

'Feminist Vatican'

Feminism and religion in popular discourse

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Introduction

Today, feminism and religion are extensively discussed in popular Dutch media. No religion is discussed more often than Islam, and when Islam is discussed it is common to understand it as oppressive of women.¹ Yet they are simultaneously denied a meaningful role in debates in the Netherlands in strikingly similar ways. To understand this complex and paradoxical situation, we need to look to places where these popular descriptions of religion and feminism overlap. Religion and feminism are both often described as something that was important in the past, but has no role to play in contemporary Dutch society. Yet both persist and thus provide a problem. The reasons that are given for their supposed incompatibility with Dutch public debates are strikingly similar.² Religion and feminism are both said to prioritize ideals and sentiments over reason and facts. Furthermore, both are presented as potentially excessive. Feminism is excessive when it pushes female emancipation, an issue believed to be resolved in the Netherlands. As such, contemporary feminists have been accused of wanting to provide unfair advantages to women at the expense of men.³ Religion in turn is excessive when it presents religious reasoning contradicting secular opinions.⁴ Religion and feminism thus both cross borders in trying to impose their logic beyond their own perceived audience. Elma Drayer's characterization of a 'feminist Vatican' exemplifies this notion.⁵

Given these similarities, one might expect feminism and religion to be perceived as related to or aligned with each other in the popular imagination. Such perceptions, however, are very unusual. Popular media rather describe religion and feminism as a comparable, but incompatible pair. Here, the symmetrical dichotomy between the two is complicated, as feminism is preferred to religion.⁶ Though the Netherlands and Western societies in general are believed to have achieved female emancipation and gender equality, religious communities are the only exceptions to this rule. The presence of Muslims in the Netherlands is seen as a particular challenge to Dutch progressive achievements in this area.⁷ Dutch society achieved its current gender arrangements primarily through the efforts of second-wave feminists.⁸ Therefore, the solution for Islamic gender arrangements is feminism and provides the only exceptional case where it is applicable.⁹ Of course, these characterizations are problematic as their ideas on religion and feminism are limited and fail to reveal the philosophies that inform them. Therefore, I want to engage with these popular media descriptions more extensively in this thesis, leading me to pose the central research question: How are religion and feminism represented in contemporary popular Dutch media discourses on gender?

¹ Jessika ter Wal. *De publieke discussie over moslims in Nederland. Een analyse van artikelen in de Volkskrant 1998-2002* (Den Haag, Sociaal en cultureel planbureau 2004) 11, 18-19.

Margueritte van den Berg and Willem Schinkel. '<Women from the catacombs of the city>: gender notions in Dutch culturist discourse' in: *Innovation - The European Journal of Social Science Research* 22 (2009) 393-410, quoted 398.

² Jan Willem Duyvendak, Ewald Engelen and Ido de Haan. *Het bange Nederland. Pleidooi voor een open samenleving* (Bert Bakker, Amsterdam 2008) 146.

³ Liesbet van Zoonen. '*Moeten strijdende vrouwen zo grof zijn?*' *De vrouwenbeweging en de media* (Amsterdam, Sua 1991), 241-245.

⁴ Elizabeth Shakman Hurd. *The politics of secularism in international relations* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 2008), 119.

⁵ Drayer, Elma. 'Mag het voortaan zonder feministische kledingpolitie?' published 18-4-2014: <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/6847/Elma-Drayer/article/detail/3637623/2014/04/18/Mag-het-voortaan-zonder-feministische-kledingpolitie.dhtml>

⁶ Hester Eisenstein. *Feminism Seduced: How Global Elites Use Women's Labor and Ideas to Exploit the World* (Paradigm, Boulder 2009) 195.

⁷ Vilan van de Loo. *De vrouw beslist : de tweede feministische golf in Nederland* (Inmerc, Wormer 2005) 5.

⁸ Ibidem, 229.

⁹ Berg and Schinkel. 'women from the catacombs', 403.

Sarah Bracke. 'From 'saving women' to 'saving gays': Rescue narratives and their dis/continuities' in: *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19 (2012) 237-252, quoted 239-243.

Argument

To answer this question, I expand upon my description above, but also aim to reveal which ideas inform the contemporary thoughts on the way in which feminism and religion interact. This thesis argues that the limited recognition given to religious and feminist arguments is informed by a limited understanding of both feminism and religion. Rather, it is shaped by philosophies of two related schools of thought, namely liberalism and secularism. Secularists and liberals both attempt to create a neutral system for political engagement. Secularism focusses on assigning religion its 'proper' place in society, while liberalism is primarily concerned with liberating people from any external influences, religion providing the paradigmatic example. These goals often align, making secularism reinforce liberalism and vice versa. For instance, the neutralization of religious influence in politics is a goal in both philosophies. They also favor the same tool to achieve this goal: dividing the world in a public and a private domain.

According to liberal theorists, the private sphere could be used for the individual to fulfill its own desires. The public sphere, on the other hand, was dedicated to higher goals and should be governed by liberal rules of engagement altogether.¹⁰ Though at the surface such regulations only serve liberalism's struggle against religion, the results of this dichotomy are more far-reaching and effect people's lives in unexpected ways.¹¹ The dichotomous thinking liberalism popularized invited a host of other dichotomies.¹² Males were described as public figures of reason, unpolluted by emotion or religion. Men were also described as lacking female sensuousness. Many of the first liberal philosophers even described the state or society as 'a body' in order to create a depersonalized and defeminized alternative.¹³ With the public domain described as the place for rational decision-making, its opposite became associated with a lack of rationality or abundance of its perceived opposite, corporeality. Women's work, which had historically been found in the home, once more emphasized women's association with the private sphere. This model described women as irrational sensuous creatures best kept in the private sphere.¹⁴ At the same time, females were also ascribed religious significance. Responsible for raising children, protecting their purity and making a home, women were seen as keepers of culture and religion. Furthermore, believed to be more emotional, women were perceived to be more susceptible to religious experience. Needless to say, men but primarily women suffered from these limiting constructions. With a gender that was so deeply determined by social structures, going beyond it was a dangerous exercise.¹⁵ Though much has changed, these thoughts still determine the acceptability of arguments made in the public sphere, excluding feminist and religious ones in a strikingly similar way.

Indeed, the societal positions of gender and religion have completely changed since the public and the private domain were first conceptualized. In the Netherlands, religion first flourished when different religious communities turned inward but competed for influence on national politics during the time of

¹⁰ John Rawls. *A theory of justice* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge USA 1971) 375-376.

¹¹ Raia Prokhovnik. 'Public and Private Citizenship: From Gender Invisibility to Feminist Inclusiveness' in: *Feminist Review* 60 (1998) 84-104, quoted 95-96.

¹² Carole Pateman. *The disorder of women : democracy, feminism and political theory* (Polity Press, Cambridge UK 1989) 124.

Raia Prokhovnik. *Rational Woman : A Feminist Critique of Dualism* (Routledge, Florence USA 1999) 158-159.

¹³ Pateman. *The disorder of women*, 46.

¹⁴ Carole Pateman. *The sexual contract* (Polity press, Cambridge UK 1988) 97-98.

¹⁵ Prokhovnik. *Rational woman*, 1-6.

Kate Nash. *Universal difference : feminism and the liberal undecidability of <women>* (Macmillan, Basingstroke 1998) 40.

'pillarisation'.¹⁶ Halfway through the twentieth century, the religious influences in the Netherlands declined rapidly and continue to do so until this day.¹⁷ More recently, the secularizing trend has been challenged by the persistence of religious communities and the arrival of new believers, notably Muslims.¹⁸ In the Netherlands, no political topic has been discussed as extensively as the position of Islam within the country. Debates about the topic show that Islam is seen as a traditional religion, strikingly similar to the Christian religions that dominated society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁹ Dutch Muslims are seen as incompatible with its secular society, providing an undemocratic challenge to it. The discourses most often suggest that Muslims are somehow lacking in secularity, and should replicate the Dutch process of secularization in order to achieve it.²⁰ In any event, these characterizations have a secularist bias. They misrepresent religion, concerned with excluding its influence from public debates but fail to see its positive contributions.²¹

At the same time, feminism has developed in a similar manner. During the first wave of feminism, women simultaneously took on positions in the public sphere and sought recognition for the female predicament. Ultimately, they also successfully petitioned to have their citizen's and voting rights expanded after which many women's organizations dissolved.²² In the same years that the Netherlands started to secularize, a second wave of feminism emerged and attacked the Dutch gender arrangements in a plethora of ways. Strikingly, this time the pillarised Dutch culture was attacked more radically. Like the previous wave, this wave was successful but lost its prominence at the end of the century. Legal and institutional gender equality was perceived as an important achievement of second-wave feminists.²³ Simultaneously, these achievements have hurt the contemporary legitimacy of feminism. Like religion, feminism is thus understood insufficiently. Informed by a liberal bias, feminism is popularly perceived as relating to rights. In this way, social and cultural gender issues remain unaddressed. Furthermore, this liberal feminism serves only a limited amount of women, excluding those that²⁴

Strikingly, there is only one issue where feminism is still seen as relevant and important. For Muslims,

¹⁶ Arend Lijphart. *The politics of accommodation. Pluralism and democracy in the Netherlands* (Second and revised edition; University of California Press, Berkeley 1975) 15.

¹⁷ Joep de Hart. *Geloven binnen en buiten verband. Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (Sociaal en cultureel planbureau, The Hague 2014) 32-40.

Peter van Rooden. *Religieuze regimes. Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland, 1570-1990* (Bert Bakker, Amsterdam 1996) 43.

¹⁸ Hurd. *politics of secularism*, 116-119.

¹⁹ Paul Mepschen, Jan Willem Duyvendak and Evelien H. Tonkens. 'Sexual Politics, Orientalism and Multicultural Citizenship in the Netherlands' in: *Sociology* 44 (2010) 962-979 quoted 966.

²⁰ Oskar Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap : een essay over nationalisme en secularisme in Nederland* (Askant, Amsterdam 2009) 144-145.

²¹ Jan Willem Duyvendak, Evelien Tonkens and Menno Hurenkamp. 'Culturalization of citizenship in the Netherlands' *Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research paper* (2008) 1-29, quoted 3-4.

²² E. A. Heringa-van Ruth, Willemien Hendrika Posthumus-van der Goot and Anna de Waal. 'Lotgevallen der feministen' in: Willemien Hendrika Posthumus-van der Goot and Anna de Waal (eds.) *Van moeder op dochter. De maatschappelijke positie van de vrouw in Nederland vanaf de Franse tijd* (3rd edition, SUN, Nijmegen 1977) 248-266, quoted 256-258.

²³ Karen Celis, Joyce Outshoorn, Petra Meier, and Joz Motmans. 'Institutionalizing Intersectionality in the Low Countries: Belgium and The Netherlands' in: Andrea Krizsan, Hege Skjeie and Judith Squires (eds.) *Institutionalizing Intersectionality: The Changing Nature of European Equality Regimes* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstroke 2012) 119-147 quoted 141.

Irene Meijer. *Het persoonlijke wordt politiek. Feministische bewustwording in Nederland 1965-1980* (Het Spinhuis, Amsterdam 1996) 63-66.

²⁴ H. Eisenstein. *Feminism seduced*, 174-176.

feminism is perceived as necessary, changing women and thereby the heart of Muslim culture.²⁵ Along with secularization processes, feminism can be used to modernize them. That is, to make them more like their Western example.²⁶ Liberal-secularist biases thus not only limit the understanding of religion and feminism, but also their relation, viewing cooperation between the two as problematic.²⁷ Still, secularist and liberal philosophies appear as neutral systems that accommodate debates, with the public-private split providing a notable example. In this way, these philosophes immunize themselves, making alternatives unthinkable.²⁸ In this thesis, I attempt to show how these philosophies influence the representation of religion and feminism and thereby making them accessible for scrutiny and criticism.

Approach

In this thesis, I will try to reveal the influence of these philosophies by analyzing discourses on gender. I consider the debates on the websites of *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw*. While considered quality papers for the middle to upper class, both are widely read and sold throughout the Netherlands and beyond. Furthermore, both papers have a Christian legacy that they interact with in different ways. Of course, this background shapes the findings of my analysis and limits its scope. I expect that on the websites of popular lower-class papers like *de Telegraaf* or *Algemeen Dagblad* similar discourses could be observed, though probably more explicit and more polarizing.

The analysis and the thesis as by a social constructivist perspective, the thesis assumes ideas and conditions within a society are created by people's interaction. Obviously, language is one of main channels through which people interact, and language thus represents a society's historically created rules and ideas about the world.²⁹ At the same time, I recognize that discourse never exists in isolation, but is always part of a larger history. The debates I study in this thesis appear equally accessible to everyone. Published on the public website of well-known Dutch newspapers, everyone who owns an account can contribute. Still, this does not mean that everyone does. Pierre Bourdieu has famously studied this, showing that seemingly neutral institutions are actually organized through and organize divisions of class, ethnicity and gender.³⁰ Bourdieu has shown that class continues to be a social force of classification in France and beyond.³¹ Acquiring cultural symbols of higher class are made hard to acquire due to costs of time, money or class-grounded exclusion, making the system self-reinforcing.³² Notably, Bourdieu takes the selection of newspapers as one of his examples.³³

In the Netherlands, it is believed that social stratification through class plays a small role. Still, education, leisure and indeed newspaper reading continue to be organized along class lines. In this thesis I subscribe to

²⁵ Conny Roggeband and Mieke Verloo. 'Dutch Women are Liberated, Migrant Women are a Problem: The Evolution of Policy Frames on Gender and Migration in the Netherlands' in: *Social policy & Administration* 41 (3) (2007) 271-288, quoted 286.

²⁶ Angela McRobbie. *The aftermath of feminism. Gender, culture and social change* (SAGE, Los Angeles 2009) 88-89.

²⁷ H. Eisenstein. *Feminism seduced*, 191-193.

Janet Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini. *Love the sin. Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance* (Beacon, Boston 2004) 103.

²⁸ Hurd. *politics of secularism*, 36-37.

²⁹ Liesbet van Zoonen. *Feminist media studies* (SAGE, Thousand Oaks 1994) 39.

³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction. A social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* [Translation of *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement*, Les Éditions de Minuit 1979] (8th printing, Harvard University Press, Cambridge USA 1996) 482.

³¹ Ibidem, xi.

³² Pierre Bourdieu. 'Cultural Reproduction and Social reproduction' In: Richard Arum and Irene Beattie, Eds. *The Structure of Schooling: Readings in the Sociology of Education* (McGraw Hill, New York 1973) 56-68, quoted 58-60.

³³ Ibidem, 62-63.

his conception of class, while extending his constructivism to the topics of religion and feminism as well, revealing the ways in which (ir)religiosity and gender influence the participation and contents of popular debates in the Netherlands. Religion and feminism and alike shared a history in the Netherlands for years, with historical and social events informing assumptions about each. The events and assumptions both serve as a backdrop for my analysis of what is said about them today.

Social constructivism teaches that our language is not simply a neutral vehicle for communication. Rather, it is intimately connected to the way in which our society is organized.³⁴ People apply this language and other meaning-systems to help them understand their society and the world at large. Without it, the world would simply be devoid of meaning and people would lack consensus on the meanings of objects and ideas.³⁵ This would not only imply that people would disagree, but that they could not even discuss subjects, as they would lack common terms to refer to objects and concepts.³⁶ Our language shapes the way in which we see and understand society. Simultaneously, societal developments also influence language and its application. By repeatedly choosing specific topics and using specific descriptions for them, specific ideas gain their societal legitimacy.³⁷ Therefore, history is an important part of this thesis. Communication thus does not simply represent the ideas that are held within a society, but influences which ideas and activities might be adopted in the future, which Charles Taylor described as 'social imaginaries'.³⁸ The relationship between society and language works in both directions. The idea that a society tells about itself and others shapes the self-understanding of its members while also determining who those members are.³⁹ Even discourses that have been abandoned can continue to exert their influence on social ideas years after. For instance, chapter one indicates that even though the Dutch abandoned their self-understanding as a pillarized country, it continues to serve as an image that the Dutch both fear and identify with.⁴⁰

The rules that facilitate communication and thinking about specific topics or ideas are identified as discourses and are the primary object of study in this thesis. Of course, not all discourses are equally influential. The influence of the discourse is determined by the social settings and actors through which it operates.⁴¹ As such, discourse is inclined to favor the status quo and perpetuate societal arrangements.⁴² Established media like the newspapers studied in this thesis are instrumental to this process, offering fixed interpretations of themes and actors in society. Alternative discourses exist, but have their own audiences that understand their meaning.⁴³ While I think that these are useful for creating sites of resistance for socially disadvantaged groups, I think that these discourses ultimately lack the social influence to make a significant impact. Rather, I think much can be expected from reconfiguring popular discourses into social criticism.⁴⁴

³⁴ Judith Butler. *Opgefokte taal. Een politiek van de performatief* [Translation of *Excitable Speech, a Politics of the Performative*, Routledge 1997] (Paresia, Amsterdam 2007) 177.

³⁵ Bourdieu. *Distinction*, 468.

³⁶ Theo van Leeuwen. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Analysis* (Oxford University press, Oxford 2008)19-20.

³⁷ John Richardson. *Analysing newspapers : an approach from critical discourse analysis* (Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke 2006) 38.

³⁸ Charles Taylor. *Modern social imaginaries* (Duke University Press, Durham North Carolina 2004) 1-2.

³⁹ Richardson. *Analysing newspapers*, 26-27.

⁴⁰ Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens. 'Sexual politics', 964-966.

⁴¹ Richardson. *Analysing newspapers*, 221-223.

⁴² Richardson. *Analysing newspapers*, 153.

Zoonen. '*strijdende vrouwen*', 27-30.

⁴³ Zoonen. '*strijdende vrouwen*', 19, 24-27.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Dean. *Rethinking contemporary feminist politics* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2010), 165, 170-173.

Furthermore, different discourses rarely operate in isolation. Rather, they often intersect and influence each other. For instance, ideas about homosexuality are often intimately connected to ideas about gender and male-female difference. When two discourses are so intimately connected that talking about one implies talking about the other, scholars identify it as a discursive knot.⁴⁵ In Dutch discourses on gender, Islam and immigration often come to the fore, even though this connection may not seem obvious. In contrast, feminist discourse on Dutch gender issues has become more controversial, unless Islam is also discussed. In this thesis, I will attempt to show how discourses on gender and female emancipation have become intertwined with discourses on Islam and integration.⁴⁶ At the same time, this thesis will also attempt to disentangle this discursive knot and offer alternatives to it.

To achieve this, I will apply the method of critical discourse analysis to the website articles and the online reader responses. That is, I describe what these texts say, which ideas they connect to and what these thoughts imply. My discourse analysis thus connects both with historical thoughts and the social implications of language. In this way, I hope to gain an understanding of these topics that takes into account the underlying assumptions that inform popular discourses about it.

Definitions

In this thesis, I engage with philosophical themes, thoughts and movements that are well-known, but differ greatly in the way they are understood and given shape. Therefore, I will explain some of their common understandings, and then choose the understanding that I favor. To do this, I consider the work of scholars from around the globe. I value their insights, but also recognized that they cannot always be translated to the Dutch situation. Generally, I favor broader definitions as they offer a wide scope that goes beyond obvious and stereotypical understandings of the ideas that this thesis is concerned with. The articles' writers and their responding readers are not equally careful. Supplying definitions of feminism and religion are unnecessary in this genre. As such, it is often hard to apply scientific insights to these popular debates, as the language of science cannot be naturally applied here. Translation is required for these debates to be considered by scientific discourse analysis.

This thesis uses a rather broad definition of feminism. With this definition, I can make sure that a broad range of feminist sentiments and activities are included.⁴⁷ Feminist strands within the second wave were historically classified as liberal, socialist or radical. Fighting for the equality of all women, second-wave feminists were unable to recognize the particular needs of minority or religious feminists. Some have tried to broaden the scope of feminism, calling for the inclusion of lesbian, black and multiculturalist feminisms that have sought to adapt feminism to their situation while remaining critical of its normative inclinations.⁴⁸ Still, religious feminism is often presented as oxymoronic, while arguments between feminists and believers are perceived as normal. In general, earlier and later feminist efforts are both granted little value. In my thesis, I want to include first-wave feminism, religious gender criticism and 'post-feminism' in the analysis. Therefore, I adopt a broader definition of feminism, defining feminism as thoughts or activities that call into question societal gender arrangements.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Richardson. *Analysing newspapers*, 159.

⁴⁶ Roggeband and Verloo. 'Dutch women', quoted 280-281.

⁴⁷ Cf. Imelda Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought : from the second wave to 'post-feminism'* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1995) 11.

⁴⁸ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 16-17.

⁴⁹ Olive Banks. *Faces of feminism : a study of feminism as a social movement* (Robertson, Oxford 1981) 3.

Today, identifying as a feminist has become a controversial topic for many members of the general public. Indeed, people discussing gender issues often indicate that they are not, or at least not 'typical', feminists. The popular image of feminism seems to be quite negative, but is also fixed. Indeed, this image is strongly informed by the efforts of secular progressives within second-wave feminism.⁵⁰ Instead, Identifying as a 'post-feminist' is more common. Post-feminism is a controversial term among scholars. In this thesis, I adhere to a broad definition: post-feminism as the critical exposition with feminist thought. Even then, the ways in which post-feminism is given shape varies greatly. Some post-feminists distance themselves from their feminist legacy and criticize contemporary feminism.⁵¹ While applying the benefits and insights of feminism to their individual lives, post-feminists do not unite them into a wider social critique.⁵² Liberal and conservative writers alike have also seized post-feminist arguments, rejecting feminist influences in areas like education, politics, or the family. Others continue to embrace feminism but argue that our era calls for a unique form of feminism.⁵³

Secularism is probably the most fervently contested concept in religious studies today.⁵⁴ Secularization was historically thought of as an inevitable and universal modernizing process that described the way in which societies liberated themselves from religion, eventually leading to a modern and secular world.⁵⁵ This belief has been criticized on various points by many different scholars. First, the inevitability of secularization has been scrutinized. Of course, there are many societies that are not secular, many of them outside of the global west. Suggesting that these societies are less advanced or modern is deeply unsatisfying, as it describes them as falling short of achieving the Western example.⁵⁶ The universality of the concept has similarly been brought into question. In the various countries where a secularization process can be described, various forms have surfaced. As an example, Ahmet Kuru has described the forms of secularism in the United States, Turkey and France that differ greatly in their relationship with religion and the way in which secularism is upheld.⁵⁷

One of the most influential participants in the debate is José Casanova. He has made contributions like the ones summarized above, but also scrutinized the term secularization as such. Taking notice of the different ways in which scholars apply 'secular', Casanova has suggested distinguishing between three understandings of secularism.⁵⁸ The oldest understanding of secularization describes it as the increasing differentiation of religious tasks to other realms. For instance, science, economy and government have all been part of religion's responsibility. These understandings of secularization believed that as part of modernizing progress, religion would ultimately recede from society altogether.⁵⁹ The other two

⁵⁰ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 10.

Meijer. *persoonlijke wordt politiek*, 108.

⁵¹ McRobbie. *aftermath of feminism*, 1, 11-12.

⁵² Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 236-237.

Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 76.

⁵³ Patricia S. Mann. *Micro-politics. Agency in a postfeminist era* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1994) 118.

⁵⁴ Ahmet T. Kuru. *Secularism and state policies toward religion: the United States, France, and Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK 2009), 1-3.

⁵⁵ Peter van Rooden. 'Oral history en het vreemde sterven van het Nederlandse christendom' in: *Low Countries Historical Review* 119 (2004), 524-551, quoted 525.

⁵⁶ Kuru, *Secularism and state policies*, 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 9-15.

⁵⁸ José Casanova. *Public religions in the modern world* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994) 7.

José Casanova. 'Rethinking Secularization: A Global Comparative Perspective' in: *Hedgehog Review* 8 (2006) 7-22, quoted 7.

⁵⁹ Casanova. *Public religions*, 5.

understandings of secularization also describe the transformation of religion as such. Secularization's second understanding describes the way in which religion has been privatized. Connecting with ideas of church-state separation, these understandings postulate that secularism implies the split of the world into private and public domains and issues. Religion, then, is the paradigmatic example of a private issue.⁶⁰ But this understanding of secularization also extends beyond this issue, designating all subjects their place as either an individual or public issue. A final understanding of secularization holds that this process is also extended to a personal level. This understanding thinks that secularizing also implies that the amount of religious convictions and activities will decrease altogether.⁶¹

In this thesis, I discuss the first understanding of secularization, believing that religious influence is in fact declining. The second understanding is most elaborately problematized in this thesis. There may be limited merit to the thought that ideas of what is public and private are shifting. Still, I am critical of many of the ideological implications of this interpretation of this secularist understanding of secularization that immunizes itself while appointing religion its place.⁶² The third interpretation of secularization is hardly considered in this thesis for two reasons. First, this thesis is not so much concerned with religious beliefs as such, but more with the role that religion claims or is granted in public debates. Second, I do not believe that it is easy to measure personal religiousness. There has never been a definition of religion that satisfied all religious participants and scholars of religion. Religious practices and beliefs are so diverse among and within people that measuring it seems close to impossible.

Casanova offers one more important insight that also informs this thesis. He claims that secularization is always tied up with religion. So even while secularists want to give religion a new position, they are still engaging with it and using it as a starting point.⁶³ Furthermore, history indicates that many secularizing trends actually have religious sources. The Netherlands are no exception, as conservative protestants tried hard to emancipate themselves from the state.⁶⁴ Other scholars have elaborated on this point, revealing that secularism is in many respects comparable with religion. Thus, secularism is not simply opposed to religion, but also an extension of it.⁶⁵

Though liberalism as a term and a movement is not nearly as contested as the other ones I described in this introduction, many political ideas around the globe are all described as liberalism. For instance, though many liberals reject extensive state intervention, many European countries including the Netherlands know more socialist varieties of liberalism.⁶⁶ Furthermore, many liberals are themselves reluctant to define liberalism, believing that the philosophy has few inherent traits, but rather proposes a system for enabling neutral and civilized political discourse.⁶⁷ In later chapters, I reject this definition of liberalism, arguing that it serves as a rhetorical device that renders liberalism immune to criticism.

In this thesis, liberalism is defined as the philosophy and movement that argues that all individuals have

⁶⁰ Hurd. *politics of secularism*, 29.

⁶¹ Casanova. 'Rethinking Secularization', 8.

⁶² Cf. Hurd. *politics of secularism*, 16-17.

⁶³ Casanova. 'Rethinking Secularization', 10.

⁶⁴ Siep Stuurman. *Verzuiling, kapitalisme en patriërchaat. Aspecten van de ontwikkeling van de moderne staat in Nederland* (SUN, Nijmegen 1983) 72-73.

⁶⁵ Hurd. *politics of secularism*, 12-13.

⁶⁶ Sierk Ybema. *De koers van de krant : vertogen over identiteit bij Trouw en de Volkskrant* (Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit 2003) 106.

⁶⁷ Hurd. *politics of secularism*, 37.

liberty and equality of opportunity, later expanded to include various rights.⁶⁸ As alluded to, liberalism simultaneously proposes many rules for engaging with dissenters in the political realm. Liberalism as a philosophy and practice is thus intimately related to human rights discourses and ideas on statecraft.⁶⁹ I should define two more specific conceptions of liberalism here. By classical liberalism I mean liberalism as it was conceived of by writers between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Today, liberalism has changed, but is still inspired by these authors.

The last theme I discuss here is multiculturalism. I consider this theme to indicate the way in which the Dutch demarcate 'Dutchness'. Some authors think that Dutch culture should accommodate difference or tolerate it, while other understandings seek to set limits to what 'Dutch' entails. They try to find core values of Dutch society and apply them to include and exclude individuals and groups of Dutch society. As competition between ways of understanding is such an important issue in this thesis I pay a lot of attention to multiculturalism. Multiculturalism implies the recognition of cultural diversity and the ambition to make this diversity a factor in decision-making. Multiculturalism is found in many guises, ranging from seeking recognition for a groups particularity to the recognition of diversity as such.⁷⁰ I mention multiculturalism primarily as a critic of liberalism's ideal of a common language for performing politics. Multiculturalism calls attention to the diversity within a country, pointing out that different cultures will require unique ways of communication and unique regulations.⁷¹ In this way, multiculturalists try to include more people in society in a meaningful way. Multiculturalism often operates within a liberal country, criticizing the way in which liberalism excludes specific groups.⁷² I also explain the way in which multiculturalism relates to pluralism, tolerance and recognition of difference.

Outline

With these stipulations, my thesis is divided as follows. In the first two chapters I write a history of the way in which religion and feminism have entered the public sphere in the Netherlands. In the first chapter, I turn to the place that has been assigned to religion in Dutch society between the nineteenth century and today. As such, liberalism, secularism, multiculturalism and tolerance are important topics in this chapter, as all have occupied themselves with assigning a proper place to religion. The second chapter gives an overview of feminist thought and activity in the Netherlands, from the nineteenth century until today. I focus both on feminist theory and the popular perception of the movement in history. Of course, its interconnections with religion and cultural difference are given additional attention. I also pay some attention to recent and historical manifestations of the postfeminist phenomenon. Informed by these historical and theoretical considerations, I turn to the discourse analysis in my final two chapters. In the third chapter I explain my methodology and the philosophy that informs it. This includes a general exposition of, social constructivism, critical discourse analysis and the way in which I apply them. It also describes the two newspapers that publish the discourses that I scrutinize. Finally, I will also consider the ideological colors of both papers, and reflect on the nature of online arguments. In the fourth chapter I present ten selected articles, each one in some sense relating to feminism or women's rights. The articles are given a short introduction, followed by discourse analysis that draws on all of them. The full, original articles may be found in the appendices,

⁶⁸ Clara Meijers. 'Gij zult niet arbeiden!' in: Posthumus-van der Goot Waal (eds.) *Van moeder op dochter*. 188-196, quoted 189.

⁶⁹ Wendy Brown. 'Finding the Man in the State' in: *Feminist studies* 18:1 (1992) 7-34, quoted 12.

⁷⁰ William Connolly. *Pluralism* (Duke University Press, Durham North Carolina 2005) 40-42.

⁷¹ Monica Mookherjee. *Women's rights as multicultural claims : reconfiguring gender and diversity in political philosophy* (University of Edinburgh Press, Edinburgh 2009) 2-4.

⁷² Bhikhu Parekh, 'A varied moral world' in: J. Cohen, M. Nussbaum and M. Howard. (eds.) *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 1999) 69-75, quoted 74.

though reader responses are excluded for reasons of space. In my analysis, I connect my observations to the historical and theoretical information in my first two chapters. In the analysis, I pay particular attention to the way in which religion is brought to the fore by authors or online responders. In the conclusion I summarize the research, consider the meaning of my findings and explore possibilities for future research.

Chapter one: religion in the public sphere

In this chapter I reveal something of the development of Dutch society, focusing on the position that has historically been assigned to Dutch religion. As such, this chapter is strongly concerned with liberalism and secularism as the two main organizing principles of religion and politics in the Netherlands since the nineteenth century. One important and unique operation of these philosophies in the Netherlands is the so-called pillarization. After offering an exposition of these two philosophies, I discuss some important criticism of these movements, primarily relating to the positions of groups and diversity under liberal-secularist philosophies. I thus discuss tolerance and multiculturalism, indicating how these concepts problematize the way in which liberalism and secularism enable religious participation in the public sphere and its debates. Finally, in discussing these themes, I also seek to describe the way in which these dualistic philosophies create definitions of 'Dutchness' and set it off against its 'others': the non-secular, the illiberal and the intolerant. Simply following current citizenship definitions does not suffice, as perceptions of what constitutes Dutchness also go beyond this.

Liberalism

The Netherlands cannot be seen as an example of the perfect liberal state, as socialist and Christian influences have shaped the country and its politics as well.⁷³ Still, liberalism was and continues to be the most powerful influence in Dutch political history.⁷⁴ In this context, I refer to liberalism both as the philosophical school and the political system that this philosophy informs. Liberalism holds that people should have optimal freedom in pursuing their goals. Of course, people's desires and opinions generally diverge, creating a situation where one person's freedom limits the freedom of the next. Liberals solve this problem by making people compete to have their ideas and desires fulfilled.⁷⁵ To secure an even competition, they try to adopt a secular system, diminishing the influences of religion and the state. The influence of the clergy and monarchy in particular are designated as unfair influences.⁷⁶ This means that liberals try to create a secular state where the government's role is small, participating minimally in social matters.

Liberal and Protestant thinkers are the founders of the Dutch political system of representative democracy the country knows today.⁷⁷ In the Netherlands, the liberal secular ideal was not given shape in the form of religious absence, but fair competition among religious denominations and political interest groups. Johan Rudolph Thorbecke crafted the constitution, paying much attention to separating the state from monarchical⁷⁸ and religious influences, removing Protestant privileges.⁷⁹ Thorbecke allowed dioceses in the Netherlands again, undoing their absence since the Dutch reformation. This decision was condemned by Thorbecke's political opponents and some Protestants petitioned against it. Thorbecke shared some of these sentiments. He viewed the Protestant faith as the most advanced and liberal type of religion. Like many of his contemporaries, Thorbecke viewed Christianity as a general source of social progress and cohesion that permeated society.⁸⁰ He mentions three groups supporting 'exclusive religions': pagans, Jews

⁷³ Lijphart. *accommodation*, 17.

