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'It's the birth rates': Sex, gender, and race in Europe's 'Muslim Question'

Edited and revised version of the inaugural lecture upon accepting the Chair of Sociology of Gender and Sexuality at the University of Amsterdam, on Friday March 6, 2020,

Sarah Bracke¹

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Inconvenient facts

On 7 November 1917, Max Weber delivered a lecture titled *Science as a Vocation* (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*) at the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, where he was teaching at the time. He had been invited by the *Freistudentischer Bund* in the context of an ongoing national debate on education and on the question whether science should be approached as *Bildung* or as *Beruf* (see also Shapin, 2019). This was a time of war and political turmoil – a situation that would soon lead to Germany's war defeat, the German Revolution, and the establishment of the Weimar Republic. The turmoil was particularly intense in Bavaria and Munich. Philologist Victor Klemperer, who held a brief professor appointment in Munich right after the war, was already keeping his diary – the diary that became the basis for his masterpiece *Lingua Tertii Imperii* (2006), which meticulously documents the gradual Nazification of language. 'Everything is wretched, everything is bloody, and you always want to laugh and cry at once', Klemperer (2017, p. 111) wrote about his time in Munich in 1918–1919, a period when a Bavarian king was overthrown, a socialist minister murdered, and the Munich Soviet Republic slaughtered.

Science as a Vocation (1958) is known for making a case for value freedom (*Wertfreiheit*) – a notion that is frequently invoked as the ground upon which we do (or even should do) sociology but that is not often considered

in its complexity. To say that the social sciences should be value-free is not to say that they should be free of values. Weber's methodological principle of value freedom is grounded in an understanding that value commitment is both unavoidable (as no knowledge can be obtained without it)² as well as necessary (i.e. one's value position needs to be clear). His understanding rejoins Kant's recognition that science begins from at least two presuppositions (which could also be seen as values), that are, that scientific truth exists *and* that it is valid, or, put differently, that it is possible to know *and* that it is worth to know (Weber, 1958, p. 132).³

Weber's argument about values, however, is more far-reaching, and is inspired by his fear that science in general and sociology in particular might be overrun by 'arbitrary value commitments' (Burawoy, 2016, p. 379). That the proponents and opponents of the Bavarian king, the socialist minister, the Soviet Republic will take over the classroom, so to speak. Through 'value freedom', Weber sought to establish a distance between what happens 'out there' and what happens in the classroom, as the imagined and (at least part of the) real public of *Science as a Vocation* were indeed students. 'The primary task of a useful teacher', Weber lectured, 'is to teach his [*sic*] students to recognize "inconvenient" facts' (Weber, 1958, p. 125). Mobilising his own methodology of interpreting the social within the external conditions that shape it (see also Burawoy, 2016, p. 379), there are many ways to situate Weber's attempt at drawing a line between science and politics. Michael Burawoy (2016), for instance, sees this line as a means to create legitimacy for the young and barely professional field of sociology at the time. Yet, however much one contextualises,⁴ the line between science and politics remains fraught. It is from this apparent fraughtness that I begin this inaugural lecture today.

And I begin by confessing my own desire for a line: I, too, want to teach students to recognise 'inconvenient facts' (of gender and sexuality, but also of race and religion). And I, too, do not want the classroom nor the university to be overrun by 'arbitrary value commitments', and especially not those that run counter to those inconvenient facts that I know to be solid. I do not want my classroom to be a 'room for discussion' for outdated essentialist views on gender as binary and hierarchical, nor for replacement conspiracies, to name but two examples, and I think that a university committed to scientific knowledge production has an important role to play in taking knowledge seriously – especially so in so-called post-truth times. I, too, believe that the pursuit of knowledge requests us to draw lines.

Yet, Weber's line between science and politics is unconvincing, and its fraught character and ironies run deep. Weber argued that politics should

