (homo)sexuality in Muslim communities (cf. Nahas, 2004). When in February 2010 a gay man celebrating carnival was refused a wafer in a Roman Catholic church, this immediately sparked widespread protests, media attention, and public contempt for the responsible priest. Several Social Democratic and Green members of parliament with Muslim backgrounds have taken up the struggle against homophobia, while the former mayor of the multicultural Amsterdam borough Slotervaart, Ahmed Marcouch, actively mixed a Muslim cultural politics with a gay rights agenda, promoting debate throughout 'his' borough on these issues.

The defence of sexual freedom can include Muslims who share this position, as well as respectful discussion with all those who do not share it. Such non-violent verbal struggle is necessary to limit and prevent psychological violence, as was argued by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty* (1859). Disagreement should be distinguished from dismissal: there is space for lesbian/gay politics beyond Islamophobia. To claim this space and to get beyond the false dichotomy of defending the religious and cultural rights of minorities versus the sexual rights of women and gays, we argue that we need to take seriously – in political and

social organizing as well as in academia – the diversity and complexity of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and questioning (LGBTQ) cultures and the possibility that queer migrants might choose forms of sexual emancipation, of sexual freedom, that deviate from ‘modern’, ‘normative’ articulations (Wekker, 2006, 2009). As Wekker argues, it is essential to take questions of power within lesbian and gay communities and movements seriously – to take full account of the intersections of class, ethnicity, religion and gender that shape sexual cultures today (2009). At the heart of this approach is a critique of exclusionary assumptions about Muslim and black sexualities, and of the temporal politics that has become entwined with our progressive narratives.

Charles Taylor has taken up the challenge to rethink multicultural citizenship in such a way that different expressions of cultural and sexual identity have a place, not just alongside each other, but in dialogue:

[T]he key to facing the dilemma of exclusion creatively [is] the idea of sharing identity space. Political identities have to be worked out, negotiated, creatively compromised between peoples who have to or want to live together under the same political roof (and this coexistence is always grounded in some mixture of necessity and choice). Moreover, these solutions are never meant to last for ever, but have to be discovered/invented anew by succeeding generations. (2002)

Taylor’s views echo Gerard Delanty’s plea for cultural citizenship as a learning process, which Delanty counterposes to dominant, liberal, disciplinary discourses of citizenship (2003). Indeed, ‘a notion of cultural citizenship conceived of in terms of learning processes that have a developmental and transformative impact on the learning subject’ (Delanty, 2003: 605) are a far cry from the uninformed and patronizing ways in which sexual rights are employed in Orientalist discourses in Europe today. What we need are forms of sexual citizenship that take sexual and cultural diversity into account without erasing power distinctions, beginning with the premise that we indeed have no alternative to sharing identity space, and thus to sharing time (Taylor, 2002).

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## Notes

- 1 NRC *Handelsblad*, 9 May 2001. All translations from Dutch sources in this article are our own.
- 2 Marnix van Rij in *Trouw*, 16 May 2001.
- 3 ‘Ook wij willen leven in vrijheid en zonder angst’, *Parool*, 12 May 2001.
- 4 *Telegraaf*, 8 May 2001.
- 5 *Volkskrant*, 14 August 1998.

- 6 Elsevier, 7 August 2004.
- 7 Ephimenco in *Trouw*, 5 September 1998.
- 8 *Groene Amsterdammer*, 9 June 2001.
- 9 *Volkskrant*, 9 February 2002.
- 10 *NRC Handelsblad*, 27 October 2001.
- 11 Abou Jahjah argued that homosexuality was prohibited in Islam, as the Koran explicitly outlawed it (*Algemeen Dagblad*, 30 September 2002).
- 12 *Parool*, 30 April 2004.
- 13 *Trouw*, 2 February 2002.
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