⁷⁴ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 256-258.

⁷⁵ Rawls. *A theory of justice*, 3-5.

⁷⁶ Kuru. *Secularism and state policies*, 23.25.

⁷⁷ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 190.

⁷⁸ Johan Rudolph Thorbecke. *De scheppende kracht van de natie : het liberalisme volgens J.R. Thorbecke. Een bloemlezing gekozen en ingeleid door Erik Swart* (Van Gennep, Amsterdam 2007) 44-45.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, 82-83.

⁸⁰ Thorbecke. *liberalisme volgens*, 92-94.

and Muslims. He viewed the Roman Catholic Church as inclusive, but its structure led to despotism.⁸¹ Yet, he maintained that the constitution implies that Catholics should be allowed to organize themselves. He adds that this is not limited to tolerance, but also includes granting them the same rights as you would desire for yourself.⁸² Even though Dutch liberals were hardly neutral, they still attempted to create a system that could accommodate different religions.

The liberals created a system of male census suffrage, independent of royalty and church. Still, religion was never absent from Dutch politics, as many representatives were religious and demanded recognition for their religion. For instance, from the 19th century onward, Catholics tried to 'emancipate' themselves, regaining their social influence.⁸³ More strikingly, the first political party was the Reformed Protestant Anti-revolutionary Party (*ARP*). This conservative party rejected what they perceived as the 'excesses' of the French revolution: liberalism, socialism and feminism. Strikingly, within the Dutch liberal political system, the first political party was a conservative Christian one. For most of the nineteenth century, census suffrage meant that representative politics were dominated by conservative or liberal men of the upper classes. Abraham Kuyper, the charismatic leader of the *ARP*, ultimately abandoned this tradition. He successfully appealed voting rights for all males. This was informed by the fact that his supporters were mainly middle class while their Protestant orthodoxy rejected female public roles.⁸⁴ Kuyper remained skeptical about public roles for women in spite of protests from his female supporters.⁸⁵ Still, five years later, women's suffrage was also constitutionalized. While Thorbecke's concept of state-church separation was based on his liberal philosophy, Kuyper reached a similar conclusion by introducing sphere sovereignty: church and state are sovereign in their proper domains and cannot control one another. Early Dutch secularization was thus very much informed by both Protestant and secular narratives.

Pillarisation

For the history of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, it has become somewhat of a cliché to talk about the Netherlands as a pillarised country. That is, the Netherlands are believed to have encompassed several 'blocs', each of them representing a minority culture and arguing for it at a national level. I take the founding of the *ARP* in 1879, by the Reformed preacher Abraham Kuyper, to be the start of pillarisation. Though cradled in the ideals of '*het Réveil*', their Christian humanitarianism was soon eclipsed by the *ARP*'s reactionary confessional identity politics. Arguing against the liberal refusal of public aid to religious schools, Kuyper found Catholic representatives at his side, temporarily ignoring confessional differences.⁸⁶ *ARP* supporters wanted to be able to teach in their own way and rejected liberalism as 'antithesis' of Christianity and overly progressive.⁸⁷ By the 'pacification of 1917', Kuyper's demand for religious education were fulfilled. By that time, secular and Christian parties had been thoroughly antagonized.⁸⁸ Indeed, group conflicts were increasingly discussed in parliament, as the pillars consolidated their social position. In 1920, the *ARP* followed the Reformed church in abandoning some statutes that defined them as different from Catholics and atheists. For some of the orthodox Reformed, this meant that they could no longer support

⁸¹ Ibidem, 89-92.

⁸² Ibidem, 95-96.

⁸³ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 72-73.

⁸⁴ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 209.

Rooden. *Religieuze regimes*, 35.

⁸⁵ E. A. Heringa-van Ruth, Willemien Hendrika Posthumus-van der Goot and Anna de Waal. 'De verenigingen' in: Posthumus-van der Goot and de Waal (eds.). *Van moeder op dochter*, 350-373, quoted 353.

⁸⁶ Lijphart. *The politics of accommodation*, 105-106.

⁸⁷ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 225.

⁸⁸ Lijphart, *accommodation*, 112.

the party. Instead, they founded the Reformed Political Party (*SGP*), while continuing to be inspired by anti-revolutionary founders like Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper. In any event, these Protestant identity politics and secular resistance to it were instrumental in laying the groundwork for both pillarisation and secularization, supporting Casanova's insight that secularism is always constituted between religious and secular parties.⁸⁹

Pillarisation as a term was coined in the postwar years, when pillarisation was believed to have deeply determined society. Lijphart's now classic study *The politics of accommodation* described pillarisation as a tool for the pillars' elites to run the country in spite of deep, mainly religious differences. He distinguishes between a Roman Catholic, orthodox Calvinist and socialist pillar. At many points in his analysis, Lijphart adds a fourth pillar, interchangeably identified as liberal or general pillar.⁹⁰ Each of these pillars pervaded the entire social spectrum, encompassing people of all classes. As such, each pillar had its own political party, unions, and broadcasting company. At a local level, conflict was pacified as people organized their sport and social organizations according to the pillars as well.⁹¹

Like the system that he studies, Lijphart's research has a strong liberal bias. Quoting liberal philosophers, Lijphart constructs liberalism as a way for the pacification of otherwise warring religious factions.⁹² The solution for this problem is to be found in the liberal parliament, where the pillar's representatives suspend their own group interest in favor of a solution that is peaceful and benefits everyone. Lijphart makes the error of presenting liberalism itself as somehow neutral or generic in these respects.⁹³ This characterization lacks constructivism's insight that ideologies produce both the socio-political system and the economic and material aspects.⁹⁴ Siep Stuurman rightly notes in his dissertation on pillarisation how Lijphart fails to acknowledge the internal complexity of pillars, as he centers everything on their political representatives. As such, he dismisses the women and lower classes that were part of all the pillars. That being said, Lijphart's study is still the paradigmatic pillarisation study. Stuurman's critiques of Lijphart's work can serve as additions that include (among others) women, the working class and more complex religious perspectives.⁹⁵

After the Second World War, political negotiation and pacification continued, resulting in conservative politics that upheld the status quo. More notably, the pillar system served to exclude women and the working class from the world of politics. For other groups, like immigrant workers and homosexuals, 'pillar membership' and in extension political representation was even problematic as such.⁹⁶ The pillarization became formalized in parliament as well, with the founding of the Catholic People's Party (*KVP*, 1945), socialist Labor Party (*PvdA*, 1946) and the rightwing liberal party: People's party for Freedom and Democracy (*VVD*, 1948). These years are described as the heyday of pillarisation, with politicians running the country based on compromise and pragmatics rather than ideological opposition and political machinations.⁹⁷ Still, this organization disabled questioning of fixed values both in groups and between them. Relevantly, the hierarchical class and gender oppositions were the very requirements for the

⁸⁹ Casanova. 'Rethinking Secularization', 10.

⁹⁰ Lijphart. *accommodation*, 16-18, 23.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 68-69.

⁹² *Ibidem*, 3-5.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 66.

⁹⁴ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 40-45.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 14.

⁹⁶ Gloria Wekker. *Van Homo Nostalgie en betere Tijden. Multiculturaliteit en postkolonialiteit. George Mosse Lecture 2009*. (University of Utrecht, Utrecht 2009) 7-8.

⁹⁷ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 123-126.

conservation of the pillars.⁹⁸ Of course, this situation was not meant to last, as pressures in both of these areas were rising. As Lijphart admits in a revised edition of his book, by 1967 the politics of accommodation were breaking down.⁹⁹

For years, the leaders of the pillars had been relying on their pillars' support, as well as the negotiation with the elite of the other pillars. Lijphart explains that the pillars' elites were unprepared for the protests and demands from the 'radical left' (the counterculture movements), which they failed to pacify.¹⁰⁰ These generally young people had been dominated by the pillarisation system for years, and reclaimed the public sphere in outspoken ways. Workers, socialists and ethnic minorities were all petitioning for recognition from those in power.

Relevantly, feminists are arguably the paradigmatic organizers of this liberation while churches are its archetypical opponent. Today, leftist and rightist thinkers alike claim that the hard-fought emancipatory achievements of these centuries are a continuation of enlightenment ideals and as such need to be upheld.¹⁰¹ Strikingly these progressive developments have gone hand in hand with a decentering of Christianity in Dutch representative politics. For instance, 1980 saw the *ARP* and *KVP* united with the Christian Historical Union (*CHU*) in the Christian Democratic Appeal (*CDA*) which over the years has lost much of its explicit Christian identity. At the turn of the century socialists and liberals worked together to exclude the party of cabinets in order to further their progressive agenda. At the same time, Dutch religious groups focused inward, strengthening their communities even in the face of declining numbers.¹⁰² As such, religious groups replicated secularist logic, making religion something internal to their communities, to be kept outside of public life. The most recent national survey follows this trend, indicating that active Church membership remains a minority activity in the Netherlands, while smaller groups of people hold more orthodox beliefs.¹⁰³ All these developments made progressiveness and irreligion powerful symbols of the twentieth-century Netherlands, while pillarisation became a past proudly left behind. The Dutch differentiate between a divided religious past and a united progressive present.¹⁰⁴

Today, liberalism continues to be the basic frame for western democracies, be it implicit or explicit. Liberalism as it is given shape in many Western countries believes that all individuals should be presented with equal opportunities. It is the state's task to make sure that politics are executed in a correct and civil manner, but it cannot favor any group. Rather it should focus on the citizen and the way he or she interacts with the state. Indeed, it is by being a citizen that one becomes a true liberal individual, and without being enfranchised by the state, this is almost impossible.¹⁰⁵ To uphold this, liberals support an ethic of justice. Rawls has defined justice as fairness, meaning that society's rules and positions are created from an equal

⁹⁸ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 331-335.

⁹⁹ Lijphart. *accomodation*, 196.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 212-213.

¹⁰¹ Gijs van Oenen. *Nu even niet! : over de interpassieve samenleving* (Van Gennep, Amsterdam 2011), 69-72.

W.S.P. Fortuyn. *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur : Nederlandse identiteit als fundament* (Bruna, Utrecht 1997) 46-47.

¹⁰² Peter van Rooden. 'Oral history', 527.

¹⁰³ Hart. *Geloven binnen en buiten verband*, 9-13.

¹⁰⁴ Baukje Prins. 'The Nerve to Break Taboos: New Realism in the Dutch Discourse on Multiculturalism' in: *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 3 (2002) 363-379, quoted 373.

Duyvendak, Tonkens and Hurenkamp. 'Culturalization', 5.

Judith Butler. 'Sexual politics, torture and secular time' in: *The British Journal of Sociology* 59 (2008) 1-23, quoted 3.

¹⁰⁵ Prokhovnik. 'Public and private', 98.

Hannah Arendt. *The human condition*. (2nd edition, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1998 [1958]) 34-36.

Butler. *Opgefokte taal*, 177-180.

and neutral (that is, fair) position.¹⁰⁶ This system redistributes power and ascribes equal human rights to all. The liberal ideology of justice holds that every person should, as individuals, be attributed the same basic rights. Yet in practice particular groups of people are more privileged than others. The privileged and media will be more inclined to support the system that leads to stability, securing their position.¹⁰⁷ Liberalism is thus far from a neutral system for public debates, but prioritizes the voices of the privileged, today notably excluding feminists and believers.

The liberal solution for this problem is the idea of the veil of ignorance, prominent in the work of John Rawls. This idea holds that individuals should judge social or legal practices not from their own position, but outside of it. They should temporarily close their eyes to the historical precedents of societies, and thereby to oppression.¹⁰⁸ As a way to escape these loathed influences, liberals present a radical individualism. Every person should make judgments based purely on individual reason, effectively circumventing tradition and peer pressure.¹⁰⁹ The neutrality that Rawls chases cannot be found in reality, as he acknowledges, but liberalism comes closest to this ideal.¹¹⁰ Rawls' implication is that everyone considering it in this way would adopt the liberal ideology. But this is really no solution at all. By closing his eyes to issues of inequality, Rawls renders himself blind to social injustice.¹¹¹ By asking people to accept the veil of ignorance, they are actually asked to accept liberalism, basing the philosophy on self-referring evidence and clothing it with a false sense of neutrality. Liberalism thus fails to acknowledge historical and social injustices and inequalities, including gender arrangements.

Secularism

The position of people with doctrinal beliefs was an important issue for the first liberals and is still a matter of debate in the United States and to a lesser extent Western Europe. The influential liberal philosopher John Rawls initially distinguished between ideas of perfectionism (various religions and doctrines) and fair justice (liberalism). He maintains that differences between perfectionist groups are often irreconcilable. In general, group desires endanger the state as liberals would have it. Liberals believe that supporting one group always implies disadvantaging another, creating an unfair influence and limiting individual freedom. It is therefore reasonable to support justice instead.¹¹² This is sometimes described as the liberal paradox: even though liberalism supports the freedom of conscience of each individual, it still needs to limit acts that hurt this basic freedom.¹¹³ Here the state is supposed to intervene against groups to secure the freedom of its individual members.¹¹⁴ Of course, liberals believe in the freedom of individual conscience and speech, so they choose another route to fight this problem. The separation between the public and private limits the possibility of all religious and certain political expressions in the public sphere. In general, secular viewpoints invite such dichotomous thinking. By declaring some expressions as inappropriate, they are subordinated to other expressions that are presented as more rational or fit for public life.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁶ Rawls. *A theory of justice*, 11-13.

¹⁰⁷ Lijphart. *accommodation*, 133-137.

¹⁰⁸ Rawls. *A theory of justice*, 200.

¹⁰⁹ Zillah R. Eisenstein. *The radical future of liberal feminism* (Longman, New York 1981) 119.

¹¹⁰ Rawls. *A theory of justice*, 136-138.

¹¹¹ Prokhovnik. *Rational woman*, 1-6.

¹¹² Rawls. *A theory of justice*, 330-332.

¹¹³ Monica Mookherjee. *Women's rights*, 2.

¹¹⁴ Lisa H. Schwartzman. *Challenging liberalism : feminism as political critique* (Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park 2006) 6-8, 16-18.

¹¹⁵ Erin K. Wilson. *After Secularism. Rethinking Religion in Global Politics.* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstroke UK 2012). 11-15.

As such, secularism as it is often implemented in liberal states (including the Netherlands) refers to the belief that religion's relevance for public life is limited. As such, religion is hardly taken into account in policy making. Scholars have debated the meaning of secularization. As a result, it is now common to distinguish between interconnected processes of transformation of religious beliefs, activities and institutions.¹¹⁶ Under the pressure of changing insights and individualism, religion can do nothing but recede to a more modest role. The Netherlands is widely seen as a deeply secular country. Though the country was once deeply denominationally divided, the breaking away of these confessional traditions is often remembered as permeating the entire society. Of course, people could and did still hold religious or traditional beliefs, but for rational public discourse these are irrelevant. To make sure that religion could not keep its grip on individual decision-making, liberal thinkers proposed that the world would be radically split in two spheres: a private and a public one.¹¹⁷ This dichotomous thinking soon influenced other spheres as well, fundamentally shaping the way in which society was understood. Of course, public debates are also influenced by these dichotomies, excluding some perspectives. Ultimately, this ideal of separation would influence society as a whole, secularizing society.

For such a world-changing event, strikingly few systematic and critical studies on the process of Dutch secularization have been undertaken.¹¹⁸ Peter van Rooden is a notable exception, as the historian elaborately investigates it as part of his Dutch church history, while offering a unique and critical perspective on the secularization thesis. Van Rooden distinguishes between personal, social and theological secularization (the last one referring to a liberalization of theology). In the Netherlands, only the first has been recognized, while the second has been deeply understudied and the third one simply assumed. This replicates the liberal bias: religion is recognized as individual activity only and is believed to decline as history progresses.¹¹⁹ Van Rooden is also critical of secularization as a gradual process of modernization. For the Netherlands, secularization has often popularly been described as a sudden break with the religious past, dividing religious and secular people.¹²⁰ Finally, van Rooden also calls attention to the secularist bias in the attitude surveys that are often used to describe religion today. By locating religion in attitude, aspects of emotion and community are diminished while individual intellectual belief takes center stage. At the same time, such preferences have historically failed to recognize more feminine styles of belief while celebrating masculine ones.¹²¹ The empowering and emancipating influences of religion have also been understudied. Often, religious sources for feminism are not taken seriously, as what constitutes 'true' feminism is judged by secular standards. By pitting religion and female emancipation against each other instead of seeing their fruitful cooperation, secularist politics do not have to take either one seriously.¹²² Secularism, like liberalism, is thus far from a neutral accommodating system but effects the lives and thoughts of citizens under its wing by delegitimizing certain public expressions.

Van Rooden notes that the creation of the Dutch liberal constitution is connected, as it is in other countries, to a process of pacifying religion. Before the Dutch kingdom was united under a liberal constitution and government, it encompassed different religions that were sometimes in conflict. The Dutch reformed were

¹¹⁶ Casanova. 'Rethinking Secularization', 7.

¹¹⁷ Wendy Brown. 'Civilizational Delusions: Secularism, Tolerance, Equality' in: *Theory & Event* 15:2 (2012) quoted 2.

¹¹⁸ Rooden. 'Oral history', 524.

¹¹⁹ Rooden. *Religieuze regimes*, 18-19.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, 43-45.

¹²¹ Rooden. 'Oral history', 525-528.

¹²² Chandra Talpade Mohanty. 'Under western eyes. Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses' in: *Feminist review* 30 (1988) 61-88, quoted 71.

considered the state church, though in practice they were only privileged in limited ways.¹²³ Therefore, van Rooden argues that the Dutch separation of church and state relates more closely to the American than the French model of this separation. That is, the goal was to facilitate equal intercourse between religions, not to fight one powerful church in particular.¹²⁴ Members of every denomination, religious or irreligious, agreed with Thorbecke that the goal was to found a uniting moral basis for the state.¹²⁵ This quest for concordance deeply ingrained the liberal ideology into Dutch culture. Still, the country was popularly seen as a Protestant nation, although Catholics and other minorities undertook steps in their own communities to challenge this notion. This resulted in pillarised society, which operated within a liberal patriarchal framework.¹²⁶ Even the challenging of the religious pillars and their patriarchy in the 1960s remained a secularist enterprise, as being religious became constructed as consumption or at least a matter of choice.¹²⁷ This shows that secularism and liberalism have cooperated for many years. Far from a neutral and natural process, secularization was influenced by several social forces, liberalism chief among them.

More popular conceptions of secularization are created by the autobiographical literature of that era, that describe a radical and heroic break with the beliefs of their mothers and fathers. Indeed, one of the gains of this break was the right to speak and even provoke freely and bluntly.¹²⁸ The sexual revolution and feminist emancipation are both seen as achievements made possible by Dutch secularization, even though their actual relationship is more problematic.¹²⁹ For instance, the sexual revolution normalized almost any form of sexual behavior and made it immune for societal critiques. As a result, feminists found that condemning sexual abuse or misconduct was also made problematic.¹³⁰ Viewpoints of conservative Christians are explained by a secularist model as well, as they rejected the progress that secularization offers. Oskar Verkaaik is an anthropologist specialized in Pakistan, and starts his study into Dutch naturalization ceremonies by provocatively stating that the countries are very similar. Verkaaik argues that both countries' nationalist self-perceptions are deeply determined by the way in which these perceptions relate to religion, outsiders and gender.¹³¹ He shows that even the project of secularization itself is popularly described in very masculinistic terms. Like van Rooden, these descriptions imagine secularization as an abrupt, dramatic and violent break with existing religion.¹³² Rather, the 1950s and 1960s saw Dutch believers and churches carefully and gradually renegotiating the terms of faith in various ways.¹³³

For the Dutch, secularization refers primarily to the societal position that is believed to be appropriate for religion. The process of decline in religious convictions and activities is often referred to as 'ontkerkelijking' (de-churching).¹³⁴ As such, these understandings of secularism are related, but believed to support the process that transforms society into the secular ideal, where religion's role is trivialized and replaced by the secular state. In the secularist view, secularism is thus the opposite and superior antidote to religion. This

¹²³ Rooden. *Religieuze regimes*, 32.

¹²⁴ Kuru. *Secularism and State Policies*, 6-10.

¹²⁵ Rooden. *Religieuze regimes*, 28-30.

Thorbecke. *liberalisme volgens*, 94.

¹²⁶ Lijphart. *accomodation*, 123-124.

Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 190.

¹²⁷ Rooden. *Religieuze regimes*, 545-549.

¹²⁸ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 116-124.

¹²⁹ Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 147.

¹³⁰ Meijer, *persoonlijke wordt politiek*, 80-82.

¹³¹ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 7.

¹³² Ibidem, 134.

¹³³ Stuurman. *Verzuiling*, 61.

Rooden. 'Oral history', 526.

¹³⁴ Rooden. *Religieuze regimes*, 17-18.

view quickly became widespread. Secularization implied the decline of religious frames for understanding in many areas, including public education and politics. Religion is increasingly seen as an inappropriate influence in public debates. This does not mean that it is not okay to be religious, but rather that discussing religion is not fruitful but can polarize different groups. The presence of Muslims in the Netherlands has problematized this popular image of secularism further, making religion an area of contestation once more. The topic is so controversial that even elaborately studied positive assessments religion are excluded, so that valuable contributions of theologians and scholars of religion are often excluded. As a relevant example, *Trouw* used to ask theologians to interpret news events, but has abated the practice after criticism from its readers and editors.¹³⁵

Muslims in the Netherlands are expected to reproduce the Dutch secularization process, refocusing their community loyalty to the state and privatizing their religion. As long as Muslims do not do this, they represent an intimidating vision of the Netherlands' conservative religious past.¹³⁶ Muslim immigrants are framed as challenging the Dutch secular state. Islam is constructed as a traditional religion, not unlike the one left behind by the Dutch during the last century. The solution proposed by secular society is therefore obvious: Muslims should replicate the process of the Dutch before participation in Dutch public life is a possibility. This results in an uncomfortable situation where Muslims are frequently a topic for public debate, but seldom actors in it.¹³⁷ The concerns for Muslims' religious and ideological beliefs are even stronger when the topic concerns Muslim women. Indeed, the gender roles of Muslims are often constructed as the most important issue separating them from Dutch secular society. Here feminism is once more foregrounded as key actor in the desired integration of Muslim immigrants.¹³⁸ Considering the modest role prescribed feminism in other areas of political life, religion is often presented as feminists' most relevant topic. Often, it seems like pursuing feminist goals is thus only honorable when it serves to secularize the recipients.¹³⁹ I submit that it should instead be pursued for the women involved rather than for any religious or secular agenda.

But as we have seen, the liberal state does not condemn sexism in its own country as readily as its opinions about sexism abroad would have us believe. The unwillingness of liberal thinkers to make the state act against sexism contrasts sharply with their readiness to condemn the presence of religious and political groups. One would expect a system that values neutrality so highly to either enfranchise or disenfranchise these groups equally. By choosing to act only on certain suppressive ideologies and practices, liberalism is informed by its own biases. In this worldview, sexism is seen as personal and cannot be fought at an institutional level. Religious activities, on the other hand, are condemned as a group, because individual religious conscience is perceived as untouchable. Secularism, created to pacify the powers of churches, has developed itself to an excluding factor in the Netherlands.

Tolerance

Historically, the Dutch have praised themselves for their tolerance. Amsterdam was seen as a cosmopolitan city hosting religious refugees from Jews to Huguenots. In recent years though, the attribute has come under increasing scrutiny as tension around Islam has made people question how tolerant we really are.¹⁴⁰ A

¹³⁵ Ybema. *koers van de krant*, 7-9.

¹³⁶ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 92.

¹³⁷ Wal. *publieke discussie* 14.

¹³⁸ Mohanty, 'Under western eyes', 79.

¹³⁹ Wendy Brown, 'Civilizational delusions', 6.

¹⁴⁰ Duyvendak, Tonkens and Hurenkamp. 'Culturalization', 15.

survey of the civic organization Visie21 revealed that 53% of the interviewees were ashamed of the lack of tolerance in their country, while 'Dutch bluntness was only problematic for 8%'. The organization claims that in spite of political pessimism and social division, its goal is to unite the Netherlands once again under one vision.¹⁴¹ While they make many claims to recognizing cultural diversity, their ultimate goal is unification of this diversity. This indicates that tolerance has become associated with processes of homogenization and unification.

Though associated with human rights, tolerance is not equally applied to all people. For members of privileged groups, tolerance was taken for granted while the rest received special treatment, underlining their outsider status. Liberals and other skeptics have seized upon this interpretation of multiculturalism, repeating their criticism of the care ethic. Tolerance thus needlessly victimizes those receiving the care. Indeed, their identity is often defined by the problem they pose to the liberal democratic state. This identity is also given shape along gendered lines.¹⁴² For instance, Muslim men are seen as acting against Dutch gender arrangements and threatening them. Muslim women need to be saved from Muslim men by the secular liberal gender insights.¹⁴³ A liberal equal treatment grants them equal chances to be anything in potentiality. Yet what these critics fail to recognize in this minimal interpretation of multiculturalism is that intercultural dialogue should always be a part of it. For this reason, more nuanced versions of multiculturalism have been formulated by social scientists and philosophers. These revised versions reject essentialism, foregrounding a cross-cultural dialogical construction of meaning instead. As such, it moves beyond the dominating effects of multiculturalist sympathy and liberal tolerance.

In their book on homosexuality and Christianity in politics, Ann Pellegrini and Janet Jakobson severely criticize the idea of tolerance. They note how tolerance is always applied to people deviating from the norm, whose very presence is seen as a political event. For instance, even when gays in the United States and Muslims in the Netherlands have no political desire whatsoever, they are still politicized. Their presence is intimately connected to popular preconceptions about their lifestyle, beliefs and practices, and the general public is to submit their public opinion about this controversial issue.¹⁴⁴ To be sure, people perceived as members of this minority group are automatically classified as extremists on the controversial issue. Philosopher Gijs van Oenen similarly concluded that the twenty-first century Dutch still support the ideals previous generations fought for. At the same time though, they refuse to act on them. Rather, we see these ideals as something external to 'normal people', something idealists continue to strive for, and conservative people refuse to accept.¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, these popular political conceptions also pit religious and gender activist people against each other on the issue involving the other group.¹⁴⁶ While I think that the authors clearly reconstruct these excluding tendencies of public debate, their solution essentially remains liberal. The authors suggest that we conceptualize the state in a way that everyone is included in the general public, and no one remains a minority to be tolerated, effectively removing the issue.¹⁴⁷

Wal. *publieke discussie*, 55.

¹⁴¹ [ANP]. 'Nederlanders vooral trots op handelsgeest' published 26-4-2006:

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/820871/2006/04/26/Nederlanders-vooral-trots-op-handelsgeest.dhtml>.

¹⁴² Wendy Brown, 'Civilizational delusions', 4-5.

¹⁴³ Roggeband and Verloo. 'Dutch women', 272.

¹⁴⁴ Wendy Brown, 'Civilizational delusions', 3.

¹⁴⁵ Oenen. *Nu even niet!*, 23-24, 46-47, 86-87.

¹⁴⁶ Jakobsen and Pellegrini. *Love the sin*, 49-55.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 72.

Multiculturalism peaked in the 1990's as a result of civil rights activism (including feminism) of preceding decades. As the times changed again, the late twentieth century was troubled by the multiculturalism of different groups striving for recognition.¹⁴⁸ The presence of Muslims is seen as particularly troubling, and continues to frame the feminist debate until today. During these years, many groups demanded recognition from the broad cultural mainstream and made specific demands for culturally sensitive communication. In subcultures, people could be among their peers while still living in a liberal country. At the same time, these subcultures could also be grounds for more activist and militant activity.¹⁴⁹

The many groups vying for recognition of their viewpoints mainstreamed cultural relativism. It was widely understood that what is true for one person, might be false for the next. As such, problematizing social arrangements in the contemporary world is often seen as a selfish event, as others may not share your insight about society's misgivings.¹⁵⁰ Multiculturalist academics and activists tried to understand oppressed and minority groups, by showing and describing their culture and their internal variety. The intention to understand these people in their own terms was inherent in this project. The stakes were high, as these particular groups were striving towards political and personal recognition.¹⁵¹ When such efforts became popularized, the general public learned to tolerate others in general, not understand them. So instead of deepening understanding between groups, people learned and internalized a general principle of tolerance. As such, tolerance is far from the positive force it claims to be. Like the liberal philosophy that informs it, it is disinterested and replicates power relations in the way it selects who tolerates and who is the beneficiary. As such, it is another way in which positions in debates are appointed, with religion seldom being the one who tolerates but often tolerated.

Difference

Contemporary Dutch politics in general are very much concerned with multiculturalism. Indeed, fear of the "foreign other" informs the central political issues today.¹⁵² As a result, multiculturalism is connected with all other topics discussed in this chapter, and resisting multiculturalism has become an identity marker for being Dutch.¹⁵³ Drawing on Judith Butler's *Excitable speech*, Dutch philosopher Baukje Prins has coined the term 'new realism'. In this new genre of speech the speaker presents herself as the fair speaker of uncomfortable facts unwanted by the 'leftist elite'.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the speaker is presented as representative of the ordinary (that is, autochthonous) people and proves this by her outspoken bluntness. In this way, the speaker is in the process of constructing a group identity.¹⁵⁵ For the Dutch, outspokenness is seen as a right that was hard-fought by progressives and public figures of the 1960s.¹⁵⁶ While the speaker unites with the autochthonous population, she does so by distancing herself from the others.¹⁵⁷ I submit that 'new realism' has been even more successful than Prins could imagine. While it was not uncommon for the Dutch to describe themselves as blunt, phrases like "I'm just being frank" and "I'm just saying what

¹⁴⁸ Duyvendak, Engelen and de Haan. *bange Nederland*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Yael Tamir. 'Siding with the underdogs' in: Cohen et al. (eds.) *multiculturalism*, 47-52, quoted 50.

Cf. Susan Moller Okin, 'Is multiculturalism bad for women?' in: Cohen et al. (eds.) *multiculturalism*, 9-34, quoted 12-13.

¹⁵⁰ Jakobsen and Pellegrini. *Love the sin*, 55-58.

¹⁵¹ Mann. *Micro-politics* 157-159.

¹⁵² Duyvendak, Engelen and de Haan. *bange Nederland*, 7-9.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, 41.

¹⁵⁴ Prins. *nerve*, 368.

¹⁵⁵ Richardson. *Analysing newspapers*, 174.

¹⁵⁶ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 124.

¹⁵⁷ Prins. 'nerve', 375-376.

everyone thinks” have become common expressions. The belief that leftist politics and sciences distort uncomfortable truths is now also common.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the political pendulum has swung towards the right and popular conceptions of science focus on finding what is ‘natural or measurable’.¹⁵⁹ Such conceptions miss the point that different cultures have different standards for meaning and identity, many of them religious.

In the secularist view, people cannot be seen as full-fledged citizens as long as they keep their religion, which society no longer accommodates.¹⁶⁰ As such, the politician Pim Fortuyn famously described Islam as a new ‘pillar’, adding that he was not willing to return to the time of pillarisation.¹⁶¹ He sees emancipation and the rights that were earned by feminist and other activists during the 1960s as powerful, hard-fought cultural markers.¹⁶² Still, Fortuyn is extremely critical of feminists who take different viewpoints, notably those refusing to criticize gender arrangements among Muslims.¹⁶³ Indeed, Fortuyn repeatedly stated that he was unwilling to repeat gay and female emancipation. In this way, he sets up nostalgia for a simpler but non-existent time, when these values were uncontested and minorities did not suffer.¹⁶⁴ For Fortuyn, these values are the separation of church and state, the equality of sexes and sexual preferences and equality and negotiation within families. Interestingly, these same values are exactly the one that Muslim extremists (Fortuyn continually uses these terms as a pair) are supposed to lack. According to Fortuyn, the Dutch lack awareness of these values, making a stand against other cultures difficult.¹⁶⁵

Prins thinks Fortuyn is in fact a champion of the ‘new realism’ genre, popularizing the rhetoric with a broad audience.¹⁶⁶ Like him, these people are ‘normal, decent Dutch people’ that understand the good and bad of Dutch culture, and want to defend it from unwanted influences. Being straightforward about this is presented as truly Dutch.¹⁶⁷ Formerly a socialist sociologist and labor party member, Fortuyn contrasts the open and straightforward nature of the ‘normal Dutch’ with the political correctness of leftist politics, which he characterizes as the ‘leftist church’. He goes as far as to suggest that people who left behind a doctrinal religious background were drawn to the totalitarian tendencies of socialist politics and science.¹⁶⁸ Fortuyn thus repeatedly uses secularist language to argue for a political issue. This results in the paradox of Fortuyn arguing for the exclusion of certain perspectives with the argument that they dogmatically exclude some perspectives. The solution of this paradox lies with the fact that Fortuyn presented himself as the defender of the ‘true Dutch’ only, while arguing against multiculturalist and religious people. In any event, Fortuyn popularized the view that some religious people hold problematic views and that these views can only be part of public debate as a topic, not as contributions.

Pim Fortuyn was assassinated for these opinions on 6 May 2002. Even though the perpetrator was an environmentalist, many have seized this event to criticize Fortuyn’s most important opponents in general: Muslims and the ‘leftist church’. Furthermore, the Dutch have used gay rights as identity marker against

¹⁵⁸ Duyvendak, Engelen and de Haan. *bange Nederland*, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Hurd. *politics of secularism*, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 130.

¹⁶¹ Berg and Schinkel, ‘women from the catacombs’, 397.

¹⁶² Fortuyn. *tegen islamisering*, 67-69.

¹⁶³ Ibidem, 73.

¹⁶⁴ Wekker. *homo nostalgie*, 1-3.

Bracke. ‘saving women’, 245-246.

¹⁶⁵ Fortuyn, *tegen islamisering* 37-40

¹⁶⁶ Prins. ‘nerve’, 375-376.

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem, 369.

¹⁶⁸ W. S. P. Fortuyn. *De zestiger jaren: een wonderkind of een total loss?* (Boekwerk, Groningen 1988) 32.

believers, particularly Muslims.¹⁶⁹ For instance, an article by Duyvendak et al. shows how columnists for *Trouw* and the conservative weekly *Elsevier* in a few years' time completely reversed their opinion of gay men. In 1998 they were disgusted with gay pride celebrations in Amsterdam. Only three years later, they celebrated the Dutch tolerance of gays against Imam El-Moumni who sparked a controversy when he made provocative homophobic claims.¹⁷⁰ This shows that even though Dutch gay tolerance has not been institutionalized until recently, it is already being claimed as an identity marker separating the 'enlightened Dutch' from 'backward Muslims'. The Dutch immigration policies that focus on gay acceptance certainly add to the conflict that Muslims and gays are framed in. For instance, early twenty-first century naturalization ceremonies in the Netherlands include a video of two men kissing. The immigrant Dutchman or -woman is explicitly asked if the image is upsetting. Though this could be constructed as an educational video instructing viewers about varieties of sexuality, it might also serve as a way to keep the Netherlands 'progressive'. The discourse on Dutch progressiveness opinion today dictates that religion and LGBT people do not mix.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, the immigrants are the only ones asked this question, while the support of native Dutchwomen and -men is simply assumed.¹⁷² In this way, liberal discourse constructs a situation where two divergent groups can be tolerated by them, but not by each other and as such should be careful in expressing themselves publicly. The state designates itself as arbiter, limiting the freedom of expression of both groups in order to control them.¹⁷³

The similarity of the ways in which female and gay emancipation have been framed in the liberal secularist culture war is striking. Western feminism is useful for the saving of brown women from brown men¹⁷⁴, and gay rights activism has later similarly been incorporated in this frame.¹⁷⁵ Though feminism as a social movement has been around for a long time and has learned from its postcolonial critics, the gay emancipation movement is much younger and largely lacks compatible developments.¹⁷⁶ As such, LGBT people and gay men in particular have become symbols for Dutch tolerance. To be sure, the Netherlands were indeed the first country to legalize gay marriage.¹⁷⁷ Still, the country was equally challenged by widespread homophobia in a way not unlike other Western countries. So even though it is a powerful political frame, it is only loosely connected to reality, primarily serving a liberal secularist agenda.

Furthermore, this defense of the secular progressive state is very much aimed at one particular group: Muslim men. While imposed feminism is seen as a refuge for Muslim women, Muslim men are constructed as the main cause of homophobia and female oppression. Dutch gender politics are shaped accordingly, focusing on liberating Muslim women from their male family members.¹⁷⁸ Both characterizations are of course limited, as both genders, regardless of their nationality, should be held accountable for their part in these issues. To some extent, this serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy. As Muslims are told that gay men are what separates them from Western society, they might act against these men if society indeed rejects or fails to accommodate them.¹⁷⁹ Accommodating diversity in gender roles and religious identification should be an issue for society at large, not just the group that is designated as problematic.

¹⁶⁹ Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens. 'Sexual politics', 968.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem, 967.

¹⁷¹ Butler. 'Sexual politics', 5-6.

¹⁷² Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 66.

¹⁷³ Butler. *Opgefokte taal*. 9-11, 110.

¹⁷⁴ Mohanty. *Under western eyes*, 67.

¹⁷⁵ Bracke, 'saving women', 239.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, 247.

¹⁷⁷ Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens, 'Sexual politics', 965.

¹⁷⁸ Roggeband and Verloo. 'Dutch women', 282.

¹⁷⁹ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 144-147.

As of 2014, some of these criticisms have been taken on board. For instance, gender and religious discrimination are explicitly rejected. Immigrants are now presented a 'contract' that lists the Dutch values of freedom, equality, solidarity and participation. By signing the document, the immigrant indicates that she understands the values and dedicates herself to them. Rather than representing these values as duties alone, they are also presented as explicitly including rights that immigrants can appeal to. Still, the values are presented as cast in stone, and leave no room for alternative views, contradicting sharply with the prized freedom celebrated in the document. In addition, the values supplied by the government should be realized by immigrants themselves. Strikingly, the minister who created the document recognizes that it has no juridical power, but is a 'social contract', echoing the founding fathers of liberalism.¹⁸⁰

Carole Pateman's criticism of contract theorists keeps its meaning in this context. Though the signers of the contract are explicitly asked for their agreement, they still have no influence on its contents.¹⁸¹ According to Pateman, this arrangement is typical for the way in which social contracts operate. Those in power create the contract and never explicitly receive consent from the powerless that are included in and subordinated by the contract.¹⁸² Even though the contract has not included any sanctions until now, various suggestions have been made. Even now, rejection of the contract is not much of an option, as it is presented as a rejection of Dutch society as such. As long as the values in the contract are not negotiable, Dutch society cannot legitimately be described as multicultural, as the contract serves to homogenize the population ordered to sign it. As such, asking immigrants to sign it is an unfair and unreasonable request. Like the native Dutch, immigrants will actually have more nuanced and ambivalent attitudes towards the values described in the document.

All minorities and lowly esteemed groups are discriminated against in similar ways. Gays, women, immigrants and religious people alike are asked to shed their beliefs, lifestyle and practices, replacing them with liberal alternatives. All these groups are presented as falling within either side of a rigid dualism: men and women, straight and gay people, natives and immigrants and secular and religious people. For all these dualisms, one identity is described as the default option, while the alternative is an exception. People's aberrant identity is tolerable only as far as it sizes up to the dominant default option.¹⁸³ Being supported (like women) or rejected (like Muslims) by the state is a difference in nuance alone. In any event, your identity and social position are demarcated. The liberal states thus continue to focus primarily on homogenizing their population. Those who succeed are met by liberals with praise. Indeed, they can become normal consumers and citizens in a liberal society.¹⁸⁴ A stronger example of this is the politicization of people critiquing their perceived peer group by politicians and the media. This mechanism can be seen in the media attention given to women producing post- and antifeminist literature, as well as to 'ex-muslims' like Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Ehsan Jami.¹⁸⁵ Malou van Hintum and Marike Stellinga have become examples of women who reject the 'excesses' of feminism.¹⁸⁶ As such, tolerance is not only enabling, but also demarcates and limits acceptability within societies.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, the very presence of 'different'

¹⁸⁰ Lodewijk Asscher. 'Kamerbrief participatieverklaring' (Kamerstuk, 19 December 2013) 2.

¹⁸¹ Pateman. *The disorder of women*, 11-12.

¹⁸² Pateman. *The sexual contract*, 6-8.

¹⁸³ Wekker. *homo nostalgie*, 4.

¹⁸⁴ Bracke, *saving women* 244.

¹⁸⁵ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 139.

¹⁸⁶ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 195.

¹⁸⁷ Butler. *Opgefokte taal*, 201-206.

people within liberalism's universalism poses a challenge to it and offers a possibility for its adaptation.¹⁸⁸

Resisting liberalism

Believing that the liberal justice ethic failed to represent and care for their interest group, critics of liberalism conclude that it is impossible, at least for liberalism, to care for all groups in all societies. Multiculturalist activists and local dissenters alike argue that liberalism has been informed primarily by those in power in the West. As such, liberalism cannot serve their interests, but rather unites the globe under Western hegemony. Instead, multiculturalists suggest that groups should be understood and tolerated in their uniqueness. To be clear, they do not want to live their traditions in private, as liberals would prefer. Instead, these groups should be visible in society, helping people encounter, recognize and ultimately accept difference. For liberals, this is not even a goal. Rather, diversity is the problem liberals try to make manageable.

Against this background, dissenters both in the West and beyond have challenged the liberal ethic of justice, claiming it to be ill-informed and self-reinforcing. The most prominent alternative to the justice ethic has been found in several incarnations of multiculturalism. It is characterized by an ethic of care that has been formulated by various leftist activists, politicians and academics. Summarized, the care ethic holds that in order to help people, we need to be able to understand them first. This term was first developed by Carol Gilligan as a feminine alternative to the 'masculine justice ethic'.¹⁸⁹ Today it is a de-gendered term for describing more attentive politics.¹⁹⁰ In practice, this means that people receive state support on the basis of their predicament. This should not be taken to mean that for instance women or whites have certain inherent traits, but rather that society treats or has treated them in a particular way. Both the current status of groups and their historic oppression are taken into account for determining their support. Instead of giving the same support to anyone, it is determined how much help people should receive to get a fair chance in society.

As is clear, care ethics can support a system of affirmative action quite well. Still, this system has also been criticized. It has been argued that such an ethic can be oppressive as well. Scholars of historically oppressed groups have argued that when it is organized in this way, it is still outsiders who determine what the group needs. In addition, by keeping these persons victimized and recipients of state support, they are actually denied the possibility to become individuals, as they still depend on the state. We need to recognize that all people have the same human rights, but society does not allow all of these people to live these rights to the fullest at this moment. Affirmative action is still a possibility, and even without victimizing the recipients of it. At the same time, human equality is upheld by the universal human rights that apply equally to me and my privileged and underprivileged neighbors.¹⁹¹ Rights have been proven to be a powerful starting point, but come up short on supporting everyone. A new way of thinking about and accommodating difference is required.

The tolerance liberalism proposes is superficial in that it makes no effort to understand the other at all. By saying that whatever people do in private is tolerated, liberals effectively relieve themselves of the burden

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem, 122.

¹⁸⁹ Gilligan, Carol. *In a different voice : psychological theory and women's development* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge USA 1982) 73-74.

¹⁹⁰ Ruth Lister. *Citizenship : feminist perspectives* (2nd edition, New York University Press, New York 2003) 101-103.

¹⁹¹ Ibidem. 104-106.

of engaging with others. As recent feminist scholarship has shown, confining people's practices or beliefs to the private sphere indicates a failure to recognize them as full-fledged humans.¹⁹² Rather, these scholars propose that the two spheres are brought closer together. In this way, citizenship is no longer just public and our deepest beliefs are no longer just private. Instead, we reach a situation where the life narratives of others can help us to understand them.¹⁹³ In Ruth Lister's words we create a situation of intimate citizenship. Tolerating other people without listening to their stories is hollow tolerance. By making others' stories part of it, we charge the other, ourselves and therefore tolerance with meaning as well.¹⁹⁴ Of course, listening to the beliefs of the other may alienate us to the point that we can no longer relate to him or her, and then liberal tolerance is still an option. Though more demanding than tolerating minorities without knowing them, this is much closer to true tolerance than the liberal proposal.¹⁹⁵

At the end of their book, Pellegrini and Jakobsen offer another solution that is both more multiculturalist and more realistic. The authors show how what in the current situation is used in exclusionary ways (like sexism for women, heteronormativity for gays and secularism for religious people) can be modified. As such, new and creative gender identities or reconfigurations, relationships as well as public religious rituals and activities can help make a more welcoming place for both the minorities involved and our public culture at large.¹⁹⁶ Like Pellegrini and Jakobsen, I propose that this disinterested tolerance should be replaced by being interested in the other, and fair about the self.¹⁹⁷

In the Netherlands, secularist and liberal policies have attempted to make difference manageable by creating a system that aims for neutrality. Notably, the Dutch have known the system of pillarization, the split in public and private domains and the suggestion of tolerance. In operation, all of these have been shown to exclude disadvantaged groups, while enabling the privileged and sustaining the status quo. In these systems, religion in particular has suffered from the inherent criticism to it that these philosophies hold. Multiculturalist politics have attempted to show these tendencies and reconfigure the accommodation of difference. They have been struggling because liberalism and secularism present themselves as neutral systems that accommodate engaging in public debates. But liberal secularism decontests the topic to the point that discussing becomes an impossibility, and valuable additions by theologians, scholars of religion and religious leaders are excluded. I now turn to the place that has been given to feminism in these debates.

¹⁹² Brown. 'Man in the State', 18-20.

Pateman. *The disorder of women*, 45-48.

¹⁹³ Maria Pia Lara. *Moral textures : feminist narratives in the public sphere* (Polity Press, Cambridge UK 1998). *feminist narratives*, 109-110.

¹⁹⁴ Lister. *Citizenship*, 151-153.

¹⁹⁵ Lara. *Moral textures*, 118-119.

¹⁹⁶ Jakobsen and Pellegrini. *Love the sin*, 144-148.

Butler. 'Sexual politics', 21.

McRobbie. *aftermath of feminism*, 162-163.

¹⁹⁷ Jakobsen and Pellegrini. *Love the sin*, 149.

Chapter two: feminism in the public sphere

Feminism takes up a particular place in popular Dutch media discourse. Problematizing gender poses a challenge to one of the primary sources of society's identity, and Dutch society is no exception. I suggest the inimical relationship between feminists and believers is presented as a general truism, and is generally insufficiently contested. The discourses that separate them are informed by historical and social arrangements of gender, cultural difference and religion. Today, popular discourse on Dutch Islam focusses on gender issues, making it harder to revise these ideas.¹⁹⁸ Feminism in turn is understood as being legitimate only if feminist ideas serve to reject religious beliefs or gender arrangements. At the same time, there are plenty of examples of fruitful relationships between feminism and religion, both historical and contemporary. Sadly, these are underrepresented in historiography and the contemporary media. In my description of the historical and contemporary Netherlands, I will thus focus on the position of religion and gender in the country, and focus on the way they have been connected in discourse. This chapter will show the issues that informed Dutch popular discourse on feminism historically and today. In it, I will show that popular understandings of feminism are primarily informed by a limited understanding of the second wave only. As a result, feminism's contemporary efficacy is underestimated. I argue that religion, presented as feminism's natural opponent, is presented as the only thing that legitimizes contemporary feminism.

Feminism before the second wave

As for several other countries, a first wave of feminism can also be described in the Netherlands. Particularly upper-class women petitioned against abuse of women, notably prostitutes. Interestingly, its rise is among others connected to the Dutch nineteenth-century Christian revival known as '*the Réveil*'.¹⁹⁹ In this religious revival movement, Christianity became a source of inspiration for political and humanitarian activity, while simultaneously rekindling the faith of the *Réveil* members.²⁰⁰ In the pietistic *Réveil*, being a Christian meant doing well in the world.²⁰¹ This was certainly true for Elisabeth Groen van Prinsterer- van der Hoop, who with her husband Guillaume was one of the driving forces behind the movement. Together the couple founded a sanctuary for single women, prostitutes and widows, training them both as seamstresses and in the study of the Bible. These women were not esteemed highly by society, while study (of the Bible or otherwise) was very controversial for all women.²⁰² Furthermore the seamstress training offered these women a possibility for economic independence. For these kinds of asylums, it was believed that women visiting them were helped in both earthly and heavenly life. Elisabeth van der Hoop was also touched by the work of Elisabeth Fry in England, extending the work of the *Réveil* movement to women in prisons.²⁰³ After the couple Groen van Prinsterer passed away, the first Dutch political party, the Reformed ARP (Anti-Revolutionary Party) was founded on the basis of Guillaume's thought.

For the *Réveil* movement, caring for the soul was of paramount importance. Their actions were neither ideological proselytizing nor disinterested humanitarianism, but religious inspired caring for people. As such, they offered these women an alternative view on their gender, informed by their Protestant pietism rather than the dominant social norm. The activist *Réveil* women also broadened their conception of

¹⁹⁸ Jessika ter Wal. *publieke discussie*, 25.

¹⁹⁹ Duyvendak, Engelen and de Haan. *bange Nederland*, 77.

²⁰⁰ Annemieke van Drenth and Francisca de Haan. *The rise of caring power : Elizabeth Fry and Josephine Butler in Britain and the Netherlands* (Amsterdam Universit Press, Amsterdam 1999) 136.

²⁰¹ Ibidem, 138.

²⁰² Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 10.

²⁰³ Drenth and de Haan. '*caring power*', 122.

womanhood by taking on public responsibilities and entering the public sphere.²⁰⁴ The *Réveil* thus offered women on both sides of its humanitarian activities alternative views on their gender. For the purpose of this thesis, the case of the *Réveil* reveals that religion was at the cradle of one of the first feminist activities in the Netherlands.

Lowly esteemed women were also targeted in the first women's society of the Netherlands, *Arbeid Adelt* (Work Ennobles). This upper class organization wanted to help poor women make money from their handicraft.²⁰⁵ Still, their projects were less respectful of minority women. Conforming to that time's fashion, the first wave feminist *Arbeid Adelt* expositions were very much focused on the good life in the 'Dutch Indies'.²⁰⁶ At the same time, the socialist feminist Wilhelmina Drucker made more strong and explicit demands for equality. Finally, Aletta Jacobs is noted for being the first female graduate and 'opening up' the university for women, as the liberal minister Johan Rudolph Thorbecke saw no reason to go against her father's wishes.²⁰⁷ After graduating, Jacobs became a physician, and used this position to offer women contraception. This middle-class profession also enabled her to challenge women's absence from suffrage in the liberal state.²⁰⁸ To sum up, this shows that even in first wave feminism, different social classes and movements had feminist tendencies, albeit they gave it form in unique ways.²⁰⁹

Liberalism is certainly one inspiration for the women's movement and suffrage activists of first-wave feminism. Though at times misogynistic or reserved about women's issues, these liberals offered a precedent for equality that could be easily seized on by feminists.²¹⁰ Along with evangelic Christianity and presocialist Marxism, liberalism was in fact one of the influential roots of feminism.²¹¹ During the French revolution, liberalism first became a popular movement, promising liberty, equality and brotherhood to all. Liberals still see this event as a break with paternalistic influences.²¹² Indeed, the violence of this popular progressive movement dealt a heavy blow to the dual powers of church and royalty that dominated society before. Still, early liberals proved unable to deal with the paternalism of patriarchy.²¹³ The classical liberal promise of *brotherhood* indicates that these liberals actually envisaged a free and equal *manhood*. This required women to petition to have these promises extended to them.²¹⁴

One notable revolutionary in this respect is the French playwright and activist Olympe de Gouges who wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of Woman* during the French Revolution. Connecting with liberal discourse, she argued that women are born free and equal to men. Adopting liberal rights discourse, she contends that both genders naturally have the rights of liberty, property, security, and especially resistance to oppression. The only thing standing in the way of this natural state is male tyranny. Nature and reason

²⁰⁴ Ibidem, 142-146.

²⁰⁵ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 14.

²⁰⁶ Bracke. 'saving women', 241.

Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 19.

²⁰⁷ Thorbecke. *liberalisme volgens*, 107.

²⁰⁸ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 17-20.

²⁰⁹ Clara Meijers. 'Der vrouwen plaats' in: Posthumus-van der Goot and de Waal (eds.) *Van moeder op dochter*, 197-218, quoted 202.

²¹⁰ Kate Nash. *Universal difference*, 64.

²¹¹ Banks. *Faces of feminism* 4-5, 7-8.

²¹² Pateman. *The sexual contract*, 135.

²¹³ J. Brok-ten Broek. 'Voorspel' in: Posthumus-van der Goot and de Waal (eds.) *Van moeder op dochter*, 13-15, quoted 15.

Pateman. *The sexual contract*, 29-30.

²¹⁴ Pateman. *The disorder of women*, 36, 40-43.

should replace this injustice.²¹⁵ As women can be judged as men, they should also receive the same rights as men.²¹⁶ For Gouges, this did not mean recognizing women, but extending current rights to women, making them share in both the nation's work and its merits. Finally, Gouges submits that a constitution cannot effectively represent a country if it fails to include more than half of the population.²¹⁷ She thereby calls attention to the problematic nature of liberal contract theorists, that is, the lack of actual consent they receive for their 'social contracts'.²¹⁸ Gouges' solution remains a social contract, only between husband and wife, promising each other and their children an equal share of wealth. Still, Gouges' work is not lacking in revolutionary aspects. She recognizes and connects different kinds of social injustice by comparing the position of women and black slaves. She observes that their social predicaments are both informed by trivial aspects of their exterior appearance.²¹⁹ More liberal feminist writings are found in the work of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor. The influential liberal philosopher and his wife thought and wrote extensively about the position of women. Like Gouges, the couple was focused on granting rights to individuals.²²⁰ For liberals, granting people group rights is more problematic, as reasoning from groups is at odds with the equality and liberty for individuals they strive for. Groups by their nature are about being set apart and peer pressure is believed to infringe on the freedom of individuals. However, this liberal bias also often translates in a failure to acknowledge group discrimination.²²¹

While some first wave-feminists argued for the equality of men and women, others sought recognition of women's particular position and activities, focusing on their roles as housewives and mothers.²²² For this reason, researchers often distinguished these movements from feminism, designating them as maternalism instead.²²³ Contemporary feminist researchers try to avoid overemphasizing such differences, focusing instead on their common goals.²²⁴ To illustrate, both strands of thought united in perhaps the most prominent liberal first-wave feminist, Mary Wollstonecraft. Recent feminist scholarship has recognized the issue, designating it as Wollstonecraft's paradox.²²⁵ Today, the two strands of feminism are called equality and difference feminism respectively. One solution for the paradox has been found in the famous feminist slogan that 'the personal is political'.²²⁶ On the one hand this shows that women are not limited to just the private domain, and that the public domain is not the only one that holds political potential. Most current feminist positions therefore emphasize that although liberalism has historically relegated women and their issues to the private sphere in numerous ways, there is still a possibility to express an outcry against sexist society.²²⁷

²¹⁵ Gouges, Olympe de. *Verklaring van de rechten van de vrouw en burgeres* [translation from *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne, 1791*] (Kok Agora, Kampen 1989) 36.

²¹⁶ Ibidem, 38.

²¹⁷ Ibidem, 39-40.

²¹⁸ Pateman. *The disorder of women*, 83.

²¹⁹ Gouges. *rechten van de vrouw*, 42, 47-48.

²²⁰ Z. Eisenstein. *liberal feminism*, 114-118.

²²¹ Ibidem, 136-138, 191.

²²² Nash. *Universal difference*, 68-69.

²²³ Prokhovnik. 'Public and Private', 92-93.

²²⁴ Mann. *Micro-politics*, 15.

Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 126.

²²⁵ Carole Pateman, *The disorder of women*, 14.

Z. Eisenstein. *liberal feminism*, 90.

²²⁶ Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 87.

²²⁷ Mann. *Micro-politics*, 191-194.

Second-wave feminism

In descriptions of second-wave feminism, feminist movements are generally classified in three secular groups: liberal, socialist or radical. This secularity of Dutch second-wave feminism might be slightly overstated, as religious influences on the movement have been understudied and Christian feminists have often been ignored.²²⁸ The evangelical Christianity that had inspired feminist organizations during first-wave feminism never acquired such influence again. Other religious influences were similarly absent. Many churches had women's groups where women sought to adapt the emancipatory ideal to their situation.²²⁹ But due to the depillarization process, motivation for them was declining along with their social influence. Furthermore, feminists and other progressives perceived of churches as the ultimate challenge to their political agenda. Indeed, church dogma was seen as instrumental in perpetuating social arrangements (notably including gender) while secular alternatives promised change. Religion thus became an unwanted influence when gender was discussed. With society rapidly secularizing, secularist ideas became popular in every area. Most Dutchwomen and -men believe that religion and gender are intertwined in Islam, with headscarves providing a tangible and visible example. Orientalist beliefs about Islam assured that they could easily be fit into the existing frame of religious as sexist and conservative. The popular image continues to be determined by secular organizations like the liberal *MVM*, socialist *Dolle Mina* or radical women's living groups.

In feminist scholarship, feminisms classified as liberal are those that focus on the relationship between individual women and their rights. Generally, they think that the state is responsible for securing these rights. They petition equal rights for men and women. For some liberal feminists, equal legal rights are enough but most focus on the equal enforcement of these rights. In general, liberal feminists do not want to change the structure of the liberal state, but make sure that women are included. This focus on the state certainly helped *MVM* and liberal feminism at large to become an influential political interest group.²³⁰

Socialist feminists are more critical of the liberal state. Inspired by Marxism, they view the struggle of women as compatible to or part of the class struggle in the capitalist state.²³¹ *Dolle Mina* took on this idea, viewing feminist activism as part of a larger class struggle.²³² They indicate that the capitalist economic struggle relegates women to the private sphere while excluding their participation in the public one. They fight this by politicizing both the public and private domains and arguing for change.

Radical feminists are not critical of the political or economic system as such. Rather, their criticism goes beyond these systems to culture itself. Using patriarchy as a key term, they think that culture prioritizes men over women in manifold ways. As such, they do not join the state and society or try to change it. Rather, their solution is to try and escape this sexist culture by envisioning or practicing cultures that can escape this cultural sexism. The women-only living groups of the 1970s present an example. This is the reason that radical feminist is often perceived as an anti-male variant.²³³

²²⁸ Cf. Stuurman. *verzuiling*, 84.

²²⁹ E. A. Heringa-van Ruth, Willemien Hendrika Posthumus-van der Goot and Anna de Waal. 'De plaats welke de vrouwenbeweging beslaat' in: Posthumus-van der Goot and de Waal (eds.). *Van moeder op dochter*, 224-247, quoted 233-235.

²³⁰ Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 156.

²³¹ Pateman. *The sexual contract*, 133.

Oenen. *Nu even niet!*, 160-164.

²³² Meijer. *persoonlijke wordt politiek*, 143.

²³³ Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 43.

Still, these feminisms did not speak to the experiences of all women. Chandra Talpade Mohanty indicated that none of these three feminisms are able to adequately address the way in which women in poor parts of the world suffer.²³⁴ Gloria Wekker has called attention to the exclusion of gay immigrant women in Dutch feminist narratives.²³⁵ Of course, there are always endless varieties of positions, and twentieth-century feminist critics have exerted themselves to add more shades to the spectrum. During second-wave feminism, even more varieties of feminism rose to prominence, notably lesbian, womanist, standpoint and postcolonial feminisms. Today, feminisms are so varied that most feminists acknowledge that speaking of 'women' can imply many things for many different people.²³⁶ Many forms of feminism have emerged, but I agree with Imelda Whelehan that feminist identity politics unnecessarily break up the program and divert attention from its goals.²³⁷

Joke Smit is credited with starting the second wave of feminism in the Netherlands. Her now classic 1967 article *Het onbehagen bij de vrouw* (the discomfort of women) in the esteemed magazine *De Gids* provoked a wide societal discussion of women's rights. Smit claimed women were doubly determined by men. First they were determined by their marital status, and second by their husbands' jobs.²³⁸ Though Smit held that the twentieth-century Western world was the best place to be, she also called attention to the three basic demands of feminism, none of which had come close to being realized. In addition to suffrage, these three demands were allowing women to be free persons, allowing them to realize their potential and making them full members of society. She saw contraception and abortion as key elements in women's liberation.²³⁹ Smit founded the political interest group 'Man Woman Society' (*MVM*), which petitioned for more female recognition inside the political system, appealing primarily to women of the elite.²⁴⁰ This was a precarious exercise, as many progressives believed female emancipation to be completed while conservatives rejected it altogether.²⁴¹

A more activist group of young women also emerged in the public domain. Calling themselves '*Dolle Mina*'²⁴² in honor of Wilhelmina Drucker, these students organized protests and public manifestations, reclaiming that sphere for women.²⁴³ In the mainstream media, the playful activities of the young beautiful *Minas* received approval, even though the focus was more on them than the statements that their activities entailed.²⁴⁴ They distinguished themselves from an ill-defined radical feminism, which they described as anti-male, anti-power and anti-structure.²⁴⁵ In addition, *Dolle Mina* was to be about showing 'normal women', which was explained as excluding 'she-males and lesbians'.²⁴⁶ Note how both *MVM* and *Dolle*

²³⁴ Chandra Talpade Mohanty. 'Under western eyes revisited.' in: *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 28:2 (2002) 499-535, quoted 523.

²³⁵ Wekker. *Homo Nostalgie*, 5-8.

²³⁶ Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 207.

²³⁷ *Ibidem*, 196.

²³⁸ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 48.

Joke Smit. 'Het onbehagen bij de vrouw' in: *De Gids* 130 volume 9 (1967) 267-281, quoted 269.

²³⁹ Smit. 'onbehagen', 267

Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 50-51.

²⁴⁰ Meijer. *persoonlijke wordt politiek*, 77.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 66-70.

²⁴² Meaning *Mad Mina*, short for Wilhelmina.

²⁴³ Meijer. *persoonlijke wordt politiek*, 98-100.

²⁴⁴ Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 9-11.

²⁴⁵ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 85-91.

²⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 122.

Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 170.

Mina demarcate the group of women they try to emancipate along lines of gender and culture. Going beyond this was often controversial. For instance, a *Dolle Mina* poster against Islamic 'clitoral mutilation' was met with wide disdain as 'cultures should be respected'. For these reasons, lesbian, black and migrant feminisms often opted for organizations of their own.²⁴⁷

In spite of these demarcations, both organizations were confronted with the precarious exercise of women entering the world of politics.²⁴⁸ While the liberal *MVM* was a legitimate organization in the world of politics, the media presented it as serious and unattractive.²⁴⁹ *Dolle Mina* had a similar but opposite problem. Liberal journalist Emma Brunt described them as fun and passionate, but too shallow to make real political contributions.²⁵⁰ During the second wave, feminism was once again a diverse movement, with groups emancipating some women while excluding others. Furthermore, it became a public and controversial movement, one that many groups and individuals were opinionated about. Feminist scholarship and activism problematized the dichotomous relationship between the public and the private, with women restricted to the second. Feminists tore at the artificial barrier between the two.²⁵¹ The feminist slogan 'the personal is political' is testament to this project.

In the seventies, Anja Meulenbelt became the public figure most commonly associated with feminism. In 1976 she published the novel *De schaamte voorbij* (Shame is over), which the subtitle 'a political life story' and the main character, Anja, revealed to be deeply autobiographical. In the book, Anja describes her unsatisfactory and sometimes abusive relationships with men, as well as her involvement in the women's movement, and ultimately finding herself as a writer. Seeking identification with standpoint feminism, a feminism that rose to prominence in the early 1970s, many women recognized the experiences of sexism and quest for good relationships described by Meulenbelt.²⁵² For standpoint feminists, being among and understanding women became more important than political petitioning.²⁵³ As a politician for the Socialist Party (*SP*), Meulenbelt was active in politics. Still, she was also a feminist symbol of the personal made political, particularly in showing the dark side of the sexual revolution.²⁵⁴ In the seventies, the sexual revolution made sure that each individual should be able to gratify her or his sexual needs, regardless of relationships or social judgment.²⁵⁵ In practice, this liberalization of sexuality often legitimized male sexual misconduct.²⁵⁶

Though the 30th of March 1981 still saw women united in a nationwide female strike, the deeply personalized women's movement was also severely criticized by the media.²⁵⁷ Simultaneously, issues raised by feminists became part of the political establishment. That is, the government and the general public took up some of the issues, changing their mentality if not social structure.²⁵⁸ Prominent feminist groups

²⁴⁷ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 96-97.

Wekker. *Homo Nostalgie*, 7.

²⁴⁸ Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 281.

²⁴⁹ Ibidem, 156, 271-272.

²⁵⁰ Ibidem, 163-167.

²⁵¹ Lister. *Citizenship*, 126-128.

²⁵² Meijer. *persoonlijke wordt politiek*. 211-212.

²⁵³ Ibidem, 236.

²⁵⁴ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 128.

Meijer. *persoonlijke wordt politiek*, 223-225.

²⁵⁵ Meijer. *persoonlijke wordt politiek*, 80-82.

²⁵⁶ Whelehan, *Modern feminist thought*, 147-148.

²⁵⁷ Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 285-288.

²⁵⁸ Ibidem, 49.

like *MVM* and *Dolle Mina* were disbanded and feminism gradually lost the public prominence it had in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁵⁹ Indeed, many of the existing and emergent societal interest groups adapted feminism to their needs. Though this mainstreaming of feminism enabled success for some women's issues, public prominence and visibility of feminism and other progressive movements waned during the 1980s and 1990s. Radical feminists turned away from patriarchal society to found female-friendly communities. A relic of Dutch feminism is *Opzij* (Out of my way), the feminist opinion monthly, and its former editor-in-chief Cisca Dresselhuys, who continues to be a media personality today. Though founded as a radical newspaper of *MVM*, *Opzij* is now a more general feminist magazine.²⁶⁰ Like Dutch feminism, it took on a more modest role. For most people, real feminism happened in the 70s, making that the blueprint for all feminism and mourning its current absence.²⁶¹

Still, the Netherlands were not liberated from gender discrimination altogether. These issues are often believed to be examples of 'private' gender discrimination that cannot be effectively addressed by public policies. Even though women received equal rights, discrimination persists at a social level, limiting the choices women have and resulting in sexist behavior. Though legal history boasts plenty of examples of personal discrimination, persons are seldom convicted for discriminating against entire groups.²⁶² As such, liberalism's boasting of universality and neutrality contrast with practice, as women continue to be discriminated in various areas. Indeed, many of the debates between feminists and liberals deal with the extent to which the state should take responsibility for issues of sexism. Liberalism describes this as an interpersonal problem, often protecting sexism under the freedom of expression and opinion.²⁶³ At the same time, affirmative action is controversial as it privileges one group over another.

With sexism firmly in place and without affirmative action, women face an awkward dilemma. When they enter the workplace they encounter institutionalized sexism, albeit not at an official level. This makes the issue harder to address. At the same time, her private sphere is also regulated, as society still largely expects women to be homemakers and care for children.²⁶⁴ In effect, this often means that women have a double day: working at home and working a job. Of course, being a mother and housewife is always respected.²⁶⁵ But even here women can be judged for not developing themselves further.²⁶⁶ Women face the choice between two ideas about the female: woman as equal to or different from man respectively. The first renders women as 'special employees' while the second places them outside the public sphere, neither of which is desirable.²⁶⁷ While these forms of sexism persist, feminism is remembered as an historical movement only, preventing it from making meaningful contributions to contemporary debates.

In Western states, liberal feminism is the only variant that states usually support.²⁶⁸ Contemporary liberal feminists emphasize human individualism, and male-female equality. The state should safeguard equality and rights of people, disregarding their gender. In her critique of prominent second-wave liberal feminist Betty Friedan, Zillah R. Eisenstein notes that her feminism posed the least threat to the liberal state. But

²⁵⁹ Ibidem, 164-165.

²⁶⁰ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 71.

²⁶¹ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 10-14.

²⁶² Z. Eisenstein. *liberal feminism*, 191, 234.

²⁶³ Schwartzman. *Challenging liberalism*, 21.

²⁶⁴ Lister. *Citizenship*, 200.

²⁶⁵ Pateman. *The sexual contract*, 33-35.

²⁶⁶ E. A. Heringa-van Ruth, Willemien Hendrika Posthumus-van der Goot and Anna de Waal. 'Een nieuwe generatie groeit op' in: Posthumus-van der Goot and de Waal (eds.) *Van moeder op dochter*, 374-390, quoted 384-387.

²⁶⁷ Nash. *Universal difference*, 34.

²⁶⁸ Z. Eisenstein. *liberal feminism*, 222-226.

according to Eisenstein, civil rights and equality alone are not enough.²⁶⁹ Feminism is about understanding female predicaments and accepting choices women may make in life, even if these choices are informed by their cultural background. In contrast, Friedan is very critical of housewives, whose work she scorns as 'destruction of capital'. She honors free market liberalism and individualism, failing to see how gendered and cultured the world is. She simultaneously calls men a model for women and celebrates their superiority in household chores.²⁷⁰ In the Netherlands, the most recent emancipation plans from minister Jet Bussemaker similarly spearheaded the point that women should work more, reaching employment rates like men.²⁷¹ Though some liberal feminists take a more nuanced view of women executing traditional female tasks, few of them esteem it highly.

In history, it is not uncommon that women's rights activists meet a backlash or that their goals are believed to be largely achieved.²⁷² The form it takes today is still striking. Though feminism generally has plenty of numbers to back up its claims and focuses on very actual social situations, its close association with relativistic theories (like constructivism or narrativism) make it suspect. Opinion publicists blame feminists for problematizing 'undeniable properties' of sex. Strikingly, feminists are blamed for hurting men by not letting boys be boys. Widely seen as keepers of culture, women in education and churches are popularly blamed for feminizing these institutions and therefore men.²⁷³ Somehow, the activist, even religious, nature of feminism is supposed to make it incompatible with the liberal state. Feminists themselves also engage with the idea of feminism as a religion. In her history of feminism, Imelda Whelehan describes this as the 'confessionalism' of feminism. She continues to describe how this enables feminism to engage people with it, making them part of a larger whole.²⁷⁴ Similarly, Wendy Brown has called attention to perceived feminist identities, asking if they are in fact quasi-religious, doctrinaire, or moon-worshippers.²⁷⁵ I now turn to some consequences of these criticisms of feminism.

Postfeminism

Though feminist issues are raised again today, this is most often in isolation. In contrast, contemporary feminist scholars argue that society is still gendered in every way and space, and therefore feminism necessarily operates within a social context.²⁷⁶ Still, feminist arguments or gender criticisms are unusual frames for understanding events or debates. In a sense, this is nothing new. As feminist gender criticism cuts so close to the gendered fabric of society, feminists generally meet fervent resistance. Still, the shape this resistance takes in the twenty-first century is unique and will be described in depth below. In popular media, this retreat of feminist frames of understanding has been largely replaced by the phenomenon of postfeminism and contemporary articles on feminism generally use a postfeminist frame.²⁷⁷

First, the name 'post-feminism' may be something of a misnomer, as a critical exposition with feminist history and its achievements was always part of the movement. Still, the description is commonly used. In

²⁶⁹ Ibidem, 226-230.

²⁷⁰ Betty Friedan. *The feminine mystique* (Penguin, Harmondsworth 1965) 73-76, 210-211, 218-223.

²⁷¹ Jet Bussemaker. Hoofdlijnenbrief Emancipatiebeleid 2013-2016 (Kamerstuk, 10 Mei 2013) 8-9.

²⁷² Lenning et al. *Wel feministisch*, 16-17.

Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 217.

²⁷³ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 153.

²⁷⁴ Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 3.

²⁷⁵ Wendy Brown. 'The impossibility of women's studies' in: *Edgework. Critical essays on knowledge and politics* (Princeton University Press, Princeton 2005) 79-101, quoted 79.

²⁷⁶ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 170.

²⁷⁷ Ibidem, 133.

my description, I will mostly follow the description given by Angela McRobbie and her student Jonathan Dean. Both authors use popular organizations and publications as their starting point, but differ in their assessment of feminism's future. McRobbie is largely pessimistic about the loss of rigor in recent feminism,²⁷⁸ while Dean focuses on the way in which feminism changes today.²⁷⁹ According to the definition by McRobbie and Dean, postfeminism takes the belief that feminist goals have been largely achieved as its starting point.²⁸⁰ Postfeminism thus does not entail anti-feminism. Still, Jonathan Dean has said that describing feminism as redundant is still an evaluation.²⁸¹ Postfeminists believe that problems women are faced with should not be dealt with through petitioning.

All social interactions are to a certain extent politicized, as our beliefs about society delimit the time and place where persons can act, and which actions they can undertake.²⁸² Some postfeminists leave this legacy behind them, believing the struggle to be completed and feminist insights to be outdated. As a result, feminism has lost some of its power as a state critic. Instead, the hegemonic state is believed to be supportive of feminisms, making radical feminist initiatives within liberal democracies redundant.²⁸³ By depoliticizing feminism, it becomes acceptable to use it as a source for personal inspiration and empowerment. Some postfeminists hold that sexism has vanished altogether, others think persists as an interpersonal problem.²⁸⁴ Postfeminists of either conviction have argued that political feminism should be abolished, or at least abated. But by dealing with personal narratives only and keeping them relatively discreet, patriarchy as such is never questioned and thus perpetuated.²⁸⁵ Feminism becomes a lifestyle choice instead, especially in the guise of so-called girl power.²⁸⁶ Companies have noticed this and replaced feminist idealism with consumable ideas of female empowerment.²⁸⁷ Feminism is thus threatened with the perspective of becoming another commodity, approved to be consumed within the neoliberal state.²⁸⁸

That being said, postfeminists offer some challenging suggestions for feminist politics. They recognize that women often face sexist obstacles in both their public and private lives. Postfeminists reject traditional politics as appropriate routes for feminist activism. Patricia Mann takes issue with the victimization of women and demonization of men in feminism. Such narratives copy the patriarchal discourse in which powerful men dominate powerless women. Rather, they propose more modest feminist projects, centered on personal and interpersonal encounters in daily life. Though describing her project as 'micro-political' and postfeminist, she still recognizes a need for macro-political symbols, stories many women can relate to.²⁸⁹ By turning experiences with sexism into critical and personal narratives, they bring feminists' arguments to larger audiences.

²⁷⁸ McRobbie. *aftermath of feminism*, 28.

²⁷⁹ Dean, *contemporary feminist politics*, 10-14.

²⁸⁰ McRobbie. *aftermath of feminism*, 12.

²⁸¹ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 19-20.

²⁸² Prokhovnik. 'Public and Private', 90-95.

²⁸³ Dean, *contemporary feminist politics*, 55.

²⁸⁴ Mann. *Micro-politics* 1-2.

²⁸⁵ Roggeband, Conny. 'Schadelijke culturele praktijken. Een bruikbare categorie binnen Genderstudies?' in: *Tijdschrift voor genderstudies* 14:3 (2011) 32-39, quoted 34.

²⁸⁶ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 16.

²⁸⁷ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 136-139.

McRobbie. *aftermath of feminism*, 28.

²⁸⁸ Cindi Katz, 'Partners in crime? Neoliberalism and the production of new political subjectivities' in: Bondi, Liz and Nina Laurie (eds.) *Working the Spaces of Neoliberalism: Activism, Professionalisation and Incorporation* (Wiley-Blackwell, Hoboken, 2005) 229-223.

²⁸⁹ Mann, *Micro-politics* 25-27, 160-162, 193-196.

Ruth Lister's work critically connects to a long feminist tradition and celebrates the end of institutional sexism. Like Mann, she sees expanding upon accidental activism as the basis for feminist activism. Introducing intimate citizenship, she connects the public and private domains so that sexist issues can be addressed.²⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Lister's framework is still essentially liberal. For example, she is critical of the welfare state and calls to individual action as the ultimate solution.²⁹¹ Philosopher Maria Pia Lara shares a lot of Mann's issues. Reconfiguring Searle's theory about speech acts, Lara calls attention to the transformative powers of women's narratives. For instance, women vocalizing their questions about the patriarchal conception of citizenship inspired women in all sectors to take feminist actions against this.²⁹² So even though these feminist writers are different, their practical solutions are quite similar to the politicization of the private in second-wave feminism. Indeed, post-feminism and other varieties of 'new feminism' may be more feminist than has thus far been acknowledged.²⁹³

Mann submits that postfeminism is unique in that its audience is no longer constituted of feminists alone, but now applies to the agency of everyone.²⁹⁴ But feminists always criticized the patriarchal political powers of their time. In the Netherlands, feminists have reluctantly been enfranchised by the state. Still, this 'place at the table' does not mean they have to drop their critical approach, as Zillah Eisenstein submits.²⁹⁵ Rather, I think that feminist narratives as those proposed by Mann, Lister and Lara are already put in practice. Women with different backgrounds all enter the public sphere and tell their narratives, as the authors envisaged it. In this way, they can also inspire and empower each other.²⁹⁶ Dean's research in the United Kingdom shows that this is exactly what is happening. Even though feminism has become individualized, feminists find each other online and form critical, activist and supportive communities.²⁹⁷ He submits that political actions should not be understood in a limited sense. Rather, even the smallest actions can become political statements in potentiality.²⁹⁸

Postfeminist literature

As my discourse analysis in chapter four will show, feminism is still perceived as an exciting topic, provoking strong reactions. Debates often center on the current state of feminism and how it should be focused, if it should not be abandoned entirely. To illustrate this point, I will discuss five Dutch influential postfeminist works. I will now show that postfeminist critiques are not a recent invention either.

In second-wave Dutch feminism, the liberal journalist and critical feminist Emma Brunt was already a feared presence. Her collection of essays, subtitled *contemporary feminism*, aimed to indicate the common errors of feminists at the time. Strikingly, her criticism largely aligns with contemporary criticism. Like later critics of feminism, Brunt calls attention to female essentialism and the demonizing of males in feminist activism and scholarship, which she scorns as insufficiently factual.²⁹⁹ It is often suggested that feminism is not inherently flawed but just dated and made irrelevant today. Another postfeminist trope already present in Brunt's essays is the difference between realistic, viable emancipation and unattainable utopian

²⁹⁰ Lister. *Citizenship* 147,151, 199-202.

²⁹¹ Ibidem, 171, 194-199.

²⁹² Lara. *Moral textures*, 72.

²⁹³ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 95-96.

²⁹⁴ Mann. *Micro-politics* 118.

²⁹⁵ Z. Eisenstein. *liberal feminism*, 245-247.

²⁹⁶ Lara. *Moral textures*, 85.

²⁹⁷ Dean. *contemporary feminist politics*, 142-144.

²⁹⁸ Ibidem, 170-174.

²⁹⁹ Emma Brunt. *Je zal je zuster bedoelen. Eigentijds feminisme* (Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam 1979) 13-15,23.

feminism.³⁰⁰ As a liberal, Brunt is also critical of solidarity thinking in feminism, as it discourages women from striving for personal achievement. Furthermore, Brunt adds that these errors are also present in other emancipation movements, like Black Power movements in the United States.³⁰¹

Such postfeminist sentiments were not limited to rightwing liberal thinkers alone, however. A critical member of the 1970s left, writer Renate Rubinstein published a collection of essays on 'contemporary feminism' in the same year.³⁰² Both Rubinstein and Brunt were primarily reacting against the women's talking and living groups of the 1970s. Solidarity and sisterhood were exalted at the expense of men's presence in the groups.³⁰³ Not only were the authors critical of this radical project, they also doubted the efficacy of the women's movement of late, which had both been worn down and divided by a number of issues, notably that of pornography.³⁰⁴ Still, both Brunt and Rubinstein had and continued to be affiliated with the women's movement, albeit in a critical role.

This is also true of *De Volkskrant* columnist Malou van Hintum, who published *Macha! Macha!* subtitled *A liquidation of nagging-feminism* in 1995, when she was writing for *Opzij*. Van Hintum has since slightly distanced herself from the book, stating that "By now I have changed my opinion on some things, though it remains a well-written lampoon".³⁰⁵ Van Hintum's essay is indeed polemically written, as her introduction indicates. She rejects the supplying of references, says emancipation is going well and a third wave will not come as we do not need it.³⁰⁶ Agreeing with Rubinstein and Brunt, van Hintum suggests that feminists proclaiming feminine uniqueness hurt the feminist movement as well as their husbands or partners.³⁰⁷ Van Hintum takes issue with the so-called double day as well, as the amount of Dutch women working part-time is internationally enviable, and will be expanded to men as well.³⁰⁸ Society now supports men and women equally, and they should just negotiate the division of tasks more.³⁰⁹ Today is just a transition period, and men and women should face it, and negotiate the terms of their family and life together.³¹⁰

As noted above, van Hintum's book has been quite influential. For instance, nagging-feminism is still used when the speaker or writer wants to describe feminism that the user sees as redundant. Four eminent feminist academics, presenting themselves as the 'Hard core' of feminism took particular issue with the columnist's work. Reversing van Hintum's postfeminist logic, they titled their book *Feminist yes, emancipated no: feminism as new challenge*. Though the book has been judged as postfeminist itself,³¹¹ I argue that the book calls attention to the continuing relevance of feminist activism and scholarship. For instance, they provocatively open the book with claims of first- and second wave feminists proclaiming emancipation achieved. To this they add a quote from van Hintum proclaiming the same.³¹² Parodying van Hintum's nagging-feminism, they submit that there are no nagging feminists, only nagging issues. In

³⁰⁰ Ibidem, 69-75.

³⁰¹ Ibidem, 26-30.

³⁰² Renate Rubinstein. *Hedendaags feminisme* (Meulenhoff, Amsterdam 1979) 26-31.

³⁰³ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 110-114.

³⁰⁴ Ibidem, 187-188.

³⁰⁵ <http://www.malouvanhintum.nl/macha-macha>, observed 26-2-2014.

³⁰⁶ Malou van Hintum. *Macha! Macha! Een afrekening met het klaagfeminisme* (Nijgh & van Ditmar, Amsterdam 1995) 7-8.

³⁰⁷ Ibidem, 14-21.

³⁰⁸ Ibidem, 72-75.

³⁰⁹ Ibidem, 38-40

³¹⁰ Ibidem, 56-62.

³¹¹ Loo. *De vrouw beslist*, 195.

³¹² Alkeline van Lenning, Irene Meijer, Evelien Tonkens and Monique Volman (De harde kern). *Wel feministisch, niet geëmancipeerd. Feminisme als nieuwe uitdaging* (Contact, Amsterdam 1996) 4-6.

addition to these continuing problems, they playfully add the problem categories of bugs and bytes. 'Bug' problems emerge when feminists lift up one rock (that is, solve a problem), while 'byte' problems appear as a result of changing times, especially new technologies.³¹³ All these authors thus judge feminism as focusing too strongly on women as a group and changing society. They urge women to focus on improving their individual life within society as it exists instead. Two more recent books continue this trend.

In 2009, another postfeminist book was published and received a second printing within a month. The book was provocatively titled 'The myth of the glass ceiling' and was written by economist and liberal columnist Marike Stellinga. Whereas the previously discussed writers were or used to be connected to feminism in some way or at some point, Stellinga distances herself from the movement on the first page. Denying that she is a feminist, misogynist or activist, she refutes nine 'nonsensical beliefs' about women, each one popular in feminism.³¹⁴ Stellinga is especially critical of Dutch second-wave feminists, as they politicized their personal life. She adopts their logic, only to turn it on its head: she claims that feminist writers researching government's women's policy lack neutrality. Feminists overly praise women, while men are harshly criticized. As a result, feminists are sexist against both genders.³¹⁵ Stellinga holds that structural gender discrimination is an illusion. She counters belief in it with numbers and statistics, though she occasionally uses interviews. What remains of women's relative lack of success in the labor market is to be explained by their limited ambition and personal choice (that is, for the family).³¹⁶ The writer claims that the government has no business intervening in the labor market or childcare on women's behalf.³¹⁷ Her liberal position is once again underscored at the end of the book, where Stellinga provocatively submits that feminism, like religious influence, should be separated from the state. She decries feminism as ideology, and suggests to depoliticize the personal, replacing activism and emotion with reason and facts.³¹⁸ Stellinga thus connects with a common dichotomous conception of feminism that perceives of it as irrational and emotional, making it unfit for public debates. As a liberal, Stellinga mistakes the current status quo for a neutral and good situation. This means that she denies feminism and religion alike a role in the public domain, by describing them as subjective and irrational. Thereby Stellinga fails to acknowledge that the very idea of behavior appropriate to private and public domains is a result of thinking in a liberal, secularist framework. Her denial of alternative thinking is therefore only self-serving.

Finally, *Trouw* columnist Elma Drayer published a portrait of 'the Dutch woman' in 2010, entitled *Verwende prinsesjes* (Spoiled princesses) and taking issues with 'fairy tales' about them.³¹⁹ Elma Drayer is one of the most prominent columnists on the *Trouw* site, publishing columns every week. These columns often discuss feminism, at times coupled with religion. In her book, Drayer retains her columns' playfully polemic style. To illustrate, it is striking how Drayer describes herself in the introduction. Being a 'classical feminist', she does not believe in the superiority of women, and argues instead for the 'unpopular view' that women can learn a lot from 'masculine properties' like working hard, decisiveness and delighting in power and influence. Drayer also rejects 'victimhood'. Women living in patriarchal (sub)cultures (either in the Netherlands or abroad) have every reason to complain. We [that is, Dutch women] don't.³²⁰ Drayer is also disagreeing with Stellinga. In her view, she does not go far enough. While it is true that the government

³¹³ Ibidem, 11-12.

³¹⁴ Marike Stellinga. *De mythe van het glazen plafond* (Second edition; Balans, Amsterdam 2009) 197.

³¹⁵ Ibidem, 105-111.

³¹⁶ Ibidem, 132-138.

³¹⁷ Ibidem, 174-177.

³¹⁸ Ibidem, 220-222.

³¹⁹ Drayer, Elma. *Verwende prinsesjes: portret van de Nederlandse vrouw* (Bezige Bij, Amsterdam 2010) 5.

³²⁰ Ibidem, 10.

policy is allowing women to work and they largely fail to do so, Drayer does not want to accept this, as the liberal writer reluctantly does.³²¹ Rather, women should simply do an even share of the work lest Dutch sex segregation will reach the level of Islamic countries.³²²

If Stellinga exemplifies the dichotomous thinking in liberalism and secularism, Drayer exemplifies its disdain of Islam. Though Drayer offers a separate chapter on religion, it is important to note that Islam plays a role throughout the entire book.³²³ She submits that Islam is currently the biggest obstacle to equality of the sexes. Because Muhammad was both a religious and political leader, the religion secularized the slowest and kept its sexist customs in place.³²⁴ Drayer is critical of feminists that defend the headscarf, like Anja Meulenbelt and Karen Armstrong. She supports feminists that reject it in principle, like Cisca Dresselhuys and Ayaan Hirsi Ali.³²⁵ Drayer thinks all monotheists would prefer to keep women indoors, but even the *SGP* is not as bad as Islam.³²⁶ At the same time, she thinks neoconservatives are right about one thing. The feminization of society, driven by the feminist elite, has hurt men. According to Drayer, masculine behavior is seen as aberrant, while female behavior is presented as the healthy norm.³²⁷

To sum up, the Dutch postfeminist books cite common postfeminist tropes. Though Brunt and Rubinstein were active at the peak of second-wave feminism, their critique is often similar to later postfeminists. All these authors criticize feminism for being self-reinforcing, overly subjective and exclusive of men. While these critiques relate largely to the politicization of the personal in the 1970s, later works also take issue with more institutionalized forms of feminism, namely scholarship and policy. For popular appeal, these critiques still appeal to older postfeminist clichés. The authors use a secularist worldview that excludes women's personal experience from policy making, by denouncing it as irrational or irrelevant. These evaluations reinforce influential ideas about public and private, favoring neutralized political expressions over emotional and activist ones.³²⁸ Ironically, this again places women's issues firmly in the public domain.

Feminism and multiculturalism

Researchers concluded that Dutch feminist groups have had limited success on account of their lack of corporate structure, though the Dutch belief in achieved emancipation is also cited as influencing it. In addition, the new rightist liberal government announced it would stop all emancipation programs, excluding those focusing on ethnic minority women and girls.³²⁹ Feminism is thus increasingly seen as redundant, with religious women, particularly migrant women being a notable exception. In 2003 the Dutch minister responsible for emancipation, Aart Jan de Geus, even declared emancipation complete,³³⁰ though his budget was considerable.³³¹ Still, he added that he was talking about autochthonous women only. Indeed, popular Dutch gender emancipation discourse has been focused almost exclusively on migrant

³²¹ Ibidem, 66.

³²² Ibidem, 72.

³²³ Cf. Ibidem, 152.

³²⁴ Ibidem, 112.

³²⁵ Ibidem, 120-122.

³²⁶ Ibidem, 107-108.

³²⁷ Ibidem, 143-146.

³²⁸ Wilson. *After secularism*, 93-95.

³²⁹ Celis et al.. 'Institutionalizing Intersectionality', 141-143.

³³⁰ Sarah Bracke. '<Niet in onze naam!> Een hartenkreet tegen de inzet van het feminisme in de beschavingsoorlog' in *Ethiek & maatschappij 7* (2004) 113-128, quoted 117.

³³¹ Stellinga. *glazen plafond*, 197.

women, while autochthonous women and men in general are hardly considered.³³² This limited focus thus misses the point that women's issues are always also men's issues.³³³ Emancipation is thus seen as an issue for Muslim women only, whom state policy fails to address positively as a group. This is certainly not the first time feminism worked to assert Dutch 'superiority over foreign others'. Still, feminism has an even longer history of inclusiveness and state critique, and scholars urge feminists not to forget that.³³⁴ Even so, feminism should continually be careful to remain a critic rather than facilitator of social oppression.

The debates on immigrants and women have become intertwined. Indeed it seems impossible to talk about the topic of women's rights or immigration without the other topic explicitly or implicitly influencing it. A Muslim woman represents the archetypal unemancipated woman, while the emancipation of women (and homosexuals) is seen as the central issue dividing Muslim minorities and the rest of the Dutch populace.³³⁵ Pretty, young, well-educated women have become a symbol of progressive states.³³⁶ Angela McRobbie argues that these postfeminist women can become consumers and participants in liberal society on the condition that feminism, perceived as radical, fades away.³³⁷ As we have seen, the same is asked of Muslim women: they have to leave their 'radical' religion and embrace Western values by replicating their historical development. Still, they will not receive the state support the second-wave feminists received during the second half of the twentieth century. Feminists often align themselves with exactly these ideas. Cisca Dresselhuys for instance famously stated that she will not accept headscarves on the *Opzij* staff. She also supported the politician Pim Fortuyn in his struggle against Islam, submitting that absence of religion is a preliminary for emancipation.³³⁸ In this way, the prominent feminist Dresselhuys unites with a secular viewpoint that excludes religious women as inappropriate actors in the public domain. As such, she connects with an influential dichotomy that presents religions as the subordinate opponent of liberal states.

The secularity of liberal states was contrasted with societies described as unruly and religious. Strikingly, the liberal yardstick for judging societies is often the degree in which they regulated their passions, often personified in the societies' women. Put this way, the controlling of women came to be seen as a civilizing activity as such.³³⁹ Considering this, it is interesting that the liberal ideology has since radically changed the content, but not the subject of this prescription. Today, liberal societies continue to measure their degree of civilization by the liberation of women. Yet either approach misses the mark. Women's relative freedom is not to be supported for its civilizing influence and even less to be used as argument in culture or civilization wars. In recent years, liberal thinkers have often used women's position in exactly this way. For instance, the invasion of Iraq was in part legitimized by casting it as a civilizing mission to improve women's

³³² Berg and Schinkel. *Women from the catacombs*, 398.

Roggeband and Verloo. 'Dutch women', quoted 282.

³³³ Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 177-180.

³³⁴ Bracke. '<Niet in onze naam!>', 124.

Judith Butler. 'Sexual politics', 20-21.

³³⁵ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 129.

Roggeband and Verloo. 'Dutch women', 272.

³³⁶ Butler. 'Sexual politics', 17.

³³⁷ McRobbie. *aftermath of feminism*, 15.

³³⁸ Bracke, 'saving women', 238-239.

³³⁹ Joane Nagel. *Race, ethnicity, and sexuality : intimate intersections, forbidden frontiers* (Oxford University Press, New York 2003) 10.

Okin. 'multiculturalism', 16.

Pateman. *The sexual contract*, 11-16.

rights.³⁴⁰ Still, other writers have been critical of this. For instance, Wendy Brown has indicated that in enfranchising feminists or women, the state is also regulating them and makes them give up a part of their power.³⁴¹

Liberal feminists maintain that the liberal democratic state is the best vehicle for female emancipation. This results in adopting liberalism's exclusionary and demarcating ideas. An example can be found in The liberal feminist scholar Susan Moller Okin has explicated this in her provocative essay "Is multiculturalism bad for women?". Okin submits that the respect that multiculturalism gives to minority groups essentially serves to maintain the status quo of those in power. In this way, multiculturalist efforts to legitimize sexist practices of cultures or subcultures fail to protect the women in these groups.³⁴² While the way (polygamy and circumcision) in which these women suffer under traditional cultures is her first concern, she still looks at them from an outsider's perspective, and is rightly critiqued for this by scholars responding to the essay.³⁴³ Adapting to some of the criticism, Okin concludes that education should be key, offering orthodox religious people alternatives. Still she warns against indoctrination and says that this is the difference between the multicultural and feminist ideologies: the second will never lead to oppression. Though Okin constructs religion and its multiculturalist supporters as a suspect category for human freedom, she sees feminism as immune to such oppressive excesses.³⁴⁴ But normalizing and exclusionary tendency of feminism has been criticized by black and postcolonial feminists.³⁴⁵ By claiming to speak for women everywhere, but taking their own experiences as basis, these mostly privileged, heterosexual and white feminists silenced other women, appraising their own life as true female experience.³⁴⁶ Feminists since the second wave have both participated in and received the critique of multiculturalist movements.³⁴⁷ Multicultural critics have generally accepted this, though many remained wary of 'surrendering' to this mainstream.³⁴⁸ But the way in which Okin distances herself from religious women's choices comes close to repeating these mistakes.

Feminism rose to prominence during two feminist waves in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The feminists petitioned to change their situation in many ways and were quite successful. Still, its relevance was continually questioned by feminist and outsiders alike. The most recent variant of this is the postfeminist phenomenon that supports the feminist achievements but limits its role to interpersonal issues today. Though feminism has cooperated with religion both in the past and today, many people still align with the dichotomous thinking that sees them as similar but opposing ideologies. Like, religion, feminism is relegated to the private sphere and subordinated to the lower side in a limiting dualism. That is, women are subordinated to men like religion to secularism.³⁴⁹ Such arguments make it harder for feminist arguments to impact public debates as they once did. In the next two chapters, I turn to the position that is assigned to feminism in contemporary Dutch debates.

³⁴⁰ Nagel. *Race, ethnicity, and sexuality*, 255-256.

Judith Butler. 'Sexual politics', 14-17.

³⁴¹ Brown. 'Man in the State', 8-11.

³⁴² Susan Moller Okin. 'Reply' in: Cohen et al. (eds.) *multiculturalism*, 115-132, quoted 117-120.

³⁴³ Tamir. 'underdogs', 50.

³⁴⁴ Azizah Y. al-hibri. 'Is Western patriarchal feminism good for third world/minority women?' In: Cohen et al. (eds.) *multiculturalism*, 41-46, quoted 41-43.

Cf. Okin. 'Reply', 125-131.

³⁴⁵ Whelehan. *Modern feminist thought*, 119-122.

³⁴⁶ Mohanty. 'Under western eyes', 63-66.

³⁴⁷ Dean, *contemporary feminist politics*, 16-17.

³⁴⁸ Katz. 'Partners in crime?', 229-230.

³⁴⁹ Prokhovnik. 'Public and private', 86-87.

Chapter three: methodology and field of research

In this chapter, I will set out the course for my research. First, I will describe my methodology. By using critical discourse analysis, I want to map the popular Dutch discourses on feminism. In particular, I want to show how these discourses are interwoven with ideas about the Dutch and their 'others' and ideas about religion and politics. Second, I will describe the focus of my research; the websites of the *Volkskrant* and *Trouw* newspapers. On the one hand, these websites face typical internet concerns while on the other hand, they serve as extensions of the existing (paper) newspapers. As such, they also have a history and public image of their own. Though newspapers do not possess the power to produce realities, they have the power to influence it by offering or reproducing perceptions of the world.³⁵⁰ This chapter is instrumental to answering my research question. It offers both the methods for and a description of the field in which the analysis of popular contemporary feminist discourse will take place.

Critical discourse analysis

In the next chapter I will apply critical discourse analysis to both opinion articles and reactions to these articles on the websites of *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw*. Though connected to linguistic discourse analysis, it is different in that it does not take language for granted, but connects it to social practice.³⁵¹ Indeed, the method of critical discourse analysis is informed by social constructivism. This philosophy holds that by talking about society, ideas about that society are (re)produced, ultimately creating its social fabric and granting it legitimacy. Discourses are thus self-serving, created by society in order to create society. This means that certain ideas appear repeatedly and structure society in tangible ways. I have touched upon some relevant examples of such thoughts in previous chapters.

Critical discourse analysis aims to make visible such power relations underlying language, and offers the precedent for changing them.³⁵² Therefore, applying critical discourse analysis can show how discourses on feminism are informed by discourses on multiculturalism and secularism. The general public seems to be largely unaware of discourses, but some things are known. The perceived political identities of papers like *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* are examples of this, and will be discussed in more depth below.³⁵³ Discourse can deeply influence our consciousness and perception of the world. It can influence social practice by demarcating areas of activity, and by framing types of behavior as rational or irrational.³⁵⁴ Though this does not go as far as the 'false consciousness' of classical Marxism, it still is crucial in deciding who can be an acting subject, and who is excluded from this privilege.³⁵⁵

So rather than constructing discourse as an all-powerful regent, it should be taken as a continuous process of attributing meaning to cultural and social events and products.³⁵⁶ These discourses are necessarily multifocal and mean different things to different people since they are a construction rather than a

³⁵⁰ Zoonen. *'strijdende vrouwen'*, 19.

³⁵¹ Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer. 'Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory and methodology' in: Idem (eds.) *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Second edition; SAGE Thousand Oaks, 2009) 1-33, quoted 2.

³⁵² Ibidem, 6-9.

³⁵³ Siegfried Jäger and Florentine Maier. 'Theoretical and methodological aspects of Foucauldian critical discourse analysis and dispositive analysis' in: Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.) *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Second edition; Thousand Oaks, SAGE 2009)34-61, quoted 49.

Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 13-14.

³⁵⁴ Leeuwen. *Discourse and Practice*, 110-114.

³⁵⁵ Jäger and Maier, 'Foucauldian critical discourse analysis', 36-39.

³⁵⁶ Ibidem, 43.

representation of reality.³⁵⁷ This does not result in a postmodern relativism devoid of meaning, however. Rather, the analysis can focus on who benefits from the current discourse and how it can be connected to the societal order and hegemony.³⁵⁸ The analyst can explicate unrealized alternatives and explain what restricts their success.³⁵⁹ Discourses are not isolated either. Instead, they are often intimately connected to one another in a so-called discursive knot.³⁶⁰ The intimate connection between German discourses on sexism and immigration as researched by Jäger is a striking example.³⁶¹ Below, I will explore to what extent the same is true for the Netherlands.

For my discourse analysis, I will analyze in what way feminism and religion are described and used. If the phenomena are used together, I will discuss how they relate to one another. The ideologies introduced in chapter one will be used instrumentally here. Though seldom explicit, writers and responders often base their views on one or several of these thoughts. These popular discourses are informed by our society's dominant ideology. Indeed, liberalism and secularism can be said to inform contemporary Dutch policy and society. Most varieties of feminism are more problematic and, like multiculturalism, strongly criticized. As such, they continue to influence popular Dutch political discourse. My intention is to make the views in these discourses explicit again, investigate who is served by them and show in what sense they are problematic.

The field of research

Nine national newspapers are published in The Netherlands.³⁶² A crude characterization can be made as follows. The Financial Daily (*FD*) is a business newspaper. The General Daily (*AD*) and The Telegraph (*De Telegraaf*) are widely seen as more popular or sensationalist newspapers. The Reformed Daily (*RD*) and Dutch Daily (*Nederlands Dagblad*) represent orthodox Protestant newspapers. Finally, the NRC Business paper (*NRC Handelsblad*), its youth version *nrc.next*, *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* are regarded as so-called 'quality newspapers'. Indeed, these papers focus primarily on middle- to higher class readers, negotiating this goal with the goal to reach higher sale numbers. It is important to note that both *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* also have religious origins. *Trouw* started as a conservative Protestant newspaper, increasingly liberalizing its religious orientation over the years. Today it is still Protestant in name, but is in practice focused on all 'religious and philosophical worldview issues'. *De Volkskrant* started as a Catholic working class paper but dropped its confessional connection in the 1960s in favor of a more leftist activist orientation. Today it takes distance from this activism as well, and is marketed as a paper that is both entertaining and of good quality. Of course, the religious sources of these papers make them more likely to discuss religion compared to the liberal *NRC* papers. The fact that they are 'quality papers' makes them more likely to cater to the needs of higher classes,³⁶³ and often excludes lower classes altogether.³⁶⁴

For my discourse analysis, I have chosen to discuss articles on the sites of *Trouw* and *Volkskrant*. The first

³⁵⁷ Norman Fairclough. 'A dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis' in: Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.) *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (Second edition; SAGE, Thousand Oaks 2009) 163-164. Zoonen. *Strijdende vrouwen*, 19.

³⁵⁸ Fairclough. 'dialectical-relational approach', 167-168.

³⁵⁹ Ibidem. 180-182.

³⁶⁰ Margarete Jäger and Siegfried Jäger. 'Rechtsaußen in der <Mitte> : Rassismus in deutschen Diskursen' in *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 51:11 (2000) 608-616, quoted 610-611.

³⁶¹ Jäger and Maier, 'Foucauldian critical discourse analysis', 47-48.

³⁶² *HOI circulation figures 2013 Q3*.

³⁶³ Richardson. *Analysing newspapers*, 76-79.

³⁶⁴ Ibidem, 137.

reason for this is that they are regarded as quality newspapers. Though the sensationalist papers have larger readerships, they are taken less seriously, especially by academics.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, the quality papers supply more room for debate, making it easier to reconstruct it from there.³⁶⁶ Though the conservative Protestant newspapers deal more explicitly and often with religious issues, I want to show how these concerns are present even in *de Volkskrant* en *Trouw*. Secondly, both papers are trying to function both as sites and drivers for public debate.³⁶⁷ In the 1970s, it was argued that *de Volkskrant* should also have an educative and activist role.³⁶⁸ Finally, *de Volkskrant* en *Trouw* are published by the same media company and share most of their news agencies, yet target largely different audiences. Like it is for other researchers, this is an important reason for me to favor these papers.³⁶⁹ The websites are instrumental to this, both boasting an ‘Opinion’ next to the ‘News’ button. The websites also enable readers to post reactions to opinion pieces. In particular on *de Volkskrant* site, these opinion contributions are increasingly written by people outside of the editorial staff. Though the NRC papers also share a website, debate and opinion is way less prominent and vivid there. Thirdly, the NRC papers are widely taken to be relatively neutral papers, while *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw* are perceived as more leftist. A neutral paper is impossible, and feminist media scholar Van Zoonen has rightly called attention to the liberal bias of *NRC*.³⁷⁰ As I concern myself with liberal and secular thought in this thesis, I would like to show how it is a factor even for *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant*. As both papers ultimately try to make a profit, they cover alternative social movements only if their stories are expected to sell well.³⁷¹ For the most part however, they side with those with people with the highest news status (that is, power) and thereby favor and reproduce the dominant ideology.³⁷² Still, newspaper are neither simply extension of hegemonic ideas. Rather, newspaper journalism helps readers understand the world around them and attribute meaning to it. Relevantly, this function is not limited to news articles but is extended to opinion contributions as well. Indeed, in opinion contributions this function is more explicit due to the argumentative structure of the articles.³⁷³

Trouw

*Trouw*³⁷⁴ is a Dutch daily reaching 100344 readers.³⁷⁵ It was founded in 1943 as a resistance paper by a group of orthodox Protestants.³⁷⁶ Though other Christians and humanists joined the paper during the war years, it was claimed by Reformed Protestants after the war. In the pillarised society, *Trouw* was the paper for the Reformed pillar moving onward, actively supporting the *ARP*.³⁷⁷ Following the depillarisation, the Reformed faith both deepened its meaning and decreased in numbers of adherents.³⁷⁸ *Trouw*, which was intimately connected to the Reformed pillar, suffered as a result but chose to adopt a more liberal Christian image. Ultimately, they were forced to fuse with some small conservative Christian papers. This was hard,

³⁶⁵ Zoonen. *strijdende vrouwen*, 116.

³⁶⁶ Wal. *publieke discussie*, 1.

³⁶⁷ Wal. *publieke discussie*, 9.

³⁶⁸ Zoonen, *strijdende vrouwen*, 112-114.

³⁶⁹ Wal. *publieke discussie*, 1-2.

³⁷⁰ Zoonen, *strijdende vrouwen*, 104-106.

³⁷¹ Ybema. *koers van de krant*, 130.

Zoonen, *strijdende vrouwen*, 23-25, 30.

³⁷² Zoonen, *strijdende vrouwen*, 37-39.

³⁷³ Richardson. *Analysing newspapers*, 6-8.

³⁷⁴ The name means ‘Loyalty’, compare ‘true’.

³⁷⁵ *HOI circulation figures 2013 Q3*.

³⁷⁶ Ybema, *koers van de krant*, 50.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 47-50.

³⁷⁸ Zoonen, *strijdende vrouwen*, 100.

because the theological differences were vast.³⁷⁹ Ultimately, the staff of *Trouw* opted to embrace the image of a paper with a special concern for religious and philosophical worldviews in general. This meant that the conservative Christian identity was moved increasingly to the background. Still, the paper has never denied its Christian identity and continues to attract readers with different Christian backgrounds. Therefore, this remains an issue that faces the paper even today.

Ybema has researched identity discourses at the offices of both *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant*. Both papers face decreasing sales and different image problems. For *Trouw*, their image problem is intimately connected to their Christian identity. Described by the editor-in-chief as ‘the watershed’, the paper faces the choice between a more general journalistic line and their focus on worldviews.³⁸⁰ Many of their conservative Christian readers perceive the paper as too liberal and secular. At the same time, secular people that do not read *Trouw* often view the Christian identity of the paper with suspicion. Mostly, the paper’s Christian identity is viewed as dull.³⁸¹ At other times, the conceptions of the paper’s identity are even more negative. For instance, it has been viewed as a misogynist paper, even though the paper reports positively on feminist issues. At the same time, the paper is praised for its quality journalism by both its editors and readers.³⁸²

Ybema notes that the editors themselves have internalized these conceptions of their paper. The paper is characterized as the best paper that is not being read and complaints about the religious identity of the paper are commonplace. Indeed, the editors seem to be somewhat uneasy with the idea of writing for a conservative Christian audience.³⁸³ Great doctrines are distrusted by the current editors’ board. As such, secularism is even more suspect than Christianity and the paper continues its line focusing on worldviews.³⁸⁴

De Volkskrant

As indicated, *de Volkskrant* faces image challenges not unlike *Trouw*. Of course, the papers share a common Dutch history and meet similar challenges as a result. However, with its circulation figure of 250812, it is still the largest of the ‘quality papers’.³⁸⁵ Its primary competition is the third ‘quality paper’, NRC, which is targeting a similar readership and is published by a different company. With a name meaning ‘people’s paper’, *de Volkskrant* was founded in 1919 as a paper of the Catholic worker’s organization. During the Second World War, the paper was put under the supervision of the Dutch Nazi party (*NSB*) and was not published until the week after the Netherlands was liberated.³⁸⁶ During the time of pillarisation, it would go on to become the official paper for the Catholic pillar. As a result of pressures of modernization and depillarisation in 1965, *de Volkskrant* got rid of its Catholic identity.³⁸⁷ This was a tumultuous transformation for *de Volkskrant*, quite unlike the gradual transformation of *Trouw*.³⁸⁸ Indeed, the paper replaced its Catholic identity with a leftist social one and its moderate tone with an actively engaged one. In just a few years *de Volkskrant* transformed from the paper of the Catholic pillar to the paper of the political left. Even though the ideological reorientation of the paper was sudden, Catholicism was seen as an inspiration for

³⁷⁹ Ybema, *koers van de krant*, 51-53.

³⁸⁰ Ibidem, 41.

³⁸¹ Ibidem, 64.

³⁸² Ibidem, 69.

³⁸³ Ibidem, 73-75.

³⁸⁴ Ibidem, 44.

³⁸⁵ *HOI circulation figures 2013 Q3*.

³⁸⁶ Ybema, *koers van de krant*, 88.

³⁸⁷ Ibidem, 89.

³⁸⁸ Ibidem, 24.

social justice activism.³⁸⁹ Though at first skeptical of the women's movement,³⁹⁰ they ultimately embraced it as part of their larger anti-establishment program.³⁹¹

As the twentieth century progressed, *de Volkskrant* became (in)famous for their style of journalism. Editors remarked that for each news event, you could tell beforehand how *de Volkskrant* would report on it. At times, this made readers skeptical of the quality of the paper and the veracity of its reports. The critical and moralistic tone of the paper was perceived to be unnecessarily negative and dogmatically socialist. Like we saw with *Trouw*, the paper's editors have to mediate their ideological colors with their journalistic ambitions.³⁹² The critical legacy of the paper has come to be perceived as a burden. For instance, the paper's statutes still cited standing up for the vulnerable in society as a goal. This document has been critiqued by younger editors, but is ultimately maintained by the editor-in-chief. As a result of this undecidedness, the paper lacks a true ideological identity.³⁹³ Some people see a more rightist or liberal course as a solution, while others focus primarily on journalistic quality. Even others argue simply that the paper should be more fun, which strikingly is contrasted with the paper's leftist activist legacy. Whatever the editors perceive as the solution for the paper, few would argue that a more leftist direction has the future.³⁹⁴ Unlike *Trouw*, it seems that *de Volkskrant* has by now decided on a definitive course. Lately the paper has launched countless new sections that are more light in tone and topics.

For *de Volkskrant*, it is striking how strongly the developments among editors correlate with the societal developments described in the second chapter. Entering the twenty-first century, editors noticed how idealism started to become an inappropriate phenomenon in public debate.³⁹⁵ Ybema describes this tendency by stating that today it is politically correct to be against political correctness. Leftist politics are widely seen as polarizing public debate, and *de Volkskrant* was seen as the exponent of this. The previous editor-in-chief saw liberating the paper of 'ideology' as his personal mission. Today the editor-in-chief and many of the editors describe themselves as 'value-free' liberals. Though both neoliberal and third way liberals are found, liberalism and corporatism provides the baseline.³⁹⁶ Of course, this also translates to the content that is published on the site. Liberal and calculated perspectives are prioritized over religious and activist perspectives, both of which are seen as less rational and therefore illiberal.

Websites

Finally, the fact that these discussions are taking place online influences their content as well. The internet has a bad reputation when it comes to accommodating discussions among people. People on the internet are generally perceived as rude, and building relationships online is seen as difficult if not an impossibility. In her *(In)appropriate online behavior*, Jenny Arendholz notes that these perceptions are problematic.³⁹⁷ First, she shows how rudeness and politeness are very fuzzy concepts. Second, she offers counterexamples that indicate that internet fora offer their own rules for discussion. Still, Arendholz makes clear that these

³⁸⁹ Ibidem, 89-91.

³⁹⁰ Ibidem, 158.

Zoonen, *strijdende vrouwen*, 243-245.

³⁹¹ Ybema, *koers van de krant*, 96.

³⁹² Ibidem, 98.

³⁹³ Ibidem, 116.

³⁹⁴ Ibidem, 139.

³⁹⁵ Ibidem, 138.

³⁹⁶ Ibidem, 106-111, 166.

³⁹⁷ Jenny Arendholz. *(In)appropriate online behavior : a pragmatic analysis of message board relations* (Amsterdam, Benjamins 2013) 4.

rules can also be broken. A striking example of this is ‘flaming’: repeated postings of negative and sometimes abusive comments by several users.³⁹⁸ In the following chapter, I will cite some examples from online responders. In isolation, these comments and the positions taken by their posters can appear to be quite strong. As a result, the political issues addressed might appear as insoluble. Here, Arendholz’ reservations about and her analysis of internet rudeness are important to keep in mind.

For the *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* websites, the situation is as follows. Under the specific header of ‘opinion’, the websites publish articles that are intended to provoke readers to think and respond on the topic. *Trouw* publishes these pieces mostly in name of their own columnists. Occasionally, the paper publishes an article by an external writer. *De Volkskrant* does this more regularly and boast even more columnists, including some that write for the website alone. As a result, *de Volkskrant*’s website usually publishes several opinion pieces each day. Some topics provoke more reactions than others. These are popularly known as ‘clickbait’. That is, people are urged to click on the article’s links when they read the title. As we will see, two topics that bait clicks are feminism and religion. For both sites, the reactions are generally large in number and reject or accept the article in strong terms. There are also site users who read and post reactions every day. As a result, some of them know and in a few cases address each other.

The discourses that will be studied in the next chapter take place online, inviting people to offer their opinion within the rules of public debate. Both sites relate to papers with a Christian heritage. *Trouw* was a conservative Protestant paper and has become increasingly liberal. *De Volkskrant* on the other hand has lost its Catholic affiliation altogether and tries to steer a middle ground, providing a site for public debate. Using critical discourse analysis, it can be shown that articles on these site connect to powerful ideas about liberalism, feminism, postfeminism, secularism, multiculturalism. After introducing the texts, the next chapter will offer its analysis of these grand themes.

³⁹⁸ Ibidem, 100-102.

Chapter four: discourse analysis

This chapter will include my critical discourse analysis of five articles from *Trouw* and five from *de Volkskrant*. First, I will outline the criteria for selecting articles for analysis and the selection of ten that can be seen as exemplary publications and will be analyzed in more depth. Second, I will introduce these ten selected articles by describing their content and context. Third, I will discuss and describe the discourses that the articles relate to. In this chapter, I will draw on the historical and philosophical insights from chapters one and two and apply the method from chapter three to describe how religion is represented in popular contemporary feminist discourses on the sites of *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant*. My concern is to get an impression of the way in which religion and feminism are constructed in popular discourse. In the critical discourse analysis below, I will research how these are given shape in the websites' discourses. By researching religion and in practice, the way in which they are given shape today becomes visible. This chapter will thus show that religion often comes to the fore in unexpected ways during discussions of feminism. In these discourses, religion is understood in a limited sense. Sometimes religion is good, (that is, it plays a modest role in public life). More often, it is a threat to it. This threat can also be extended to include anyone or anything associated with religion. As such, it is often contrasted with something that is in fact appropriate in a secular liberal society. Finally, these negative associations with religion are so strong that religion is sometimes used as a metaphor. For instance, 'religion' is used to indicate closed-minded, obsessive thinking.

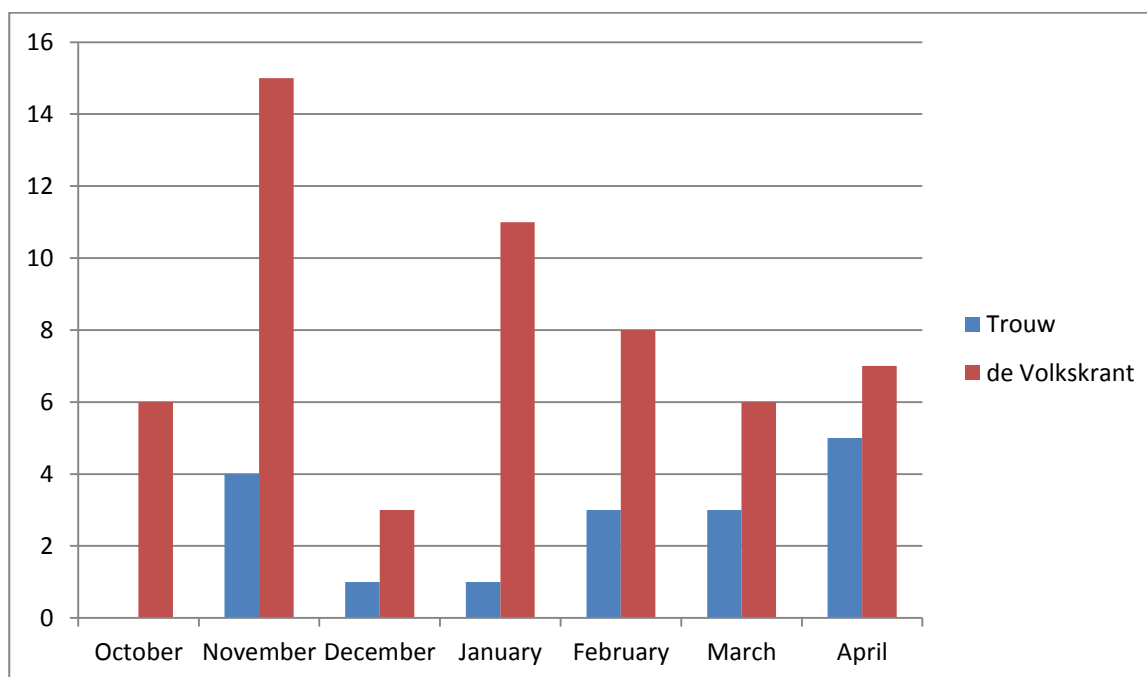
Criteria

The first criterion for the selection of articles was the discussion of topics and issues related to feminism and gender. For analytical purposes, I searched for feminism by adopting a very broad definition of articles with gender content. Though very few of these articles are explicitly feminist, many of them question current gender arrangements. For example, this also includes an article that critiques a perceived anti-male bias in divorce jurisprudence and an article against the Dutch view of prostitution. Neither of these articles are feminist in a classical sense, and yet both deal with gender issues. Still, website responders often bring up the issue of feminism themselves, at times coupled with religion. I considered only articles published on the *Trouw* and *de Volkskrant* sites from October 2013 until and including April 2014. This limitation made the research feasible while still spanning more than half a year of publications.

The table below shows the number of gender-related opinion pieces published in the seven months I did the research in. In total, *de Volkskrant* published 1207 opinion pieces in these months, while *Trouw* published 475 pieces. This means that the papers published 172.42 and 67.86 articles respectively in average per month. As the table below indicates, gender-related opinion pieces represent only a small amount of all opinion pieces published on both papers' websites. Comparing the averages from both the total number of opinion pieces published and the opinion pieces relating to gender, I calculate that 4,6 percent of *de Volkskrant's* opinion articles relate to gender, while finding 3,6 percent for *Trouw*.

Feminist topics are typical examples of 'clickbait'. Clearly, people feel quite strongly about gender issues. Even people that claim emancipation to be achieved, often express this opinion forcefully. As such, gender issues are always a good topic for debate but seldom make headlines. Still, there were some notable exceptions. First, in early October 2013, a chain of toy stores named *Bart Smit* was widely criticized for a commercial brochure many had experienced to be sexist. The brochure showed a little girl playing with a toy vacuum cleaner accompanied by the question 'You want to be as good as mommy?'. The debate that

followed eventually developed into a wider discussion of female and male stereotypes and the question if people should adapt to them or not. Second, in November of the same year the book and documentary *Sletvrees* (fear of sluts, in Dutch punning mysophobia) were released. *Sletvrees* investigated the double standard for judging female and male sexual behavior.³⁹⁹ The maker of *Sletvrees*, gender critic and documentary maker Sunny Bergman, actively promoted the film and book in the media prior to its release. *De Volkskrant* weekend magazine for instance issued a 'slut special'. Third, halfway through January 2014, two male philosophers of law declared feminism redundant in a *NRC* weekend special on feminism. For these media hypes, *de Volkskrant* site responded with a lot of writers taking sides while the *Trouw* site was affected in a more modest way. Rather, *Trouw* had its own hype in February following the UN International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, with three articles published on the subject, and one more on male circumcision the next month. The media hypes surrounding *Sletvrees* and the proclaimed completion of emancipation are reflected in the table below, while the toy brochure hype is less clearly represented. Still, five out of six gender-related opinion pieces published in *de Volkskrant* in October dealt with female/male gender patterns.



Though religion is sometimes mentioned in the articles I described above, it is discussed far less as such on the opinion website of *de Volkskrant*. In secular logic, discussing religious topics is unwanted since neither party will easily be convinced by the other. Thus, the site does not often consider religion. Of course, *Trouw* pays more attention to it, presenting both positive and negative critical discussions. Still, the discussion will show that religion often comes to the fore in unexpected ways when feminism and gender issues are discussed.

Of course, articles relating to the recent feminist media hypes are included, as they can be expected to reach larger amounts of readers. In the selection of additional articles for the analysis, I had several criteria. First, I wanted to select articles that were diverse. This meant that I wanted to select a large number of topics and writers. Both *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw* employ columnists that frequently write about gender issues, but selecting all their work would hurt the articles' diversity. That means that I included not just the work of columnists, but also sent-in pieces by scholars, representatives of interest groups and other

³⁹⁹ Sunny Bergman. *Sletvrees. Inzoomen op uiterlijk, seks en cultuur* (Nijgh en van Ditmar, Amsterdam 2013) 9.

writers. Also, I include both articles that engage explicitly with religion (again, most notably Islam) and those that do not. Second, I wanted to include the articles that engaged with public debate the most. This means that I preferred articles that responded to other articles on the papers' websites or other media; or that got responded to in the form of articles on the same website. In my description of the articles below, I will reconstruct the debate by identifying the articles that a selected article responds to. When the article received many responses by readers, this also made including it more likely. With these criteria in mind, I was able to select ten articles. They are summarized below, and untranslated versions are reproduced in the appendices of this thesis. Sometimes I support my analysis with comments from the articles' responders. The translations offered are my own, as will be the responsibility for any misrepresentations. In a few cases, I have added clarifications in brackets or footnotes.

Content and context

VK1 - Een beetje kerel kan het hebben: Ich bin ein Feminist - (A real man can handle it: Ich bin ein Feminist) - Willem Bosch – 995 words – 7th of October 2013⁴⁰⁰

Screenwriter Willem Bosch responds to an NRC article by Paulien Derwort. She argues that contemporary men have been hurt by emancipation and are less attractive. Derwort urges them to 'man up' and return to their primal instincts.⁴⁰¹ Bosch writes in the context of the media hype surrounding the *Bart Smit* toy store brochure. For instance, an actress that criticized *Bart Smit* on her Facebook page, received hateful comments on various websites.⁴⁰² Even though the brochure itself represents no conclusive proof of female discrimination, strong anti-feminist arguments published on the internet reveal the true problem. Bosch finds it ironic that fear for the sharia is often paired with calling feminists 'hysterical'. Bosch describes two popular anti-feminist statements: the first is the sentiment that feminists worry about the trivial alone. Rather, they should focus on real problems, like international conflict. As a result, the problem is not addressed at all. Second, he describes the tendency to turn to 'biological facts' or 'general truisms' as weapons against feminism. Distancing himself from Derwort's 'primal instincts', he asserts he is a man of the twenty-first century. He urges men to come out as feminists, rather than cling to an archaic construction of masculinity.

VK2 – In het moderne feminisme is een vrouw zichzelf als ze een mannencliché imiteert – (In modern feminism, a woman is herself when she imitates a masculine cliché) - Malou van Hintum – 500 words – 6th of November 2013⁴⁰³

Parting *de Volkskrant* columnist Malou van Hintum (her last column was published on the 16th of April, 2014)⁴⁰⁴, whose book once coined the term 'nagging-feminism', responds to the release of the *Sletvrees* documentary and book. The book takes issue with the gendered double standard for sexual behavior. *Sletvrees* wants to reclaim female sexuality for women, ridding terms like 'slut' of their hurtful power.⁴⁰⁵ Book promoters indicated that female sexuality is connected to issues of sin and purity, dividing women

⁴⁰⁰ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3522803/2013/10/07/Een-beetje-kerel-kan-het-hebben-Ich-bin-ein-Feminist.dhtml>

⁴⁰¹ <http://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2013/10/04/vrouwen-willen-echte-man-geen-knaap-met-v-hals/>

⁴⁰² <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3520853/2013/10/04/Bart-Smit-voelde-met-die-folder-de-mentaliteit-van-sommige-vrouwen-aan.dhtml>

⁴⁰³ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/6177/Malou-van-Hintum/article/detail/3540000/2013/11/06/In-het-moderne-feminisme-is-een-vrouw-zichzelf-als-ze-een-mannencliche-imiteert.dhtml>

⁴⁰⁴ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/6177/Malou-van-Hintum/article/detail/3636322/2014/04/16/Columnisten-kunnen-alleen-bestaan-bij-de-gratie-van-hun-lezers-dus-ik-dank-u.dhtml>

⁴⁰⁵ Bergman. *Sletvrees*, 373-374.

into 'bad girls' and 'good girls'.⁴⁰⁶ Van Hintum is surprised to learn that modern feminism entails that women should use their bodies to sell their books. Similarly, she finds it hard to believe that even degrading sexual activities are liberating as long as the woman enjoys it. Feminism should be careful not to become a hedonist movement. This seems hard to combine with judging males for keeping a double standard. Van Hintum sees the 'lust pill' for women as striking in this regard, as it shows that female sexual appetite and orgasm is apparently not at all equal to that of males. Slut activism promotes promiscuity and impulsivity, so people should fear sluts even more.

VK3 - Prostitutie te lang gezien als kroonjuweel van onze ruimdenkendheid – (Prostitution has been seen as pièce de résistance of our open-mindedness for too long) - Hala Naoum Néhmé, Eddy Terstall en Gert-Jan Segers – 810 words – 19th of November 2013⁴⁰⁷

This article has been written by three authors: two politicians (Néhmé, VVD member) (Segers, Christian Union member of the House of Representatives) and a politically engaged filmmaker (Terstall). They argue that prostitution is neither innocent nor progressive. Rather, the practice humiliates vulnerable women. The Netherlands have signed the UN declaration on women's rights, and uses the document to help women in Muslim countries. They should also investigate themselves in this way. Prostitutes suffer abuse and economic exploitation by pimps. Women's rights trump the freedom of pimps and customers in this situation. Copywriter Fabian Schurgers responded by describing the prostitutes' clients as generally vulnerable. They are ruled by their libido: a firestorm or tidal wave that should not be controlled.⁴⁰⁸ He argues instead for a surveillance and regulation of prostitution, preferably by the women themselves. Philosopher Jeroen Jonkhout responded by pointing out that Schurgers' argument victimizes men while legitimizing rape. Men should simply control themselves.⁴⁰⁹ Another columnist offered that even though Dutch prostitution employs both victims and prostitutes by choice, the first group is given priority by the media. He argues that it is better to target human traffickers than prostitutes themselves, who will be hurt by government intervention.⁴¹⁰

VK4 - Feministen van kleur willen gehoord worden; niet gered – (Feminists of color want to be heard; not to be saved) - Nadia Ezzeroili – 594 words – 25th of January 2014⁴¹¹

This article is responding to two earlier articles on *de Volkskrant* site. The first was by gender journalist Asha ten Broeke, who argued that different standards are kept for Islamic and other sexism.⁴¹² People seem to use feminism only for the purpose of bashing Islam. PhD researcher (Islam and women's rights) Machteld Zee responds by calling multiculturalism an excuse for misogyny.⁴¹³ Feminists like ten Broeke are focused on western everyday sexism, fearing that speaking out against Muslim misogyny will serve a

⁴⁰⁶ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3538164/2013/11/03/We-moeten-iets-doen-aan-het-woord-slet-Het-ontkrachten-Het-omarmen.dhtml>

⁴⁰⁷ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3546967/2013/11/19/Prostitutie-te-lang-gezien-als-kroonjuweel-van-onze-ruimdenkendheid.dhtml>

⁴⁰⁸ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3555085/2013/12/02/Criminaliseren-van-prostitutie-zal-tot-grote-problemen-leiden.dhtml>

⁴⁰⁹ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3555794/2013/12/03/De-man-blijkt-slachtoffer-van-mannelijk-libido-niet-de-prostituee.dhtml>

⁴¹⁰ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/14348/Bart-Smout/article/detail/3559683/2013/12/10/Moeten-we-alle-prostituees-afschilderen-als-lijdend-voorwerp.dhtml>

⁴¹¹ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3583282/2014/01/25/Feministen-van-kleur-willen-gehoord-worden---niet-gered.dhtml>

⁴¹² <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3579177/2014/01/17/Kaa-het-feminisme-niet-om-de-islam-te-kunnen-bashen.dhtml>

⁴¹³ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3581417/2014/01/22/Vrouwenhaat-moslims-valt-niet-goed-te-praten.dhtml>

rightwing agenda. The feminist goal is to work against its opposite: fundamentalism. Master student religious studies Sheily Belhaj responds to Zee's article, claiming that Muslim women have had their own form of religious feminism for a long time, enabling public participation.⁴¹⁴ Responding to the articles of ten Broeke and Zee, Ezzeroli rejects both of their viewpoints as patronizing. Asha ten Broeke fails to recognize the gravity of the situation by refusing to deal with it. Machteld Zee is realistic, but equally patronizing. By calling for a new wave of feminism against fundamentalism, she excludes certain women. Ezzeroli's call for an open discussion is therefore to all women of color, regardless of their religion, sexual orientation or class.

VK5 - Brandeis smoort de geest van vrijheid waarvoor zij is opgericht – (Brandeis is smothering the spirit of freedom for which she was founded) – Ayaan Hirsi Ali – 452 words – 11th of April 2014⁴¹⁵

On the 8th of April 2014, Ayaan Hirsi Ali was rejected an honorary doctorate from Brandeis University. Ali is famous for her criticism of Islam, specifically with regards to women's rights. For instance, she wrote a script for Theo van Gogh's anti-Islam movie *Submission*. Students and Muslim interest groups petitioned for the University board to reject her honorary doctorate. In a press release, the university declared that they were unaware of her views at the time. Three days after the event Ali describes the events from her perspective in *de Volkskrant*. Ali tells that she was not contacted about the issue until only a few hours before the press release. She does not believe that Brandeis was actually unaware of her viewpoints, as she is such a controversial personality. But the true issue for Ali is that Brandeis betrayed its ideal of religious freedom. Brandeis was founded as non-sectarian university just after the Holocaust, when many universities still kept rigid Jewish quota. Ali expected to be honored as a defender of women's rights against abuse that is so often of religious nature or legitimized by it. Instead, she was silenced, and now rejects further conversation.

TR1 – Vrouwenquotum uit Brussel dwingt tot discriminatie – (EU Women Quotum forces people to discriminate) – Patrick van Schie – 709 words – 25th of November 2013⁴¹⁶

This piece is written by columnist Patrick van Schie, president of the liberal, VVD-affiliated think tank *Telderstichting*. Van Schie responds to the EU decision to set a 'female quota' of 40% for the boards of businesses. He is surprised that the quota was proposed by Viviane Reding, a Christian democrat and supported by almost all parties, excluding his own liberal VVD. Traditionally, putting pressure on entrepreneurs is typical for leftist parties. Socialists, European parliamentarians and bureaucrats all think in statistics, rather than human beings. Calling positive discrimination affirmative action obscures that discrimination does take place – of men. Rather, people should simply be judged by their qualities. If this happens, the now assumed inequality will disappear as a result. Unlike governmental bodies, businesses face competition and will fall behind with quota like these. Policies like this one are not only inappropriate for the EU, they are inappropriate for any type of politics. All this does is maintain the illusion of the moldable society. Van Schie concludes by stating that EU politicians who harass their citizens and businesses and force them to discriminate are only underlining their own redundancy.

TR2 - Meisjesbesnijdenis heeft wel degelijk met de islam te maken – (Female circumcision does in fact have something to do with Islam) – Maurice Blessing – 2310 words – 23rd of February 2014⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3584456/2014/01/27/Laat-islamitische-feministen-in-hun-religieuze-waarde.dhtml>

⁴¹⁵ <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3633603/2014/04/11/Hirsi-Ali-Brandeis-smoort-de-geest-van-vrijheid-waarvoor-zij-is-opgericht.dhtml>

⁴¹⁶ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4328/Opinie/article/detail/3550972/2013/11/25/Vrouwenquotum-uit-Brussel-dwingt-tot-discriminatie.dhtml>

In this essay, Arabist Maurice Blessing takes issue with the tendency to disconnect the practice of female circumcision from Islam. Indeed, his article provoked response from another researcher who described the relationship between the two as 'complex', pointing to the different cultures of Islam.⁴¹⁸ On the other hand, members of the VVD youth entered the debate by arguing for a ban on circumcision of boys as well.⁴¹⁹ This was in turn rejected by representatives of a Jewish student organization as being illiberal religion bashing.⁴²⁰ In his article, Blessing describes how feminist Heleen Mees immediately disconnected circumcision from Islamic belief after a Dutchman of Moroccan descent tried to circumcise his five-year-old daughter with a pair of scissors. Blessing says that while it is correct that the Koran is silent about circumcision, the Sunna is actually the most important source for sharia in both Africa and Indonesia. Anthropologists describing it have made three mistakes: leaving the practice private, racistly connecting it to 'barbaric Africa', and fearing to criticize Islam. The government should prioritize research into the rich Sunna tradition instead. By investigating the social appropriation of this tradition, circumcision, jihad and honor killings might be prevented.

TR3 - Meisjes in de rk kerk lijden als vrouw opnieuw – (Girls in the Roman Catholic church suffer again as women) - Maud Kips and Annemie Knibbe - 590 words – 17th of March 2014⁴²¹

This essay was written by two representatives of the women's platform for ecclesiastical child abuse. This independent foundation wants to offer recognition and justice to female victims of child abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. In the current situation, the church has created a contact point for sexual abuse only. For women that suffered years of psychological and physical abuse, it feels artificial and humiliating to speak about the sexual abuse only. Furthermore, such violence is now answered with just an episcopal letter. Abbesses under whose supervision the abuse took place are still able to deny everything. For male monastic congregations, mediation procedures have been successful. Abusers and victims have met each other and the suffered abuse has been recognized in a personal and convincing way. Until this day, all female monastic orders have rejected such cooperation. The authors hope to convince the Church that what female victims need is a competent counselor of their own choice with whom they can share their story. Furthermore, professional mediators should guide the conversations between victims and abbesses, so that arrogant denial is no longer an option. In sum, they argue for more transparency and supervision by a third independent party.

TR4 - En weer wordt Ayaan Hirsi Ali weggezet als 'islamofobisch' – (Ayaan Hirsi Ali is once again being reduced to an islamophobe) – Elma Drayer – 522 words – 10th of April 2014⁴²²

In this column, prominent *Trouw* columnist Elma Drayer discusses the conflict between Brandeis and Ali, comparing it with a similar issue in the Netherlands. Drayer describes it as a déjà vu, as Ali did not receive much sympathy in the Netherlands either, especially by 'folk that confused religion criticism with what they call Islamophobia'. Ali was often criticized for speaking for all female Muslims, even though she shares little

⁴¹⁷ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5091/Religie/article/detail/3601826/2014/02/23/Meisjesbesnijdenis-heeft-wel-degelijk-met-de-islam-te-maken.dhtml>

⁴¹⁸ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5091/Religie/article/detail/3604450/2014/02/27/Besnijdenis-en-islam-het-licht-ingewikkeld.dhtml>

⁴¹⁹ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5091/Religie/article/detail/3607762/2014/03/05/Hoog-tijd-om-besnijdenis-van-minderjarige-jongens-te-verbieden.dhtml>

⁴²⁰ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4464/Religie-filosofie/article/detail/3609012/2014/03/07/Behoed-ons-joden-voor-JOVD-liberalen.dhtml>

⁴²¹ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5091/Religie/article/detail/3615841/2014/03/17/Meisjes-in-de-rk-kerk-lijden-als-vrouw-opnieuw.dhtml>

⁴²² <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/6847/Elma-Drayer/article/detail/3633128/2014/04/10/En-weer-wordt-Ayaan-Hirsi-Ali-weggezet-als-islamofobisch.dhtml>

of their experiences and has achieved little for them in practice. Drayer rejects this, as Ali knows Islamic oppression firsthand, due to her youth in Somalia. She is especially critical of Anja Meulenbelt who described Ali as led by belief in her own importance, but ultimately just the plaything of politics of the conservative right. Drayer is disappointed that the United States' people have proven to be equally poor thinkers. The only difference is the reactions of the universities. While Brandeis gave in to the criticism against Ali, the Amsterdam University had the courage to keep Ali as opening speaker of the academic year in 2005. Only a bit of that courage would have been a great improvement for the Brandeis board.

TR5 - Mag het volgende keer zonder feministische kledingpolitie? – (Can we exclude the feminist fashion police next time?) – Elma Drayer – 505 words – 18th of April 2014⁴²³

Because Elma Drayer is such a prominent columnist, I chose to select another of her columns for analysis. Drayer reports on her experiences at the *NK feminisme* (feminist nationals), an event for feminist debate. Drayer herself was a panel member at the event. Some participants thought that the speakers were not 'immigrant' enough, ideologically wrong and too elitist. This is problematic for Drayer. She scorns these commenters as 'believing in a feminist Vatican that produces official dogma'. Instead, she 'celebrates the diversity in the feminist church'. The event was visited by very different, even young women, and not, as before, just "baby-boomers". Drayer's discussion panel included three women born in foreign countries (including Naema Tahir) and three in the Netherlands (including Machteld Zee). Topics included sexist toy brochures, 'part-time feminism', and necessity of economic independence, headscarves, paternalism and 'sex-apartheid' justified by religion. The panel members and audience had a positive interaction that sparked a lively debate. At the end of the debate however, some audience members shouted that none of the speakers were wearing pants. Drayer remarks that she welcomes a feminist revival, but that the feminist fashion police should stay where it belongs. Deep into the seventies, that is.

Discourse analysis

As a general remark, the tone of these articles is something to note. These articles are opinion pieces, meaning that many article writers opt for strong rhetoric and firm, fixed opinions. Polarizing the debate by scoffing at opponents and exalting supporters is common. Online responders replicate this tone, arguing against each other and the author and promoting their own opinion at the expense of others'. This at times comes at the cost of understanding both the topic and the other participants in the debate. Indeed, key terms like religion, secularism and feminism are seldom problematized beyond their superficial popular meaning in these debates.

I will discuss the ideas from chapters one and two, using examples from the articles outlined above. In doing so, the discussion will demonstrate the central argument of this thesis, that feminism and religion are closely related in contemporary discourse. Neither is seen as completely compatible with a secular and liberal society, because both prioritize idealism over rationalism. Both are described as being relevant in the Netherlands' past, but redundant today. Still, they are in opposition, because women's and religious rights are seen as incompatible. Indeed, feminism is often presented as the antidote to excesses of religion. The Muslim religion is seen as the paradigmatic example of excessive religion, and simultaneously the one most needing feminist help. For instance, Machteld Zee echoes Okin's characterization of feminism as the opposite of Islamic fundamentalism.⁴²⁴ These discursive strands are indicative of the way the topics of

⁴²³ <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/6847/Elma-Drayer/article/detail/3637623/2014/04/18/Mag-het-voortaan-zonder-feministische-kledingpolitie.dhtml>

⁴²⁴ Okin. 'Reply', 131.

religion and gender have become intertwined in the popular imagination. I will analyze the dynamic of these discourses below, citing the ten selected articles.

Liberalism

Outside of TR1, which was written by the director of a VVD think tank, liberalism is never explicitly mentioned in the articles. Still, many writers and responders are operating within the liberal framework and assume liberal rules for debating. As we have seen, liberalism always wants to exclude irrational and ideological influences from public debate. Though religion is the archetypical problem for liberal democracy, feminism is increasingly portrayed in a similar frame. Both are seen as forms of unfree, even dogmatic thinking. Sometimes, feminism is even likened to a church, as we saw in Stellinga's suggestion to separate feminism and state.⁴²⁵ As a liberal, Stellinga thinks that the role of the state in social matters should be limited as such. Her criticism is thus not directed at feminism alone, but a leftist political program as such.

This trope is also put forward in TR1, TR4 and TR5. In TR1, liberal historian Patrick van Schie does not refer directly to religion or feminism. However, he does construct women's quotas as a topic unfit for politics on any level. The dogmatic and discriminatory measures taken by the EU are contrasted with his own liberal ideology, that rejects such state intervention. In the columns of Elma Drayer the rejection of 'feminist orthodoxy' (describing it as religious) is even stronger. In TR4 she discusses responses of academics to Ayaan Hirsi Ali's invitation as a speaker for the Amsterdam University. Many of them thought that it was troubling to invite Ali, while so many women had been struggling for Muslim women for years. Drayer submits that the only reason Ali was disliked was because of the fact that some of her opinions do not align with those 'confessing' the multiculturalist ideal.

In TR5 she goes even further, characterizing the criticism of the guest list of the Feminist Nationals as belief in 'a feminist Vatican'. She says that these people seem to think that it can be decided which 'feminist believers' should be granted the right to speak. In the same column, she introduces the 'feminist fashion police' and says they should have remained in the seventies. Ironically, this is also a way of establishing a feminist orthodoxy. As always, responders to the articles connect to such discourses in more explicit ways. Responding to VK1, **Louk van der Sloot** writes:

'Geez, Bart Smit issues a toy brochure with vacuum cleaners and other domestic equipment and this is the sign for Willem Bosch to do confessional politics. How terribly Reformed to preach fire and brimstone. And look how doctrinally just I am. That's nice, son, you belong to the good ones. Who still doubts that men and women are equivalent. Only the SGP. And such equality would be put down by a toy brochure?'

This responder connects Bosch's argument for men to speak out as feminist to conservative Reformed confession practices. At the same time, he sees the conservative Reformed *SGP* members as the only ones contesting male-female equality today. In this reading, Willem Bosch becomes himself associated with Reformed arguing for sex segregation, even though his argument is a feminist one. Indeed, even by simply bringing the issue up, Bosch is seen as threatening feminist achievements like gender equality.

Feminisms

Even though all articles are primarily concerned with women (primarily as backdrop for Ali in VK5), only the authors of VK1, VK2, VK4, TR4 and TR5 identify explicitly as feminists. In all these articles, feminism is also

⁴²⁵ Stellinga. *glazen plafond*, 176.

criticized. That is, the author sets her- or himself off against existing feminist viewpoints. The articles thus show many varieties of feminism, all of which are frequently called into question. Sometimes, these articles also address religion. Religion is the subject in VK4, VK5, TR2, TR3, and TR4. Even in articles where religion is not a topic, it often looms over the discussion, appearing as a paradigmatic example of sexism. For instance, VK1 mentions the sharia as cause for concern about women. Similarly, VK3 mentions in passing that the UN declaration of women's rights does not apply to 'Muslim countries' alone. In TR5, several religious references are made in a list of feminist topics covered at the 'feminist nationals'. Whether explicit or implicit, religion is in all these cases described as posing a problem for women. Generally speaking, religions are thus framed as arguing opposites. Islam is seen as the most obvious example of sexist religion and therefore the most effective rhetorical device for disarming feminist arguments concerning the Netherlands. Often, Islamic attitudes towards women are presented as a retort against feminist arguments. As long as Muslims are believed to treat their women poorer, Dutch gender arrangements can not even be made into a topic for discussion.

Though such a description is typical for secularist thought, the absence of religion as a positive influence in women's lives is striking. For instance, religion has been described as empowering, offering a framework for making sense of experiences and helping them cope with experiences.⁴²⁶ The role of feminism in these articles is important as well. In VK4, VK5 and TR4, feminism is put forward as a solution to certain Islamic practices. Both Ayaan Hirsi Ali herself (VK5) and Elma Drayer (TR4), writing in support of Ali, use this frame.⁴²⁷ Though they reject the characterization of being Islamophobic, the feminist authors still position themselves over against Muslim practices, thus continuing the frame. In VK4, it is even more striking. Ezzeroili is aware of processes of discrimination and paternalism and deeply critical of them. She concludes her article by calling attention to 'a new generation of feminists of color that cannot wait to do away with all forms of misogyny, racism, gender discrimination and homophobia.' The absence of religious discrimination is striking, particularly in an article that specifically addresses condescending attitudes of western feminists towards Muslim feminists. In an earlier paragraph, Ezzeroili discusses the opening of the discussion to women of color, 'whatever their sexual preference, religion or social class'. So even though Ezzeroili wants to include religious women in the feminist debate, she does not mention religion as a possible source of exclusion and thereby fails to acknowledge this obstacle. Responders expand upon this gap, once again making religious people the primary object of feminism. **Kees Kloost:**

'Go for it Nadia.. There is work to be done.. There are entire tribes of Muslim women to liberate. And to emancipate.. There is a country where Muslim women want to breathe freely.. The rest will sort itself out.'

Interestingly, the penultimate sentence in the response closely resembles the title of a feminist song and a collection of essays by Joke Smit, the unofficial founder of Dutch second-wave feminism. Her book is called 'There is a country where women want to live'. In this way, this responder associates the desired emancipation of Muslim women with second-wave feminism, presenting it simply as an extension of it. In this way, he fails to acknowledge the difference in the situations of Muslim women today and the Dutch feminists of the second wave.

In TR2, Arabist Maurice Blessing sees a better understanding of Islam, rather than feminism, as the solution. In fact, the only times he mentions feminism it is in the figure of Heleen Mees, who argued that female circumcision was not an Islamic practice. Finally, TR3 does not propose feminism as a solution for victims of Roman Catholic officials, but puts forward a female form of understanding instead. The readers

⁴²⁶ Bracke. '<Niet in onze naam!>', 122.

⁴²⁷ Drayer. *Verwende prinsesjes*, 120-122.

and responses are more explicit about the connection between feminism and religion, mentioning it even when articles relate to gender issues only. For instance, TR5 responder **Alain** gives his own interpretation of the debate on Islam at the Feminist nationals.

'[...] It is true. Muslim women are doing well. But by calling their achievements 'the highest feasible' Naema [Tahir] unwittingly showed a sad reality. That is, Elma's feminist fashion police is nothing compared to the fashion police named Islam.'

In this way, feminist arguments are used as occasion to argue against Islam, while the feminist topic at hand is trivialized. As a result, the criticism of Islam often becomes more important than the feminism itself as is shown in the discussion among responders.

On TR2, **J.J. van der Gulik** writes:

'The existence of a link [of FGM] with Islam can now no longer be denied. As the Islamification continues it will become increasingly difficult to resist it. There is only one solution: de-Islamification. In this way, the rights of the Dutch will be restored simultaneously. Continuing Islamification also means that as time passes the Dutch girls/women will have to suffer this too.'

All the responders cited in this article use rhetoric of urgency, citing a threat that has to be dealt with immediately and in the right way. This means that other solutions, let alone problems have to be set aside in favor of the issue the author puts forward. Islam and sometimes other religions are often used in this way when feminist issues are concerned. Islam is again presented as the exact opposite of gender emancipation. In this simplistic dualism, a growth of Islam inevitably yields the result of a decrease in women's rights.

Postfeminism

As we saw above and in previous chapters, the necessity and position of feminism is very much debatable today. The limits of feminism are explored in several opinion pieces. VK1, VK2, VK4, and TR5 all cite this as their main topic, while in TR4 Elma Drayer opposes a multiculturalist type of feminism personified in the person of Anja Meulenbelt. In that article, as well as in VK4 and TR5, this question is explicitly related to the position of Muslim women in Dutch and other societies. For Drayer, all feminist activism should at least acknowledge the main feminist problem (which is Islam), although various feminist angles and issues exist. However, even responses to Willem Bosch's article (that does not mention religion once) reveal the responders' preoccupation with Muslims and religion. The same is true for van Hintum's column (VK2). Though she is exploring the limits of what can be called feminism and is mostly discussing sexuality, responders are still triggered to write about religion. **Han Xi** provides an example:

'First you abandon the oppressed and often horribly abused and or killed Muslim women with a weak culture excuse and now you deny the next generation of women their own feminism. Well, well, your feminist generation has achieved great things. This is what I call useless living.'

This responder reproaches modern feminists, personified in Hintum, twice. He critically judges the little room that feminists give to the new generation that engages with sexuality more. In her research on postfeminism, Angela McRobbie has noted that young girls can act in more masculine ways as well, but have to balance this with a constant reminder that they are in fact female. Although she once believed that feminism has served its purpose, van Hintum is wary of this feminist trend.⁴²⁸ This responder does not share her reservations, claiming that she cannot deny the next generation *their* feminism.

The anxiety is also shown in reactions to the 'feminism of color' that Nadia Ezzeroili tries to develop in VK4. Though she engages explicitly with the role of Muslim women in feminist debates and argues for an

⁴²⁸ McRobbie. *aftermath of feminism*, 84.

inclusive feminism, this remains problematic. Ezzeroili takes issue with a feminist conception that believes that the only way to become feminist is by reproducing the secularization and (female) emancipation of the Dutch. Analogically, Verkaaik has shown that people can only become Dutch individuals if they reproduce this Dutch process.⁴²⁹ A reaction to VK4, by **rosal**, is illustrative:

'Nadia apparently has no idea of the social history of the Netherlands and the emancipation struggle that has been waged by the common man and woman to release themselves from Church, poverty, suppression et cetera. As a woman from a modest background I had to liberate myself twice and still I call myself a feminist. Saying this is the same as white-elitist is very stupid [...].'

The heroic break from Church and class difference by social movements and second wave feminism is here constructed as the difference that separates Ezzeroili from the author. If Ezzeroili wants to be part of the discussion, she has to appreciate this difference in development. Note that religion is here once again associated with negative social issues like poverty and suppression. For this responder, religion is a social issue that needs to be overcome by immigrants and has been overcome by native Dutch.

Secularism

Like feminism, religion continues to be a problematic presence in public debates. Indeed, all these debates can be said to take place in a secular framework, excluding religious arguments. This exclusion is legitimized by assumptions about religion that are believed to describe religion better. The authors understand this and are careful not to foreground their religious affiliation. Responders however, have fewer reserves in this regard. Unhappy to simply exclude religious arguments, they interpret the authors' argument in face of their perceived religious affiliation and criticize it as such. Indeed, *ad hominem* arguments are often used to interpret the opinion piece. In the responses to VK3, VK4, VK5 and TR4 the authors' religious identity is brought into question. First, responders to the Ali pieces (VK5,TR4) relate her 'liberation' from Islam to her viewpoints on religion today. For instance, **joostsr/joosttiboschsr** responded similarly to both pieces, stating that

'[...]her fierce criticism of forced marriage and circumcision is understandable and justified in light of her youth. But calling Islam a destructive nihilistic cult of death, like Wilders, will cause ridicule in the world of (religious) studies and suspicion in the world of human rights.'

Elma Drayer similarly legitimizes Ali's activism in her column. Ali's identity as an ex-Muslim legitimizes her activism as a feminist and anti-Islam activist.⁴³⁰ In the other two articles, the (perceived) religion of the authors serves to delegitimize them instead. In responses posted to the VK3 article, many readers took issue with the political affiliation of the writers. Though Eddy Terstall is loosely affiliated with PvdA and Hala Naoum Néhme is a VVD member, Gert-jan Segers was mostly targeted as member of the Christian Union. Many responders believe that prostitution is in fact a symbol of progressiveness, and is connected to the liberation from a conservative religious past, as Verkaaik describes it.⁴³¹ Still, the article is never making religious references, using the commonplace language of human dignity. **wouterfr** for instance responds by stating that he is

'[...]neither prude nor religious, feel nothing for the CU and think that every woman should do what she wants in freedom [sic]. As long as it is her own choice to stand on sale.'

The discursive connection between religion and being prude is here contrasted with freedom and choice for women.

⁴²⁹ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 129-130.

⁴³⁰ Drayer. *Verwende prinsesjes*, 117.

⁴³¹ Verkaaik. *Ritueel burgerschap*, 130.

In responses to VK4, several responders discuss Ezzeroili's identity as a feminist of color. **Papa Yabo** writes:

'It would be helpful if more Muslims would realize that their religion objectively speaking is equally useful or useless as any other. It is hard to argue with people that think their faith is the only road to salvation. Especially if all sorts of completely irreligious oddities are committed in the name of that faith, like discrimination of women or people of a different faith. Would Nadia dare to embrace atheism or agnosticism?'

Apparently, this responder is unaware of the article that Ezzeroili wrote in October, describing her 'loving parting' with Allah.⁴³² Not only does this author ascribe a religious affiliation to Ezzeroili, he connects a lot of propositions with that religion as well, none of which she subscribed to in her article. He thus delegitimizes her argument as religious and replaces it with his own 'objective' ideas about religion. In his description, Ezzeroili becomes an intolerant believer, rather than a feminist with an Islamic background.

Willem1960 uses her identity in another way:

'Feminism, a word that makes my skin crawl lately. Indeed, not all is equally divided between man and woman.⁴³³ For now, it is common that a man works all his life while the woman thinks that two small mornings a week will suffice. The fact that the dominant feminists are now attacked by someone whom they did not expect this from is just so funny. Taste of their own medicine.'

This responder approves of the argument Ezzeroili makes against 'dominant feminists', and seizes the opportunity to make an argument of his own. Feminists are in fact not savers of women in other cultures. Disagreements between feminists and multiculturalists are celebrated. I will expand upon this important point later.

Another recurring theme in the debates on the websites is the clustering of various religions as equally discriminating. Though this generally is not done by writers themselves, responders have fewer reservations. A striking example is the article on female victims of Roman Catholic clergy (TR3). Even though the problem addressed is connected to this confession, responders extend it to Protestantism as well. In response to **dièse**, **Jansje Sigaar** writes:

'"Women are still not fully acknowledged in the conservative Roman Catholic view." Are they in the conservative Protestant, casu quo Reformed view?'

dièse responds again:

'Jansje this concerned the Roman Catholic church, the Protestant churches do not have nuns as far as I know. All religious institutions have a somewhat tense relationship with sex, as do the ones mentioned by you.'

So, even though this last commentator is aware of some differences between the various confessions, she or he still believes that every religious institution relates to sexuality in a problematic way. Responding to VK4, **McNulty** writes:

'Feminists of color? What good is that to me? Even discounting the linguistic horror? I cherish a picking order: 1. Children's rights 2 Women's rights 3. Animal rights. As long as these rights are upheld other groups ([skin] color, [sexual] orientation) should fend for themselves. They will be fine. Religious types that try impose on rights 1 to 3 with veils, kippot, circumcisions or black stockings can always be assured of my unrelenting criticism.'

This response illustrates once again that religion is most often illustrated as a perpetrator when discrimination is concerned. While the author can still imagine people being discriminated on the basis of their skin color or sexual orientation, he does not consider this for religion. Rather, he can only imagine it as

⁴³² <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/11304/Vonk/article/detail/3530560/2013/10/21/Hoe-Allah-en-ik-in-liefde-uit-elkaar-gingen.dhtml>

⁴³³ Translation note: in Dutch, it could also refer to husband and wife.

aggressor, impeding on the rights he cherishes. Considering his examples, he thinks that all monotheistic religions can be guilty of this and makes it clear by referring to the exterior aspects of their religion.

Still, Islam is the religion considered most often in public debate and the one that is believed to be the most problematic, as the following response to VK5 illustrates. **Krabbestamp**:

'It is like Hirsi Ali said this week:⁴³⁴ when you make statements that Christian or Jews dislike, you will get angry letters. When you make statements that Muslims dislike, you will get death threats and attacks. Hirsi Ali was bullied out of the Netherlands because she was seen as a troublemaker and querulant. Apparently Brandeis sees her in this way as well. A sad day for open dialogue.'

Even though it should be possible to criticize all religions and each has the potential to threaten individuals and the world of politics, this threat is the most urgent for Islam. Note also how Brandeis' decision is framed as a threat to open debate and freedom of expression. In this way, the responder connects with existing discourses in which criticism of Islam is intimately connected with 'free speech' and 'open dialogue'. This issue I will explore more extensively next.

Multiculturalism

Often intimately connected to the discourse on feminism as unfree thinking, freedom of expression is an important topic on its own, being discussed in VK1, VK5, TR2, TR4 and TR5. Drayer's criticism of leftist political correctness as limiting free expression should be familiar by now. A similar argument is made by Ayaan Hirsi Ali in her piece VK5. She connects Brandeis' decision to reject her honorary doctorate to the founding principles of the university: the spirit of freedom. The decision to reject the honorary doctorate, justified because it would protect Muslim sensitivities, is described by Ali as impeding on the free expression that the secular Brandeis University holds dear. The connection of multicultural political correctness and impeding on freedom of speech is familiar: it connects to the genre of what Baukje Prins has called new realism.⁴³⁵ In this genre, multiculturalists are represented as failing to see the truth in their efforts to be politically correct. The new realist discourse addresses this, and offers 'truer' understanding, one that does not deny uncomfortable truths. **Klokkenluider** reproduces it in response to VK5:

'The problem for people like Hirsi Ali is that specifically speaking the truth about Islam is stigmatized as <hate speech>. To escape this stigmatization, many opt for a 'politically correct', which is essentially a betrayal of the factual truth [sic]. In this way, the threat of this worldview is only facilitated, which could even imply a disastrous subversion of our economy.'

This writer sets her or his 'truthful' negative viewpoint of Islam against a politically correct view, embraced by many who fear stigmatization. In this response, the writer presents Ali as a speaker of inconvenient hidden truths. By supporting Ali's controversial statements, she or he also becomes associated with it. The screenname (meaning Whistleblower) also adds to this.

To a certain extent, feminism, like other 'leftist disciplines' falls victim to critics using this genre as well. Feminism is believed to deny the truth that female and male differences are not social in nature. The feminist efforts for transforming society are furthermore seen as impeding on personal freedoms. Using a liberal argument, women and men are believed to make their own choices, and feminists cannot force people to prioritize some choices over others. Unsurprisingly, religion is also seen as a threat to this process of liberalist decision-making. In TR2, Maurice Blessing connects to this discourse by describing how it was

⁴³⁴ Referring to a *The Kelly File* interview: <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2014/04/10/islam-critic-ayaan-hirsi-ali-speaks-out-on-brandeis-decision-to-withdraw-degree/>

⁴³⁵ Prins. 'nerve', 366.

feminist Heleen Mees that was in denial about circumcision being a practice connected to Islam. In VK1, Willem Bosch takes issue with some of these discourses. He describes them as 'new political correctness'. He submits that today it is correct to acknowledge the 'natural' situation, meaning respecting women that fulfill traditional roles. When someone is critical of this, the general argument is making the topic irrelevant, urging the speaker to discuss international politics. But the argument Bosch makes has been poorly understood, as responders still move the discussion away, urging him to discuss Muslim women instead.

Egor: *'What is Willem Bosch' vision on the treatment of women in our inner cities? Put differently, what is your opinion on treatment of women by Islam? Gratuitous white feminism is old news.'*

EddieValiant: *'I wonder what Willem Bosch thinks of headscarves and burqas?'*

Both responders fail to engage themselves with Bosch' argument, but think that simply pointing out Islam and women is enough to refute it. As we will see below, women's issues are used in this way more often, indicating what the speakers see as the desired current agenda for feminism. Furthermore, the first writer is concerned with the predicament of inner city women, which he claims is connected to 'Islam'. It is unclear if he believes these women to be Muslims themselves, but it is clear this contribution is informed by recent politics. The situation of immigrant women in large Dutch cities has recently come under increasing scrutiny from both government and the media. Such extensive attention is largely lacking for other feminist issues.

Results

In these articles on gender issues, there are several ways in which religion repeatedly appears. First, it appears as a phenomenon that is hostile to feminism and/or female liberation. Indeed, the two thoughts are often framed as being diametrically opposed to one another. Second, the religion of the writers of these pieces is sometimes addressed and brought into question as well, making the combination of dedication to both feminism and a religion a subject for debate. Strikingly, this is only an issue for religious authors, while secular ones are excluded from this scrutiny. Third, feminism is often presented as being itself a form of orthodoxy. Feminist thinking is then presented as a form of unfree thinking, dominated by dogmatic ideas of the movement. Most often, it is believed that both feminists and believers think that there is only one correct way to live your life. As a result, people affiliated with either a feminist or a religious movement loses credibility. Fourth, different religions are often related to one another and presented as equally discriminating. Still, Muslims are seen as the paradigmatic example of sexist people. Fifth, multicultural or other arguments against discrimination of Muslims or other believers are constructed as putting limits on freedom of expression. Sixth, several articles explore the limits of feminism. Many participants in the debate think that feminism should limit its focus to a number of topics, notably religion and particularly Islam.

In all these discourses, feminism and religion are pitted against each other. Feminism is presented as something that has served its purpose, with emancipation of religious women being a notable exception. Religious people are presented as archetypical sexists. Feminism is described as something that liberal and secular states should use to emancipate religious women. For that exceptional case, feminism can be revived. Liberal, secular states themselves have had their share of feminism, and gender equality has been achieved for them. This is not true for illiberal religious adherents, whose beliefs have been seen as a threat to liberalism since its inception. Religion continues to be a threat to the liberal state that has achieved gender equality. Indeed, all religions are believed to have the potential to threaten the gender equality flaunted by the liberal state. Still, the paradigmatic example of the realization of such a threat is expected among those living in or originating from Islamic countries.

While feminism and religion are in these discourses put in strong opposition sometimes they are connected as well. Both feminism and religion are described as forms of dogmatic, unfree thinking, in principle posing a threat to liberal democratic processes. Both religion and feminism are positioned as obsolete and having been surpassed in Dutch society, making their contributions to public debate redundant at best and reactionary at worst. Religious authors are thus especially scrutinized when gender issues are concerned, and their efforts are often explained as covert mechanisms for the religious discipline of women. There is a particular concern with the freedom of speech, which is believed to be threatened by the ideological view of leftist politics. Leftist participants in public debate are believed to distort inconvenient truths that hurt their multiculturalist worldview. Feminists are especially criticized for overstating the social influences on gender difference.

As such, both feminism and religion are seen as parties that are bound up in a dogmatic irrational conflict. Liberal or secular commentators might observe this conflict from the sidelines and probably even favor feminism. Still, they do not have to take either one seriously. They can simply deny their legitimacy in a liberal state, labeling their thoughts as dogmatic and irrational. To sum up, feminism and religion alike are thus subordinated to the liberal and secular perspectives in popular discourses. Feminist and religious contributions are seen as unhelpful, and even inappropriate for rational public decision-making. The liberal and secular positions are presented as neutral and disinterested and therefore more appropriate. These discursive strands are a product of the liberal and secular ideology. In particular, it is informed by the homogenizing effect liberalism has on participants in its discussions, and secularism's tendency to divide people between two dualistic scales.

Conclusion

Summary

In the past chapters, I have concerned myself with broad trends in discourses on feminism and religion. Comparing the discourse at all levels, recurring issues can be identified. Taking on our leading question, the way in which feminism and religion are valued in popular media discourses on gender issues is strikingly similar. Neither feminism nor religion is completely acceptable as a frame for understanding gender-related issues on the websites. For many contributors, religion is suspect as such, but even stronger so when gender issues are concerned. It seems that the stereotypical image of religion limiting gender equality makes it difficult to recognize its emancipatory potential. Feminism then, is a more obvious candidate, but rejected all the same. Many commentators maintain that feminist positions on gender issues are too extremist and infeasible. The popular image of feminism is tied up with the way the movement presented itself during the second wave, a movement that was believed to have ultimately prevailed. As such, feminism is viewed as something of the past, with little bearing on the gender issues of today.

Furthermore, feminism and religion are often described as necessarily inimical to one another, even though some activists and academics have criticized this characterization. Two closely related systems of thought are of particular influence in shaping these ideas about feminism and religion. First, the idea of liberalism holds that all individual human beings are endowed with the same rights and therefore have the same opportunities. This means that liberals believe all men and women have the same opportunities. The Netherlands sees itself as a liberal country and believes that gender equality has been largely achieved in the country. Liberals rightly credit feminists of the first and second wave with many of these achievements. Still, contemporary feminists argue over the extent to which feminism has achieved its goals even in the Netherlands. Second, the idea of secularism believes that the role of religion in society should be limited. In particular, religion should be excluded from public life and democratic decision-making. Liberal states have generally been very sympathetic to this idea, as religion is seen as a threat to individuals and the liberal process of decision-making. Indeed, liberalism was founded to temper the heated confessional arguments and wars of the pre-enlightenment era. Religion is perceived as a threat to both liberalism and secularism.

In many liberal secular states including the Netherlands, this issue has received renewed attention following the arrival of Muslim immigrants. In both political and popular discourse, Muslim people are presented as a problem, something civil society should find a solution for. Islamic people are deemed incompatible with a liberal and secular society, and supposed to adapt to it. Various 'traits' have been suggested as being the problem that hinders Muslim participation in such societies, though it usually can be reduced to the Muslims' lack of modernity. Strikingly, Western European countries have often cited the perceived Islamic gender roles as the problem separating them from these countries. Even though gender equality is not at all stable in these countries, it is still assumed as being so and exerted as separating them from immigrants or Muslims. They are expected to replicate the steps that the Dutch nationals are assumed to have taken. For natives and Western immigrants, such measures are seen as being redundant, making Muslim immigrants the primary target group for such state discipline. This is even true for attempts that aim to increase tolerance of Muslims. Tolerance often appears as something that needs to be given to the 'deviant' group (that is, Muslims) by the 'normal' people (the native Dutch). In the Netherlands, gender arrangements have been made the very thing separating (immigrant) Muslims from the Dutch. As a result, questioning our gender arrangements in public debate can provoke strong reactions that affirm the Dutch supremacy over Muslims in the area of gender. The Dutch tolerance of homosexuals is often put forward in a similar way. For both issues, it is discounted that they are still very much under discussion and closely

related. All these discourses are revived in Dutch debates on both Muslims and feminism, making classic liberal topics an issue once more.

Within these discourses, feminism finds itself in an interesting double bind. On the one hand, the movement is after years acknowledged as a key actor in these important issues. At the same time, their activism is impeded by a decreasing belief in the effectiveness and importance of the movement. Feminism seems legitimate only if it helps to criticize non-seculars and expose them to Western ideals. Some feminists have embraced this conception, prioritizing the emancipation of Muslims above anything else. Strikingly, this emancipation is usually given shape as requiring abandoning their traditional practices, like the headscarf or female circumcision. At the same time, the postfeminist phenomenon has appeared in Western countries. Women and girls are told that they can achieve anything they want, but feminist activism is no longer an option. Politically, this means that women need to give up activism in exchange for full and supposedly, equal citizenship.⁴³⁶ This means that the rich feminist history and achievements are acknowledged, but located firmly in the past. Feminism is described as being a form of thinking that is shaped primarily by its own beliefs. The belief in female-male equality and the conception of gender difference as a social construct are two dogmas that are often described as deeply influencing feminist thought and theorizing. This is often constructed by a view that sees things 'just the way they are', pointing to the (biological or otherwise) difference between men and women. Like religion, feminism is thus described as a way of dogmatic thinking, not rooted in reality, but in its own convictions. Escaping these attributions is an important challenge for feminists. As I alluded to before, feminism can be acceptable, but is so only if it serves to critique minorities that are perceived as illiberal. In this way, feminism can potentially become a tool to exclude and marginalize, even though the movement's intention is by definition the opposite. In their efforts to include and legitimize women, feminists today have to brace themselves for becoming part of liberalism's striving for homogenization.

Results and recommendations

In the discourses on *de Volkskrant* and *Trouw* news sites, feminism and religion are closely related in negative terms. The discourses often mention both phenomena and connect them in a stereotypical way. The two are presented as being in opposition, and both are often independently given negative evaluations. These discourses connect with similar media discourses throughout the rest of Europe, and influence political processes and popular conceptions in powerful ways. In these discourses, feminism seems only useful when it is critical of religion, particularly Islam. These debates also limit which people are considered insiders or outsiders. Religiosity is seen as an aspect that problematizes public participation. Feminism is similarly problematic, as its relevance is perceived as redundant. As indicated, popular debates generally have a polemical tone, are riddled with rhetoric and polarize between feminists and believers. These limited understandings of feminists and religious people hurt both groups, as well as the understanding of the debates in general. Welcoming academic viewpoints in such debates offers the beginning of a solution. They can help to offer more nuance and complexity to these debates, so that polemic dichotomies can be replaced with partial understanding at least.

For activist or academic feminists willing to escape limiting dichotomies, it is necessary to create their own agenda. Some feminist have forcefully resisted being used as a weapon in a culture war or secularization offensive. Feminists' association with religion is now framed very negatively, but can be changed to a more positive approach. For instance, both are described as touching the lives of groups and individuals,

⁴³⁶ McRobbie, aftermath of feminism, 2.

permeating life with renewed meaning and providing inspiration for positive participation in the world. On a more political level, both have a long history of proving powerful moral criticism that goes beyond daily life while being firmly grounded in it. This indicates that there are many possibilities to create new, more positive relationships between feminism and religion. The continuing feminist debates in newspapers and websites are promising in this respect, as is the continued relevance of religion. More alarming is the easiness and matter-of-factness in which both feminist and religious arguments are rejected. Today, both movements can simply be rejected as irrational, idealist or rooted in the past. Furthermore, feminism and religion continue to be presented as inimical to each other. As I have argued, this repressive dualistic thinking is presented as a necessary and decontested truth by the dominant liberal secular ideology.⁴³⁷ Though this ideology seems to favor feminism over religion, it only does this when it serves its secularist agenda. The challenge lies in connecting feminists and believers, so that new alliances to resist liberal secularist influences can be forged. Scholars have extensively studied both the suppressing and empowering influences of religion in women's lives, yet popular conceptions can still reduce this to being a simpler traditional way of life. Recognizing that feminism and religion can both be powerful influences in the private and the public domain alike seems like a good starting point.

⁴³⁷ Wilson. *After secularism*, 32-34.

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<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/14348/Bart-Smout/article/detail/3559683/2013/12/10/Moeten-we-alle-prostituees-afschilderen-als-lijdend-voorwerp.dhtml>

Zee, Machteld. 'Vrouwenhaat moslims valt niet goed te praten' published 22-1-2014:

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3581417/2014/01/22/Vrouwenhaat-moslims-valt-niet-goed-te-praten.dhtml>

Appendices

De Volkskrant

VK1 - Bosch, Willem. 'Een beetje kerel kan het hebben: Ich bin ein feminist' published 7-10-2013:
<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3522803/2013/10/07/Een-beetje-kerel-kan-het-hebben-Ich-bin-ein-Feminist.dhtml>

De wil van vrouwen om gelijkwaardig te zijn, wordt weggezet als hysterisch getrut. Het nieuwe taboe is het benadrukken van gelijkwaardigheid. Want is dat niet een decadent principe dat stiekem tegennatuurlijk is? Het wordt tijd dat ook mannen zich hier tegen uitspreken, schrijft Willem Bosch. 'Dan maar een gecastreerd mannetje dat zich heeft laten inpakken door het emancipatoire gevaar.'

Mannen. U heeft het vast al gemerkt: de feministen zijn weer terug. En dit keer zijn het geen Dolle Mina's meer. Wél zijn het vooral weer vrouwen die met andere vrouwen discussiëren. De ene helpt wil emancipatie, de andere helpt vindt het wel goed zo. Zo gaat dat al vijftig jaar, en al even lang weten wij mannen ons er mooi buiten te houden. Waarom zouden we in godsnaam meediscussiëren? Wij zijn de norm waartoe vrouwen zich verhouden. Het zwakke geslacht houdt zichzelf wel zwak. Goed geregeld.

Deze week schreef Paulien Derwort in NRC: 'Emancipatie is een prachtig begrip, maar we overdrijven toch schromelijk.' Keurig. Zo lang ze elkaar de tent uitvechten hebben wij niks te vrezen.

Paulien Derwort schreef ook dat die overdreven emancipatie 'het nieuwe taboe' is. Want Paulien Derwort heeft de afgelopen tien jaar onder een steen geleefd. En ze heeft niet gemerkt dat het Nieuwe Taboe toch vooral het benadrukken van gelijkwaardigheid is. Ze heeft ook niet gemerkt dat feminisme al jaren wordt weggezet als een hysterische non-discussie. Paulien Derwort gaat zelfs zover dat ze het opneemt voor ons arme mannen die zich laten verdrijven door over-emancipatie.

Ho ho.

Dat moeten even worden rechtgezet. Wij mannen zijn helemaal geen slachtoffers, en zeker niet van emancipatie. We hebben overal de macht, en een groot deel van de vrouwen vindt dat kennelijk prima. We hebben geen centimeter dominantie ingeleverd. En die fabel van de verwijfde man, waar Derwort zich over opwindt, die bestaat al eeuwen. Kijk naar Louis XIV. Met z'n maillots.

Mannen buiten het debat houden

In feite doet Paulien Derwort actief haar best om mannen buiten het debat te houden. Want welke man durft zich nu nog voor emancipatie uit te spreken? Dan ben je een slapjanus die in het gevlei van vrouwen wil komen. Iemand die zich niet realiseert dat ook heel veel vrouwen antifeministisch zijn. Dan is het punt van Paulien bewezen.

En daarbij wordt er gesteld dat feminisme een vrouwenzaak is. En als sommigen vrouwen zeggen dat de strijd gestreden is, waarom zou een man zich er dan nog mee bemoeien? Alsof je het mandaat van alle vrouwen nodig hebt om te bepalen wat gelijkwaardigheid betekent.

Zo ingewikkeld is het allemaal niet.

Alles wat het moderne feminisme bespreekt is het verschil tussen gelijkheid en gelijkwaardigheid. Traditionele verschillen tussen mannen en vrouwen wel erkennen, maar niet tot norm maken. Simpelweg: mannen mogen bier drinken, vrouwen mogen sexy zijn. Als het maar niet de regel wordt. Als een

speelgoedgigant maar niet jonge meisjes inprint dat stofzuigen 'net als mama' een prima ambitie is. Dat is het niet. Het is een kutklusje. En mannen, dat mag best hardop gezegd worden.

'Waar maak je je in godsnaam druk om'

De meest gehoorde reactie is, zoals altijd, 'waar maak je je in godsnaam druk om'. Dat is de favoriete stuip van de Nieuwe Politieke Correctheid die Paulien Derwort zo slordig over het hoofd heeft gezien. Stel je prioriteiten altijd ergens anders. Waarom je druk maken over een speelgoedfolder terwijl Syrië in brand staat? Waarom hebben we het over Syrië terwijl er honger is in Afrika? Honger in Afrika? We hebben thuis genoeg problemen. Afleiden, de discussie verplaatsen, en vervolgens niks doen. En je dan op de borst kloppen dat je tenminste het grotere plaatje ziet.

Het grotere plaatje is dit: niemand denkt dat zo'n speelgoedfolder de afbraak van emancipatie bewijst. Die afbraak blijkt pas als Bart Smit erop wordt aangesproken. Dan is het vrij schieten op die zure verheven feministische zeikuttent (dixit GeenStijl). De folder kan je uitleggen als een pijnlijk incidentje. De reacties leggen iets lelijkers bloot.

Dat gelijkwaardigheid een linkse hobby is. Dat ophef over een idiote folder vooral een belediging is 'voor de trotse moeders (respect voor de mama's) die met liefde en toewijding een huishouden draaiende houden' (opnieuw GeenStijl). Een spin zoals je alleen nog bij FOX News ziet. Feminisme als belediging voor het traditionele huishouden. Hoe bestaat het nog.

Gewapend met de twee eeuwige argumenten 'waar maak je je druk om' en 'ik zeg het tenminste eerlijk' wordt verworvenheid gereduceerd tot een marginale oprisping. De Nederlandse vrouw houdt nou eenmaal van stofzuigen. De natuur hou je niet tegen.

Oerinstincten

En daaroverheen komt Paulien Derwort, die het heeft over 'oerinstincten.' Een sluimerende gedachte dat gelijkwaardigheid tussen man en vrouw een decadent principe is dat stiekem tegennatuurlijk is. Een argument waarmee je niet moet aankomen als het over, bijvoorbeeld, homo-emancipatie gaat. Alsof we niet al duizenden jaren vooruitgang boeken die in principe tegennatuurlijk is. Alsof mijn oerinstincten me één reet kunnen schelen. Ik eet magnetron-maaltijden, verdomme.

Het debat, en dit stuk ongetwijfeld ook, wordt belachelijk gemaakt door mannen en vrouwen die denken dat we nog altijd onderdrukt worden door een linkse klik uit de jaren 70. Maar intussen leveren we lachend onze vooruitgang in. Het is ironisch dat het nieuwe politiek correcte establishment zich zo druk maakt om de sharia, maar tegelijkertijd de wil van vrouwen om gelijkwaardig te zijn wegzet als hysterisch getrut. Zo lang dat gebeurt zijn mannen en vrouwen niet gelijkwaardig. Niet echt.

Toegegeven, het is geen openlijke discriminatie. Het is een diepgeworteld patroon dat van onze moeders, echtgenotes en dochters nog altijd het zwakke geslacht maakt. En het wordt tijd dat ook mannen zich hier tegen uitspreken. Allereerst maar tegen zo'n Bart Smit-folder, want je moet ergens beginnen. Dan maar een gecasteerd mannetje dat zich heeft laten inpakken door het emancipatoire gevaar. Dan maar een hipster die zich losweekt van zijn oerinstincten. Dan maar een man die godbetert in de 21ste eeuw leeft. Een beetje kerel kan het hebben. Lul of geen lul, Ich bin ein Feminist.

VK2 - Hintum, Malou van. 'In het moderne feminisme is een vrouw zichzelf als ze een mannencliché imiteert' published 6-11-2013: <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/6177/Malou-van-Hintum/article/detail/3540000/2013/11/06/In-het-moderne-feminisme-is-een-vrouw-zichzelf-als-ze-een-mannencliche-imateert.dhtml>

De slet het nieuwe boegbeeld van het moderne feminisme? Ik zou liever zien dat vrouwen en mannen wat méér sletvrees hebben, zegt Malou van Hintum.

Dat nieuwe feminisme, ik weet het niet. Je moet er niet ouder dan 30 voor zijn (of lijken), en je moet er je kleren voor uittrekken. En je mag geen sletvrees hebben. Dat laatste maak je kenbaar door te vertellen dat je minstens 35 bedpartners hebt gehad, en door S L U T op je vingers te schilderen.

Naakt

In de feministische toekomst begroeten vrouwen elkaar 'met een vrolijk uitgeroepen 'sletje'', lees ik in het Volkskrant Magazine van afgelopen zaterdag. En promoten ze hun nieuwste boek door naakt op de foto te gaan, want 'naakt verkoopt' (hoe kómen ze erop!). Ten slotte kan het ook heel bevrijdend zijn om je door mannen te laten slaan en wurgen, en het verzamelde sperma van tien kerels uit een emmer te likken.

Mannencliché

Als ik het goed begrijp, betekent modern feminisme: alles wat vrouwen lekker vinden, is oké. Het heeft niet meer met politiek te maken, het is een 'gewoon lekker jezelf zijn'- beweging geworden, waarbij een vrouw bij uitstek zichzelf is als ze een mannencliché imiteert: met zo veel mogelijk mensen seks hebben. De slet, de feministe anno 2013, lust er wel pap van: ze doet niets liever dan seks hebben met de mannen die ze verwijt er een dubbele seksuele moraal op na te houden. Ik vind dat, uh, verrassend.

Seksuele stimulatie

De lustpil voor vrouwen die begin deze week weer in het nieuws kwam, maakt de hele kwestie nog een slagje ingewikkelder. Want terwijl de sletten stellen dat de seksualiteit van vrouwen wordt onderdrukt en de behoefte aan seks bij mannen en vrouwen even groot is, wordt de lustpil ontwikkeld omdat vrouwen juist minder zin zouden hebben. Dat komt, zegt seksuoloog Ellen Laan in de Volkskrant, omdat 'de meeste seksuele problemen van vrouwen te maken hebben met een gebrek aan adequate seksuele stimulatie'. Anders gezegd: als vrouwen op de juiste manier worden geprikkeld, dan is die pil helemaal niet nodig.

Konijnen

Ik ben daarom benieuwd naar de manier waarop de sletten hun sekspartners selecteren. Aangezien zij er geen genoeg van kunnen krijgen, komen ze kennelijk steeds de juiste mannen tegen. De mannen die hen zonder te haperen tot grote hoogten brengen. Valt het dan toch mee met de seksuele vaardigheid van de gemiddelde man? Wat me opvalt, is dat seks in deze discussie wordt gereduceerd tot klaarkomen. 'Van de mannen komt 95 procent bij de seks altijd klaar, van de vrouwen maar iets van 50 procent, dus logisch dat mannen vaker zin hebben,' zegt journalist Asha ten Broeke in de Volkskrant.

En wat ik jammer vind, is dat het slettenproject impulsiviteit en ongebreidelde promiscuïteit promoot. Een echte feminist neukt erop los. Ieder zijn meug, maar dat doet me toch te veel aan apen en konijnen denken. Wat dat betreft zou ik liever zien dat vrouwen én mannen wat meer sletvrees hebben in plaats van minder.

VK3 - Néhmé, Hala Naoum., Eddy Terstall and Gert-jan Segers. 'Prostitutie te lang gezien als kroonjuweel van onze ruimdenkendheid' published 19-11-2013:

<http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3546967/2013/11/19/Prostitutie-te-lang-gezien-als-kroonjuweel-van-onze-ruimdenkendheid.dhtml>

Raamprostitutie is geen symbool van ruimdenkendheid, maar van vernedering van vrouwen, schrijven Hala Naoum Néhmé, Eddy Terstall en Gert-jan Segers. En het kán anders. 'Het laten tentoonstellen van vrouwen is geen noodlot, maar een vrije keus van beleidsmakers.'

De vrouwen staan er een paar maanden, een paar jaar misschien. Totdat ze te oud worden en hun lichaam niet meer genoeg opbrengt. Daarna worden er weer nieuwe, jonge vrouwen geworven. Die gaan er ook weer staan, in hun naakte kwetsbaarheid, achter een raam aan een straat. Daarop paraderen hordes

mannen om te kijken voor welk lichaam ze een paar tientjes over hebben. En als het tot de daad komt, is het meestal ook nog eens een mannelijke pooier en mannelijke exploitant die hier het meeste geld van opstrijkt.

Door een tragisch misverstand is deze publieke vrouwenmarkt lang als een kroonjuweel van Nederlandse ruimdenkendheid beschouwd. En is die nog altijd een toeristische attractie. Maar het wordt tijd dat we zien wat raamprostitutie werkelijk is. Want het is geen onschuldige folklore en al helemaal geen reclamebord van een vrijgevochten wereldbeeld.

'De vleescarrousel'

Op de Amsterdamse Wallen is er een steegje met kleine kamertjes die de veelzeggende bijnaam heeft van 'de vleescarrousel'. Er zijn twee categorieën buitenlandse bezoekers die ons kunnen helpen om met andere ogen naar raamprostitutie te kijken. Er is de groep van buitenlandse die hier komen doen wat thuis verboden is. De vrouwen achter de ramen moeten hun blikken en opmerkingen voor lief nemen en na betaling nog wel meer dan dat. De tweede categorie is de groep bezoekers die zich na een wandeling over de Wallen geschokt afvraagt hoe wij Nederlanders in hemelsnaam vaak kwetsbare, buitenlandse vrouwen als vleeswaar in een etalage kunnen laten staan.

Goede vraag. Beide groepen bezoekers laten ons iets zien van wat deze 'vleescarrousel' is. Een vernedering van vrouwen.

Nederland heeft het VN Vrouwenverdrag ondertekend. Dat geeft ons iets in handen om bijvoorbeeld islamitische landen aan te spreken op de vaak beroerde positie die vrouwen daar hebben. Nederland brengt vrouwenrechten ook internationaal onder de aandacht. Onze overheid is er terecht trots op dat we, samen met Canada, leidend zijn op dit punt.

Maar dan moeten we ons ook zelf door dit VN-verdrag laten aanspreken. Artikel vijf verplicht lidstaten alles uit te bannen wat kan leiden tot de gedachte dat het ene geslacht minderwaardig is ten opzichte van het andere. En raamprostitutie heeft weinig met gelijkwaardigheid te maken. Wat we jongens in opvoeding en onderwijs proberen te leren over respect voor vrouwen, kan zomaar ongedaan worden gemaakt met één wandeling door 'de vleescarrousel'. Als de verdedigers van raamprostitutie dit vijfde artikel serieus nemen, zouden ze er op zijn minst voor moeten zorgen dat er straten komen waarin bijna naakte mannen in de etalage staan zodat er hier een gelijk speelveld ontstaat.

Zeggenschap over het eigen lichaam

Het verdrag benadrukt ook dat vrouwen de zeggenschap over hun eigen lichaam hebben. Artikel zes verplicht de lidstaten om alles te doen wat mogelijk is 'ter bestrijding van alle vormen van handel in vrouwen en van het exploiteren van prostitutie van vrouwen'. In de praktijk hebben bijna alle vrouwen een pooier die winsten opstrijkt en hen vaak tot hoge omzet dwingt. In haar onlangs verschenen boek *Prostitutie, de waarheid achter de Wallen* laat Renate van der Zee een mensenhandelrechercheur aan het woord. Hij vertelt dat er in Groningen honderdvijftig ramen zijn 'en je weet dat er achter minstens honderd daarvan dingen gebeuren die niet kloppen'.

Uit onderzoeken blijkt dat minimaal de helft van de prostituees onvrijwillig achter het raam staat. Burgemeester Van der Laan sprak onlangs bezorgd over honderden 'verkrachtingen' die iedere dag in de Amsterdamse prostitutie plaatsvinden. Ook die rauwe werkelijkheid maakt duidelijk dat raamprostitutie in Nederland haaks staat op letter en geest van het VN Vrouwenverdrag. En dan is het criterium niet dat er een minderheid van prostituees is die nooit iets merkt van vernedering en uitbuiting, maarde meerderheid bij wie daar wel sprake van is. De rechten van deze vrouwen gaan vóór het pleziertje van een hoerenloper of het verdienmodel van een pooier.

Vrije keus

Waarschijnlijk is prostitutie nooit helemaal uit te bannen. Wellicht zullen er voor sommige vrouwen altijd redenen zijn om geld te verdienen met sekswerk. Ongetwijfeld zullen er altijd mannen zijn die willen betalen

voor seks. Het gesprek daarover moeten we maar voor later bewaren. Want ook al accepteert je prostitutie als werkelijkheid, dat betekent nog niet dat raamprostitutie ook een noodzakelijk kwaad is. Zo heeft Rotterdam besloten wel clubs, maar geen raamprostitutie toe te staan. Het laten tentoonstellen van vrouwen is dus geen noodlot, maar een vrije keus van beleidsmakers.

Het is de keus van een samenleving die nog altijd wegstijgt bij veel ellende voor en achter de ramen. Een keus van mensen die nooit zouden willen dat een geliefde van henzelf daar in haar naakte kwetsbaarheid zou staan. De keus is aan ons.

VK4 - Ezzeroili, Nadia. 'Feministen van kleur willen gehoord worden – niet gered' published 25-1-2014: <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3583282/2014/01/25/Feministen-van-kleur-willen-gehoord-worden---niet-gered.dhtml>

'Zowel Asha ten Broeke als Machteld Zee getuigen van een elitaire, paternalistische houding', betoogt Nadia Ezzeroili. 'Niet nodig!'

Promovenda Machteld Zee heeft gelijk wanneer ze [stelt](#) dat vrouwenhaat van moslims niet weg gerelativeerd mag worden.

Laten we inderdaad eens ophouden met het goedpraten van genderscheiding in een debatcentrum. Ook het verschuilen achter liberale praatjes om moeilijke discussies uit de weg te gaan begint vervelend te worden. Ik gruwel daarvan. Maar Zee gaat de mist in wanneer zij alleen de intellectuele elite oproept om de discussie te voeren zodat de weg vrijgemaakt kan worden voor 'nieuwe feministen'. Het is hetzelfde paternalisme dat ze wetenschapsjournalist [Asha ten Broeke](#) - terecht - verwijft.

Die 'nieuwe feministen' zijn er immers al. Al jaren. En deze feministen willen niet gered, maar gehoord worden. Niet als ja-knikkende sidekicks van witte hoogopgeleide feministen, maar als volwaardige Nederlandse vrouwen van kleur met een eigen visie op vrouwenemancipatie.

Reddersyndroom

Kritiek op dit reddersyndroom wordt regelmatig ervaren als sabotage. Hoe ondankbaar van me! Maar ik heb mijn verworven persoonlijke vrijheden niet te danken aan discussies die door de intellectuele elite zijn gevoerd. Het was niet de elite die mijn feminisme heeft gevormd, maar de harde strijd voor zelfbeschikking die ik mijn jongste zus en andere jonge vrouwen om mij heen heb zien leveren - soms met heftige gevolgen.

In enkele gevallen stuitte ik zelfs op weerstand die nog verder gaat dan het verwijt feministische discussies te ondermijnen. Mijn kritiek is door een elitaire, zelfverklaard feministe eens weggehoond als 'gangsterpoëtisch'. Het was een weinig subtiele en onnodige verwijzing naar mijn afkomst en sociale klasse, slechts bedoeld om mijn stem te diskwalificeren.

Waarom zou ik blij moeten zijn met een goedbedoelende, maar betuttelende Asha ten Broeke die zich amper heeft ingelezen in de materie? Die, naar mijn mening, zelfs niet ver genoeg gaat in haar afwijzing van religieuze en culturele vrouwenhaat- en discriminatie? Waarom zou ik deze discussie overlaten aan een realistischer maar uiteindelijk net zo bevoogdende Machteld Zee, terwijl ik evengoed mijn eigen stem kan laten horen om mijn getuigenissen en ideeën over vrouwenemancipatie luid en duidelijk kenbaar te maken?

Deze double struggle moet maar eens afgelopen zijn. Het is al beroerd genoeg als mensen in je directe omgeving je kwetsbaarheid besmeuren wanneer je naar buiten komt met persoonlijke verhalen over je weg naar zelfbeschikking, maar het wordt vermoeiend als je zelfs binnen het feminisme moet vechten tegen betutteling door andere vrouwen. Mijn oproep om een open discussie - vrij van bullshit - te voeren is in de eerste plaats gericht aan alle vrouwen van kleur, ongeacht seksuele voorkeur, religie en sociale klasse.

Want zoals de Amerikaanse zwarte lesbienne en feminist Audre Lorde in haar essay *The Masters Tool Will Never Dismantle the Masters House* (1984) schreef: 'Diegenen onder ons die buiten de cirkel van de maatschappelijke definitie van acceptabele vrouwen staan, weten dat overleven geen academische vaardigheid is. (...) Het gaat erom te leren hoe we onze verschillen in kracht kunnen omzetten.'

Reddingsvestjes

Mijn feminisme is dus inclusief. De intellectuele elite hoeft zich niet koest te houden. Onderzoeken, Kamervragen en (opinie)artikelen zijn nuttig en nodig. Maar feminisme is al lang geen bezigheid meer voor verlichte blanke, hoogopgeleide vrouwen die reddingsvestjes staan uit te delen aan moslimvrouwen, zodat ze veilig op hun emancipatiegolven kunnen surfen.

Die tijd is voorbij. Er is een generatie mondige, jonge en gedreven feministen van kleur opgestaan die niet zit te wachten op schouderklopjes van paternalistische links-elitaire en academische feministen. Een generatie die bovenal staat te trappelen om korte metten te maken met alle vormen van misogynie, racisme, genderdiscriminatie en homofobie.

VK5 - Hirsi Ali, Ayaan. 'Brandeis smoort de geest van vrijheid waarvoor zij is opgericht' published 11-4-2014: <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/3184/opinie/article/detail/3633603/2014/04/11/Hirsi-Ali-Brandeis-smoort-de-geest-van-vrijheid-waarvoor-zij-is-opgericht.dhtml>

Ik dacht dat Brandeis me wilde eren voor mijn werk als verdediger van de rechten van vrouwen tegen het misbruik dat zo vaak religieus van oorsprong is, schrijft Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

Dinsdag besloot universiteit Brandeis een eredoctoraat, dat ze mij zou geven bij haar afstudeerplechtigheid, in te trekken. Ik neem afstand van de verklaring van de universiteit dat ik hierover ben geraadpleegd. Ik was juist geschokt toen bestuursvoorzitter Frederick Lawrence mij slechts enkele uren voor de officiële verklaring belde om mij het besluit mede te delen.

Toen Brandeis mij benaderde met het aanbod van een eredoctoraat heb ik dat deels aanvaard vanwege haar indrukwekkende verleden. Ze werd gesticht in 1948, kort na de Tweede Wereldoorlog en de Holocaust, als niet-sektarische universiteit, toen veel Amerikaanse universiteiten nog strenge toelatingsquota hanteerden voor Joodse studenten.

Ik dacht dat Brandeis me wilde eren voor mijn werk als verdediger van de rechten van vrouwen tegen het misbruik dat zo vaak religieus van oorsprong is. Meer dan een decennium heb ik me uitgesproken tegen vrouwenbesnijdenis, eerwraak en delen van de sharia die het mishandelen van vrouw en kinderen rechtvaardigen. Een deel van mijn werk was het ter discussie stellen van de rol van de islam bij het legitimeren van die praktijken. Ik was dan ook niet verbaasd dat mijn 'gewone' critici, vooral de Council of American-Islamic Relations, protesteerde tegen het eerbetoon aan mij.

Nauwelijks geloofwaardig

Wel verbaasde mij het gedrag van Brandeis. Na maandenlang mijn toespraak tot hun studenten te hebben voorbereid, kondigde ze dinsdag aan dat zij 'sommige van mijn vroegere uitspraken', waarvan zij zich daarvoor niet bewust was geweest, 'niet door de vingers kon zien'. Mijn critici hebben zich echter al heel lang gespecialiseerd in het selectief citeren van mijn uitspraken om een verkeerde voorstelling te geven van mij en mijn werk. Het is nauwelijks geloofwaardig dat Brandeis dit niet wist toen ze mij het eredoctoraat aanbood.

Erger dan de smet op mijn reputatie is dat een instituut dat is opgericht voor religieuze vrijheid, zijn eigen grondslagen zo verraadt. De 'geest van vrije expressie' waarnaar de verklaring van Brandeis verwijst, is gesmoord, aangezien mijn critici hebben weten te voorkomen dat ik de afgestudeerden van 2014 zou toespreken. Brandeis noch mijn critici wisten wat ik zou gaan zeggen. Ze wilden mij alleen het zwijgen

opleggen.

Niet tevreden met een publieke verloochening, heeft Brandeis me uitgenodigd 'in de toekomst deel te nemen aan een dialoog over deze belangrijke kwesties'. Maar zij heeft haar deel al gezegd. Ik wens niet 'deel te nemen' aan zo'n eenzijdige dialoog. Mij rest slechts de afgestudeerden van 2014 het beste te wensen en te hopen dat zij betere pleitbezorgers van de vrije expressie en de vrije gedachte zullen worden dan hun alma mater.

Trouw

TR1 - Schie, Patrick van. 'Vrouwenquotum uit Brussel dwingt tot discriminatie' published 25-11-2013.
<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4328/Opinie/article/detail/3550972/2013/11/25/Vrouwenquotum-uit-Brussel-dwingt-tot-discriminatie.dhtml>

Voorstanders van almaar meer Europese integratie beweren vaak dat klachten over onnodige bemoeizucht uit Brussel ongegrond zijn. Uitdagend zeggen zij dan: noem maar eens een terrein waarmee Europa zich ten onrechte bezighoudt.

Welnu, die liggen voor het oprapen. Maar bovendien zijn Brusselse bureaucraten en Europarlementariërs buitengewoon 'behulpzaam' om er steeds weer voorbeelden aan toe te voegen. Zo stemde afgelopen week een ruime meerderheid van het Europees Parlement voor invoering van een vrouwenquotum van 40 procent in 'niet-uitvoerende functies' voor alle bedrijven met meer dan 250 werknemers. Dit zou vanaf 2020 moeten gaan gelden.

Eerder schreef de Nederlandse minister van Buitenlandse Zaken Frans Timmermans in reactie op de ontwerprichtlijn voor quota van Europees Commissaris Viviane Reding dat dit onderwerp 'niet thuishoort op Europees niveau'. Hij heeft slechts ten dele gelijk. Het onderwerp hoort helemaal niet thuis *op welk politiek niveau dan ook*. Bemoeizucht met het personeelsbeleid van een particuliere organisatie, zoals een bedrijf, is een uiting van het helaas nog altijd welig onder veel politici tierende 'maakbaarheidsdenken'.

Van sociaal-democraten en andere linkse politici zijn we 'gewend' dat zij burgers en bedrijven graag van alles en nog wat opleggen, in plaats van hen gewoon te laten. In de Europese Unie beperkt zulke knevelingsdrift zich helaas niet tot de politieke linkerzijde. Eurocommissaris Reding is een christen-democrate.

In het Europees Parlement stemden ook haar politieke verwanten en zelfs een meerderheid van de fractie die voor liberaal wil doorgaan - maar waarin ook bijvoorbeeld het 'pragmatische' D66 zitting heeft - voor het vrouwenquotum. Die laatste fractie staat dan ook onder leiding van aartseurofiel Guy Verhofstadt, maar gelukkig bleven de VVD'ers wel liberaal denken. Zij brachten hun stem tegen het quotavoorstel uit.

Discussies over quota gaan nogal eens over de vraag of die quota wel werken. Veel belangrijker dan de (vermeende) effectiviteit van zo'n maatregel is echter de (on)eerlijkheid ervan. Wie een aanstelling te danken heeft aan een quotum is niet op zijn of haar individuele capaciteiten beoordeeld, maar is behandeld als onderdeel van een categorie. Net als socialisten denken bureaucraten niet in mensen van vlees en bloed maar in statistieken. In het Europees Parlement geldt dit blijkbaar eveneens voor tal van niet-socialistische afgevaardigden.

Wat vroeger 'positieve discriminatie' werd genoemd - een contradictio in terminis - is later voortgezet onder de omfloerste benaming 'positieve actie'. Wie echter de een (in dit geval een vrouw) voorttrekt, ontnemt de ander (in dit geval een man) een eerlijke kans.

Daar is niets positiefs aan en het blijft discriminatie. Indien het al waar is dat mannen in de top van bedrijven zijn oververtegenwoordigd, en dat dit niet voortvloeit uit de keuze van veel vrouwen in deeltijd te werken en zich zodoende niet voor topfuncties beschikbaar te stellen, dan heeft een nieuwe mannelijke kandidaat er weinig aan dat veel mensen die toevallig ook man zijn reeds op functies zitten die hij begeert.

Werknemers behoren gewoon te worden beoordeeld op hun eigen afzonderlijke kwaliteiten voor de desbetreffende functie. Wie het meest geschikt voor een functie is, behoort deze te krijgen. De frase 'bij gelijke geschiktheid wordt de voorkeur gegeven aan een vrouw' leidt evenzeer tot onterecht onderscheid, want bij de keuze tussen twee vrouwen of twee mannen zal tenslotte ook een niet-geslachtsgebonden eigenschap de doorslag geven.

Zo'n eigenschap kan evengoed beslissen bij de keuze tussen een vrouw en een man. Indien telkens de meest geschikte persoon wordt gekozen, zal uiteindelijk de man-vrouw-verhouding vanzelf evenredig raken aan de verhouding tussen de kandidaten die zich voor functies aanmelden.

Het is niet aan ambtenaren of politici te bepalen wie het beste een functie in een bedrijf kan vervullen. Als bedrijven werkelijk, zoals men in Brussel denkt, niet voor de beste kiezen, snijden zij daarmee alleen maar in hun eigen vlees. Bedrijven hebben immers, anders dan overheden, te maken met concurrentie. Indien zij er niet voor zorgen dat in elke functie, hoe 'hoog' of 'laag' ook, de meest geschikte kracht terecht komt, delven zij het onderspit.

Eurocraten en EU-politici die niets beters te doen hebben dan burgers en bedrijven dwars te zitten en tot discriminatie aan te zetten, onderstrepen hun eigen overbodigheid. Het Europees Parlement wil bedrijven die niet aan de quota-regeling voldoen met boetes en 'uitsluiting van openbare aanbestedingen' gaan bestraffen. Zinniger is het zo min mogelijk politieke besluitvorming aan EU-instellingen uit te besteden.

TR2 - Blessing, Maurice. 'Meisjesbesnijdenis heeft wel degelijk met de islam te maken' published 23-2-2014. <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5091/Religie/article/detail/3601826/2014/02/23/Meisjesbesnijdenis-heeft-wel-degelijk-met-de-islam-te-maken.dhtml>

Tijdens de jaarlijkse dag tegen genitale verminking dook het taboe weer op: meisjesbesnijdenis heeft niets te maken met de islam. Toch roept de sharia ertoe op.

Zoë was vijf jaar oud in 2009, toen ze kort in het nieuws was. Haar clitoris was weggesneden. Net als een deel van haar schaamlippen. "Papa heeft geknipt", luidde haar verklaring bij de politie. Daarbij zou een botte schaar zijn gebruikt, wat het ruwe, halfslachtige resultaat kan verklaren. Haar vader, een 29-jarige Nederlander van Marokkaanse herkomst die zich op het islamitisch geloof had gestort, werd door het Openbaar Ministerie in staat van beschuldiging gesteld.

Dit was het startschot voor een stortvloed aan ongefundeerde meningsvorming. In een opmerkelijke bijdrage in NRC verketterde toenmalig powerfeministe Heleen Mees, bijgestaan door haar gelegenheidssouffleur moslimzaken Mohammed Benzakour, iedereen die een verband durfde te leggen tussen islam en vrouwenbesnijdenis. Vrouwenbesnijdenis was namelijk 'geen islamitisch gebruik' maar 'een oud-Afrikaanse praktijk die nergens in de Koran wordt genoemd'. En hoewel Mees en Benzakour te jong zijn om persoonlijk onder de lakens van de profeet te kunnen hebben gegluurd, wisten ze stellig te vermelden dat diens vrouwen en dochters niet 'onder het mes zijn gegaan'. Mohammed zou zelfs pogingen hebben gedaan 'dit wrede gebruik uit te bannen.' Als aanvullend bewijsstuk poneerden de twee de stelling dat in Indonesië, 'het grootste moslimland ter wereld', meisjesbesnijdenis 'niet voorkomt'.

Geen weerlegging

De slagroom op de taart moest dan nog volgen. Want, aldus de auteurs in een onnavolgbare U-bocht, mochten Nederlandse moslims in de toekomst tóch massaal uit religieuze overwegingen tot besnijdenis van

hun dochters overgaan, dan was dit alvast de schuld van 'Hirsi Ali en alle PvdA-gerelateerd mediakabaal'. Voor alle duidelijkheid: hier werd iedere speculatie over een oorzakelijk verband tussen geloof en vrouwenbesnijdenis bestempeld tot medeplichtigheid aan een ernstige misdaad. Dat is wellicht de reden geweest dat in de NRC geen feitelijke weerlegging volgde - niet door academische specialisten en niet door de wetenschapsredactie.

Echt door helemaal niemand? Nee: een dappere schrijver-dichter genaamd Rudy Kousbroek, geboren op Sumatra, durfde het aan in de krant te reageren. Vier jaar eerder, schreef Kousbroek, was hem tijdens een reis door Indonesië opgevallen hoezeer zijn geboorteland was veranderd. Op de terugvlucht was hij in gesprek geraakt met een Indonesische arts. Kousbroek had zijn verbazing geuit over "de snelle opmars van de islam op Java en vooral door de gelijktijdige vervanging van de vertrouwde sarong-kabaja door de Arabische hobbezak-met-hoofddoekje. Ik zou er nog meer moeite mee hebben als ik wist wat er onder die kleren schuilging, zei de arts, en hij vertelde mij dat de opmars van de islam op Java gepaard ging aan een opmars van de vrouwenbesnijdenis. Het ging niet om een 'symbolisch kerfje', zo maakte hij duidelijk, maar om clitoridectomie naar Arabisch voorbeeld. Deze besnijdenis kwam weliswaar niet voor in de Koran, maar was niettemin een ritueel dat behoorde bij de bekering, in parallel met de besnijdenis voor mannen."

Maar toen Kousbroek, eenmaal teruggekeerd in Nederland, over die ervaring vertelde, was hij 'door een horde van zelfbenoemde experts' van 'laster' beschuldigd. Hij had zijn 'koloniale mond' moeten houden, en had 'na enige schermutselingen' besloten aan dat advies gevolg te geven.

Kousbroek overleed in 2010. Er valt dus niet meer te achterhalen wie die 'zelfbenoemde experts' waren. Maar verbazingwekkend is zijn intimiderende ervaring zeker niet, aangezien nog in 2006 een rapport van de Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid verscheen, getiteld 'Klassieke sharia en vernieuwing', waarin letterlijk wordt gesteld dat vrouwenbesnijdenis 'ten onrechte' wordt toegeschreven aan 'de islam' (opvallend detail: in de literatuurlijst van dit rapport is een artikel te vinden uit de gezaghebbende International Journal of Middle East Studies, waarin de relatie tussen vrouwenbesnijdenis en de klassieke sharia/ islam juist uitgebreid wordt onderbouwd).

Clitoridectomie

Gelukkig lijkt Kousbroek nu postuum gerehabiliteerd te worden. Want wat blijkt uit nieuw onderzoek in niet-Afrikaanse landen? Dat er sprake is van ernstige 'onderrapportage' door de VN van het wereldwijde fenomeen vrouwenbesnijdenis, omdat deze organisatie haar data altijd uitsluitend op het Afrikaanse continent verzamelde. Niet opgenomen in de VN-statistieken zijn de moslimvrouwen uit het Midden-Oosten en Oost-Azië.

Op grond van fragmentarisch onderzoek mogen we aannemen dat daar tientallen miljoenen moslima's zijn besneden. Alleen al in Maleisië is 94 procent van de vrouwen, 14 miljoen, besneden. Op West-Java en Sumatra blijkt de ingreep vrijwel collectief te worden toegepast. Dan spreek je al snel over enkele tientallen miljoenen vrouwen. In de overige delen van Indonesië, waar de islam een kortere geschiedenis kent, neemt de populariteit van 'clitoridectomie' sterk toe. De ingreep wordt dan ook goedgekeurd door de Indonesische Raad van Ulama (een semi-overheidsorgaan van islamitische schriftgeleerden) en 's lands grootste moslimorganisatie, de Nahdlatul Ulama.

In een willekeurig onderzocht Arabisch land als Oman blijkt zo'n 80 procent van de vrouwen besneden te zijn. "Overall waar je onderzoek doet, vind je aanwijzingen voor FGM" (de Engelse afkorting voor genitale verminking van vrouwen), zo citeert de Volkskrant een onderzoeker van de Duits-Koerdische organisatie Wadi, die ook de situatie in Noord-Irak onderzocht. "Maar het is nooit serieus genomen."

We weten nu dat Kousbroek geen abjecte koloniale moslimhater of misogynie fantaseer was. Dat is nuttig. Dat deze praktijk niet alleen in 'donker Afrika', maar ook in het Midden-Oosten en Azië miljoenen vrouwen treft, is lang 'onbekend' gebleven omdat het de hulporganisaties beter uitkwam om vooral de schijn te vermijden dat de strijd tegen de besnijdenis een strijd tegen de islam is. Ik kom daar later op terug.

Zelf controleren

Maar waarom besnijden veel moslims hun dochters, terwijl er niets over in de Koran staat? Die vraag is makkelijk te beantwoorden. Ze komt voort uit een uiterst weerbarstig misverstand: namelijk dat de Koran de belangrijkste bron zou vormen voor de sharia - de traditionele leefregels van de islam. Maar dat is geenszins het geval. Het islamitische Heilige Boek is daarom ook niet bruikbaar als Enkhuizer Almanak voor moslimzaken - al wordt die indruk op de opiniepagina's vaak gewekt.

Dat kunt u zelf eenvoudig controleren. Neem een koran ter hand, of google een vertaling op het internet. Gaat u vervolgens bij uzelf na welke sharia-voorschriften ('islamregels') u kent, en probeert u deze regels eens in uw koran terug te vinden.

Daar gaan we: de plicht van vrouwen om hoofddoekjes te dragen ... Nee, helaas, staat er niet in. Eens kijken ... het bestraffen van overspelige vrouwen door steniging! Nee, ook niet. Gek is dat ... Besnijdenis van mannen dan?

Neen. Helemaal niets over terug te vinden! Ziet u wel? Waarom zou deze eenvoudige methode nu niet werken bij opiniemakers?

Nu wilt u natuurlijk weten waar de grote meerderheid van de islamitische leefregels dán vandaan komt. Het eenvoudigste antwoord luidt: uit het gewoonterecht van het pre-islamitische Midden-Oosten. Dit werd voor de komst van de islam, in de zevende eeuw, in het Arabisch sunna genoemd, 'het voorbeeld dat nagevolgd dient te worden'. En inderdaad werd dit begrip later geïslamiseerd tot wat de Palestijns-Amerikaanse wetenschapper Wael Hallaq, 's werelds meest vooraanstaande kenner van de klassieke sharia, 'de profetische sunna' noemt: het voorbeeldgedrag van 'de Profeet' en zijn metgezellen.

Heersende norm

Deze laatste, geïslamiseerde sunna werd door de religieuze elites van de vroege moslimgemeenschappen overgedragen in de vorm van vrome anekdotes over de tijd van de profeet: de zogenaamde 'hadiths'. Het is in deze hadiths - waarmee oude, pre-islamitische normen en regels die niet in de teksten van de Koran voorkwamen konden worden 'geïslamiseerd' - dat we de eerste 'schriftuurlijke' verwijzingen naar vrouwenbesnijdenis terugvinden.

Wat daarbij opvalt is dat in de betreffende hadiths niet zozeer tot vrouwenbesnijdenis wordt opgeroepen, maar dat de ingreep als heersende norm wordt voorondersteld. Zo wordt de seksuele daad vaak omschreven als 'wanneer de twee besnijdenissen elkaar ontmoeten' of 'als de ene besnijdenis de andere raakt'. De schriftgeleerden gingen er dus vanuit dat zowel de moslimse man als vrouw besneden was. Dat dit ook in de praktijk bij in ieder geval een deel van de Arabische vrouwen het geval was, blijkt uit andere, niet-religieuze bronnen. Zo komen we in de klassieke Arabische literatuur de grove belediging 'zoon van de clitorissnijder' tegen.

Niet alle middeleeuwse juristen behandelen het onderwerp vrouwenbesnijdenis. Maar wanneer zij dit wél deden - en dat waren niet de minsten onder hen - dan waren ze bijna zonder uitzondering enthousiast over het gebruik. Zo noemde de middeleeuwse Hanbalitische rechtsgeleerde Ibn Qayyim (tegenwoordig vaak aangehaald door salafisten) het besnijden van de clitoris 'een bewijs van dienstbaarheid aan God'. Het besnijden van vrouwen paste dan ook binnen het meer algemene streven van de, zonder uitzondering mannelijke, rechtsgeleerden om de seksualiteit van de vrouw te beteugelen. Zij had recht op haar seksueel genot - zij moest wel gemotiveerd blijven om kinderen te baren en haar man te bevredigen - maar het mocht niet al te gek worden. Een 'gelimiteerd' wegsnijden van de clitoris paste binnen dit ideaalbeeld.

En zie: ook voor dit doel bleek een hadith te zijn overgeleverd. Zo zou de profeet een besnijdster in Medina hebben opgedragen: "Haal het niet helemaal weg, want dat is beter voor de vrouw en heeft de voorkeur van de man." Dat zelfs de schriftgeleerden erkenden dat deze hadith op discutabele wijze was overgeleverd,

weerhield hen er niet van hem als bron voor de Wet te gebruiken. Zo kwamen zowel soennitische als sjiiitische geleerden uiteindelijk tot de conclusie dat de besnijdenis van islamitische meisjes ofwel sunna (aanbevolen dus) dan wel 'verplicht' was.

Privésfeer

Dat brengt ons bij de vraag hoe bovenstaande kennis, te vinden in bijna iedere universiteitsbibliotheek in Nederland, voor het grote publiek zo lang verborgen heeft kunnen blijven. Veel onderzoekers zijn waarschijnlijk misleid door het taboe waarmee het gebruik ook in de moslimwereld zelf nog altijd wordt omgeven. Arabische bedoeïenen gebruikten niet voor niets het woord sirr ('geheim') voor vrouwenbesnijdenis. En waar de besnijdenis van jongetjes in de islamitische wereld in het openbaar wordt gevierd, speelt die van jonge meisjes zich geheel in de privésfeer af. Geen man of buitenstaander mag erbij zijn.

Ook racistische vooronderstellingen zullen een rol te hebben gespeeld. Zo gingen antropologen er automatisch van uit dat een dergelijk 'barbaars' gebruik uit 'donker Afrika' afkomstig moest zijn. Nog altijd wordt door antropologen beweerd dat de term 'faraonische besnijdenis' (de meest ingrijpende vorm) op een Egyptische en dus Afrikaanse herkomst wijst.

Opvallend genoeg zien de Soedanezen die deze versie toepassen dat zelf anders. Voor hen bewijst die benaming juist dat de traditie oorspronkelijk uit het nóorden komt. Uit de Arabische wereld dus.

Maar de belangrijkste reden voor de onbekendheid is waarschijnlijk de huiver onder activisten dat hun strijd tegen vrouwenbesnijdenis zal worden beschouwd als een strijd tegen de islam als geheel, zodra er een link tussen die twee wordt gelegd.

Sharia-traditie

Zoiets hebben we de afgelopen decennia vaker gezien: bij djihad en islam. Politiek geïnspireerde wetenschappers, auteurs en activisten hebben zich enorm ingespannen om de relatie ertussen te ontkennen. De gedachte daarachter: als we 'islam' en 'dijhad' ont koppelen, dan kunnen we het laatste fenomeen veel effectiever bestrijden. Eén blik op het huidige Midden-Oosten is genoeg om het failliet van die redenering aan te tonen.

Het bespreekbaar maken van de relatie tussen de sharia-traditie en vrouwenbesnijdenis of djihad maakt niet van iedere moslim automatisch een 'besnijder' of 'terrorist'. Waar het wel toe zal leiden is iets waar een enorme behoefte aan bestaat in onze samenleving: namelijk het vergaren van meer inzicht in het proces van identiteitsvorming door moderne moslims. Zoals bekend gebruiken velen de eeuwenoude sharia-traditie (vrij toegankelijk via internet) als grabbelton om een 'unieke', vaak expliciet niet-westerse, 'moslimidentiteit' te creëren. En daarbij zijn natuurlijk die elementen het interessantst die haaks lijken te staan op 'westerse' waarden en normen. Misschien verklaart dit waarom wereldwijd onder moslims de populariteit van vrouwenbesnijdenis lijkt toe te nemen, juist op het moment dat het gebruik volgens de statistieken afneemt onder niet-moslims.

En, ook niet onbelangrijk, het verschaft ons informatie waarmee vrouwenbesnijdenis via de rechtbank effectief kan worden bestreden. De vader van Zoë werd vrijgesproken vanwege gebrek aan bewijs. Bij die beslissing speelde, volgens een verslag in Trouw, mee dat hij nota bene als Nederlands-Marokkaanse born-again moslim geen overtuigend motief had. De rechter had vast anders geoordeeld als hij meer inzicht had gehad in het verband tussen de islamitische sharia-traditie, moslimse identiteitsvorming en clitoridectomie (en ook als de verdachte een 'zwarte' Afrikaan uit de officiële 'risico-categorieën' van de overheid was geweest.

Geen onderwijs

Ook de preventie zou gebaat zijn bij meer openheid over de relatie tussen vrouwenmishandeling en religieuze tradities. Vanwege het zware taboe op dit onderwerp tasten hulpverleners hier vaak in het duister.

Want wat is nu precies een religieuze traditie en hoe ontwikkelt die zich? Wat voor rol speelt een dergelijke traditie in het krachtenveld van 'actoren' binnen een gezin, of een gemeenschap? Waarom worden tradities door sommigen binnen die gemeenschap bestreden en door anderen juist gepromoot?

Dit leer je niet op de opleidingen voor maatschappelijk werk of op de huisartsenopleiding. Want wie zou dat moeten doen? En op basis van welke informatie? De universitaire studie van de sharia houdt zich, weet ik als sharia-docent, niet met zulke vragen bezig. Theorieën over de rol van sharia-tradities in moderne samenlevingen worden er (nog) niet ontwikkeld, laat staan toegepast. Terwijl die bijzonder waardevol zouden zijn.

Als de overheid écht werk wil maken van de bestrijding van vrouwenbesnijdenis, dan zal ze universiteiten moeten stimuleren om dit thema onverfrozen te gaan bestuderen. Nederland geeft vanouds prioriteit aan onderzoek naar de relatie tussen sharia en staat, of de ontwikkeling van een 'liberale islam'. Maar bij relevant onderzoek horen ook hete hangijzers, zoals de relatie tussen sharia en vrouwenbesnijdenis (en die tussen religie en eerwraak).

De feiten erover zijn zoals ze zijn. Grondig onderzoek ernaar zal zeker wrijvingen opleveren. maar we hoeven niet bang te zijn dat het gesprek erover 'over de hoofden van de moslims heen' wordt gevoerd. Want veel jonge moslims - de vrouwen in nóg groteren getale dan de mannen - melden zich aan de laaglandse universiteiten. Zij kunnen, net als iedere andere betrokken Nederlander, volop deelnemen aan discussie en onderzoek.

TR3 - Kips, Maud and Annemie Knibbe. 'Meisjes in de rk kerk lijden als vrouw opnieuw' published 17-3-2014: <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/5091/Religie/article/detail/3615841/2014/03/17/Meisjes-in-de-rk-kerk-lijden-als-vrouw-opnieuw.dhtml>

Mishandelde en misbruikte vrouwen hebben behoefte aan overtuigende erkenning door de rooms-katholieke kerk, betogen belangenbehartigers Maud Kips en Annemie Knibbe.

Er gaat veel mis voor vrouwen die in hun jeugd mishandeld of misbruikt, of mishandeld én misbruikt zijn door een of meer geestelijken in de rooms-katholieke kerk. De voorzitters van de Konferentie Nederlandse Religieuzen en de bisschoppenconferentie, broeder Cees van Dam en kardinaal Wim Eijk, zijn verantwoordelijk voor de erkenning van meldingen daarover. Namens de vrouwen die leven met deze verborgen geschiedenis en haar gevolgen, gaan wij vandaag met hen in gesprek, samen met de voorzitters van Mea Culpa en Klokk.

Het kerkelijk gezag heeft voorzien in een klachtencommissie die zich buigt over seksueel misbruik. Klachten over ander geweld behandelt deze commissie echter niet. Voor vrouwen die jarenlang psychisch en lichamelijk zijn mishandeld en daarnaast nog eens één of enkele keren misbruikt, is het kunstmatig, vervreemdend en vernederend om uitsluitend dat misbruik ter sprake te mogen brengen.

Ontkennende overste

De vrouwen die zich wel bij de klachtencommissie hebben gemeld om misbruik onder de verantwoordelijkheid van zustercongregaties, krijgen vrijwel als regel te maken met een bijzonder arrogante en ontkennende houding van de overste. Dit doet veel vrouwen opnieuw lijden.

Naast de klachtenprocedure hebben deskundige bemiddelaars een traject aangeboden, waarvan slachtoffers en kerkelijk verantwoordelijken samen gebruik kunnen maken om tot erkenning en genoegdoening te komen. Een aantal broedercongregaties heeft, in samenspraak met de meest mannelijke slachtoffers, hieraan de voorkeur gegeven.

In deze bemiddeling worden zowel seksueel misbruik als mishandeling besproken. Ongeveer tweehonderd

slachtoffers hebben dit traject gevolgd. Zij ontvingen een overtuigende persoonlijke erkenning en kregen een compensatie aangeboden die vergelijkbaar is met die bij de klachtenprocedure en uitdrukking gaf aan de erkenning. Dat waren bevrijdende processen. Tot nu toe weigeren echter alle zustercongregaties - met vooral vrouwelijke slachtoffers - deze herstelbemiddeling, met een beroep op het gezag van de KNR.

Vorig jaar oktober heeft het kerkelijk gezag ten slotte opdracht gegeven tot het instellen van een procedure die moet voorzien in erkenning en genoegdoening voor lichamelijk en psychisch geweld. In reactie op de vorm van deze procedure heeft minister Opstelten er op 14 november 2013 bij de kerk op aangedrongen om betere procedures te bieden aan de betreffende slachtoffers, vergelijkbaar met die voor seksueel misbruik, en te zorgen voor een persoonlijk bejegening.

Luisterend oor

Dat sluit aan bij wat de vrouwen nodig hebben. Zij willen van de verantwoordelijke kerkelijke gezagsdragers erkenning voor de mishandelingen en de gevolgen daarvan in hun leven: zien en horen dat begrepen wordt wat zij vertellen. Om eindelijk woorden te vinden voor hun geschiedenis hebben zij eerst het luisterend oor nodig van een zelfgekozen competente vertrouwenspersoon. Voor het gesprek met de overste is de leiding nodig van deskundige en onafhankelijke bemiddelaars.

De nu ingestelde procedure voor geweld biedt de melders echter voornamelijk schriftelijke verklaringen met de handtekening van een van de bisschoppen. De verantwoordelijke overste hoeft er niet voor te tekenen en kan zelfs blijven ontkennen. Desgewenst kan de melder een eenmalig gesprek vragen met leden van de commissie die de verklaringen opstelt. De compensatie staat in geen verhouding tot die in zaken van seksueel misbruik. Dit wordt niet als erkenning ervaren.

Wij hopen vandaag in gesprek met kardinaal Eijk en broeder Van Dam te komen tot een wending ten goede. Zonder overtuigende erkenning kan het niet langer.

Daarom verzoeken wij hen namens vrouwelijke melders om gepaste openheid naar nieuwe melders en melders van steunbewijs, een transparante procedure, een persoonlijke bejegening van melders door onafhankelijke vertrouwenspersonen en bemiddelaars, en toegang tot de klachtencommissie voor seksueel misbruik zolang dat nodig is.

TR4 - Drayer, Elma. 'En weer wordt Ayaan Hirsi Ali weggezet als islamofobisch' published 10-4-2014:
<http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/6847/Elma-Drayer/article/detail/3633128/2014/04/10/En-weer-wordt-Ayaan-Hirsi-Ali-weggezet-als-islamofobisch.dhtml>

Het heeft even geduurd, maar nu is er ook in haar nieuwe vaderland een relletje uitgebroken rond Ayaan Hirsi Ali. De bestuurderen van Brandeis University kwamen dinsdag terug van hun voornemen om haar in mei een eredoctoraat te verlenen. Bij nader inzien stroken haar opvattingen namelijk niet met de 'kernwaarden' die de universiteit wil uitdragen.

In The New York Times was te lezen waarom zij van hun plan waren teruggekomen. Niet uit zichzelf zagen zij het licht, maar pas na een krachtige lobby vanuit de Amerikaanse moslimgemeenschap. Er kwam een petitie op gang en er ging een brief naar de voorzitter van Brandeis University, waarin ze als 'notorious Islamo-phobe' werd betiteld.

Een hardnekkig déjà vu drong zich op. In dit land kon Hirsi Ali immers evenmin op veel sympathie rekenen - zeker niet onder de luitjes die religiekritiek consequent verwarren met wat ze 'islamofobie' noemen.

Scherp staat in het geheugen hoe wetenschappers in 2005 over elkaar heen buitelden van verontwaardiging toen de Universiteit van Amsterdam Hirsi Ali had gevraagd te spreken bij de opening van het academisch jaar. Dat uitgerekend háár die eer te beurt viel, het was een schande. "Waarom Hirsi Ali uitnodigen als

woordvoerder van moslimvrouwen, terwijl er zoveel vrouwen zijn die daar al jarenlang werkelijk voor opkomen?", mokte ene professor doctor Annelies Moors. Goddank trok het college van bestuur zich van deze protesten niets aan en liet Hirsi Ali gewoon haar rede houden.

Maar de pogingen om haar de mond te snoeren bleven. Vaakst gehoorde argument: ze zou niet weten wat er leefde onder moslima's. Onzin, natuurlijk. Hirsi Ali wist heel goed waarover ze het had - uit eigen, bittere ervaring. Alleen omdat ze een boodschap bracht die de belijders van de multiculturele gedachte allerminst beviel, werd ze consequent verdacht gemaakt, tot getraumatiseerd geval bestempeld, weggezet als willoos werktuig der xenofobische krachten, als 'jullie zwarte prinses'.

Geen wonder dat zij haar opgelucht uitzwaaiden toen ze Nederland in 2006 verruilde voor de Verenigde Staten. Van deze hinderlijke tegenstem zouden ze voortaan geen last meer hebben.

Niettemin vond Anja Meulenbelt het drie jaar later nodig om haar nog een trap na te geven. In haar eigen krakende proza: "Ik heb me wild geërgerd aan de domme gemakzucht waarmee Hirsi Ali, die kennelijk door al die media-aandacht steeds meer ging geloven in haar eigen importantie, als spreekbuis van de emancipatie van moslimvrouwen werd opgevoerd waar ze in werkelijkheid geen poot voor uitstak, en ik heb me ook opgewonden over de manier waarop rechts, met de hulp van Ayaan opeens de vrouwenemancipatie kaapte."

O zeker, Meulenbelt vond het reuze sneu dat ze continu met de dood werd bedreigd en het land moest verlaten. En wisten wij wel hoe ze had meegeleefd toen Theo van Gogh was vermoord! "Maar dat ze een grote leegte achterlaat nu ze vertrokken is naar een ultra-conservatieve denktank in de VS, nou nee."

Intussen weet ik niet wat ik treuriger vind. Dat Hirsi Ali nu in de Verenigde Staten aanloopt tegen dezelfde soort denkmooie. Of dat de bestuurders van Brandeis er nog naar luisteren ook. Hadden ze maar een snippertje van de moed die hun collega's in Amsterdam bezaten.

TR5 - Drayer, Elma. 'Mag het voortaan zonder feministische kledingpolitie?' published 18-4-2014: <http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/6847/Elma-Drayer/article/detail/3637623/2014/04/18/Mag-het-voortaan-zonder-feministische-kledingpolitie.dhtml>

Het beloofde een fijne bijeenkomst te worden - alleen al vanwege de intrigerende titel: 'NK Feminisme'. Geintje natuurlijk, het waren geen kampioenschappen. Inventariseren hoe de vrouwenzaak er heden ten dage voor staat, was het veel bescheidener doel van de organisatoren - het Amsterdamse debatcentrum De Balie en Atria ('kennisinstituut voor emancipatie en vrouwengeschiedenis').

De avond was nog niet aangekondigd of een vermakelijk gekrakeel brak los. Tout feministisch Nederland had alvast een mening over de spreeksters die waren uitgenodigd. Zij zouden niet allochtoon genoeg zijn, niet uit het juiste ideologische hout gesneden, te elitair zijn - en dan vergeet ik vast nog wat ernstige bezwaren. Hilarisch hoogtepunt: vrouwen die zelve de uitnodiging tot deelname nuffig afsloegen om vervolgens het inuitatiebeleid uitgebreid te bekritisieren op Twitter.

Deze zusters doen een beetje alsof er een feministisch Vaticaan bestaat dat kan verordonneren welke leerstukken wel, en welke niet zuiver op de graat zijn. Dat bepaalt welke feministische gelovigen wel en welke geen recht van spreken hebben. Quod non. Het aardige is nu juist dat de neuzen binnen de feministische kerk allang niet meer één, maar alle kanten op staan.

Jeugdige publiek

Gelukkig trokken de organisatoren zich niks van deze scherpslijpers aan. En terecht, zo bleek. De grote zaal van De Balie was afgelopen zondag tot bovenaan gevuld - en niet alléén, zoals jarenlang te doen

gebruikelijk, met babyboomers. Met vrouwen, zeg maar, die zich destijds verplicht voelden een tuinbroek te dragen beha's af te zweren, en alle make-up in de ban te doen. Tot veler verrassing was het publiek juist opvallend jeugdig.

Bovendien wist de hashtag #nkfeminisme urenlang trending topic te blijven in het virtuele universum, mede dankzij het feit dat de bijeenkomst ook via internet te volgen was. Wat zoiets zegt over de reëel bestaande wereld waarin u en ik leven - ik heb geen idee. Maar wie had vermoed dat het f-woord anno 2014 überhaupt weer tot enige opwinding zou kunnen leiden? Ik zeker niet.

Op het podium zaten drie vrouwen wier wiegje in verre buitenlanden stond, drie vrouwen (onder wie ikzelf) van autochtone komaf. Dat kritiekpuntje was in elk geval ruimschoots onderuitgehaald. We debatteerden over seksistische speelgoedfolders, over bakfietsfeminisme, over de noodzaak van economische zelfstandigheid, over hoofddoekjes, paternalisme, religieus gerechtvaardigde sekse-apartheid. En geheel naar verwachting waren wij het op vele punten prettig met elkander oneens.

Broek aan de benen

Intussen roerde het publiek zich danig - met scherp commentaar, soms applaus, soms verontwaardigd gemompel. Zoals het hoort, zou ik denken.

Maar dat had ik gedacht. De avond liep bijna ten einde, toen een vrouw vanuit de zaal plotseling snierde dat de zes spreeksters op het podium geen van allen een broek aan hun benen hadden. Waarop een ander zulks 'een goed punt' noemde en de verwerpelijkheid van 'jurkjes, rokken en hakken' onderstreepte. "Laten we dat idee van genderrollen die vastzitten op tafel houden!"

Kijk, dat het feminisme een opleving lijkt door te maken - ik juich het van harte toe. Maar de feministische kledingpolitie mag van mij blijven waar ze thuishoort: diep in de jaren zeventig.