stay out of the classroom (Weber, 1958, p. 123)⁵ from within a position of deep political involvement. This was known at the time and has been elaborately documented (notably by Wolfgang Mommsen, 1984): Weber's position on the so-called 'Polish Question', his role in the founding of a political party (the *Nationalsozialer Verein*), his participation in the German Versailles Treaty's delegation, and his involvement in drafting the constitution of the Weimar Republic, to name but a few examples.⁶ These political positions, moreover, did not stay out of this intellectual work. In fact, as Andrew Zimmerman (2006) asserts, after Weber's first substantial encounter with the Polish minority in Germany in 1888, Weber began to centre debates about free labour (which was the central question for Marxists and conservatives alike at the time) in what he considered to be the inferiority of the Poles and the cultural degeneration of the Prussian East. In his inaugural lecture at the Freiburg University in 1895, he warned in no uncertain terms about the 'Polonisation' of Germany (see Weber, 1980) – an apprehension that we, in today's terminology, could regard as replacement thinking at work.⁷ The intellectual move he made was to culturalise the economic question of free labour and render an economic struggle into a struggle between two nationalities (Abraham, 1991; Zimmerman, 2006).⁸ Weber emphasised 'the role played by racial differences of a physical and psychological nature, as between nationalities, in the economic struggle for existence' (Weber, 1980, p. 428),⁹ and feared that 'society allowed biologically inferior individuals to prevail over superior individuals' (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 63). Weber's efforts to 'solve' the Polish problem – solutions he suggested in his lectures, including his support for the closing of Germany's eastern border to Poles – effectively influenced the government to adopt more stringent anti-Polish measures (Abraham, 1991).

Weber's crude anti-Polish racism was subsequently developed into a general political economy of race and free labour through his sociology of religion. Weber explored how religion – not as individual piety or practice but as civilisation and culture – shaped economic, political, and other behaviour; he did so notably in his influential *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001). In a conceptual realm, religion thus became the proxy for what Weber understood as 'physical and mental race differences' (Zimmerman, 2006, p. 63).¹⁰ In other words, the notion of 'physical and mental race differences' was folded into Weber's concept of religion and his understandings of culture and civilisation. Moreover, Weber held a clear value judgement about these different religions that he studied, considering Calvinism/Protestantism as the standard for progress. Different religions/civilisations, organised hierarchically, were inscribed with (and haunted

by) a notion of racial differences. If all of this sounds awfully familiar, it is, amongst other things, because Samuel Huntington read his Weber well.¹¹

The conceptual entanglement of race, religion, and culture within sociology thus precedes the well-documented supersession of race with culture in the 1950s' post-Shoah Europe (Balibar, 1991; Lentin, 2006). It is indeed at the heart of the assumptions built into the discipline (see also Abraham, 1991). We have only begun scratching the surface of the implications of this conceptual entanglement – a task that requires an analytical understanding of race to fully grasp what culture, as we know it, is and does. While commonsensical understandings of race often remain wedded, in essentialist ways, to biology (physiognomy) – which often leads to faulty constructed arguments, such as 'Islamophobia is not racism, as Muslims are not a race' – critical theoretical scholarship, notably Stuart Hall's (1997, 2017) classical understanding of race as a floating or sliding signifier, shows us that racialisation occurs in different ways and on different grounds, and decidedly upon grounds of culture or religion. Religion played a crucial role in this respect, with the early modern notion of *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity) in the Iberian Peninsula, which recasts religious difference through blood, seeking to distinguish 'old/pure Catholics' from those Jews and Muslims who were forced to convert (see Topolski, 2018).

I took some time to recount this story of sociology's disciplinary origins for a reason. Weber's formulation of value freedom is far removed from easy references to so-called objectivity or neutrality. For Weber, reason *depended* on values and norms, that is to say, on culture. And he seemed to suggest that, in a scientific or scholarly context, '*les valeurs de se discutent pas*' (values are not to be discussed). Herbert Marcuse's critical reading draws our attention to the way in which Weber's notion of value freedom implied that he refused to subject his own values to criticism (Marcuse, 1965). And Zimmerman (2006) argues that Weber conceived of the practice of doing science in a way that left no grounds upon which to challenge the nationalism, imperialism, and racism of his own science. While Weber asserted the importance of the principles of scientific research, he considered them to be of a different kind (i.e. situated in a different realm) than values, and he considered our scholarship to rest upon an underground of values about which we could and should have no discussion. It strikes me that his articulation of value freedom operates in a similar way to how the political principle of freedom of speech is weaponised today (on the effect of the latter within the academy, see Reichman, 2019).

Drawing lines

Weber desired a line between science and politics, and he drew one. I think there are a couple of problems with his line. Weber's notion of value freedom not only functioned to shield racist conceptions from inquiry (whether scientific, political, ethical, ...) but also prefigured the relativism that contemporary usages of freedom of speech tend to perform. And I have a problem with relativism when it comes to the pursuit of knowledge.

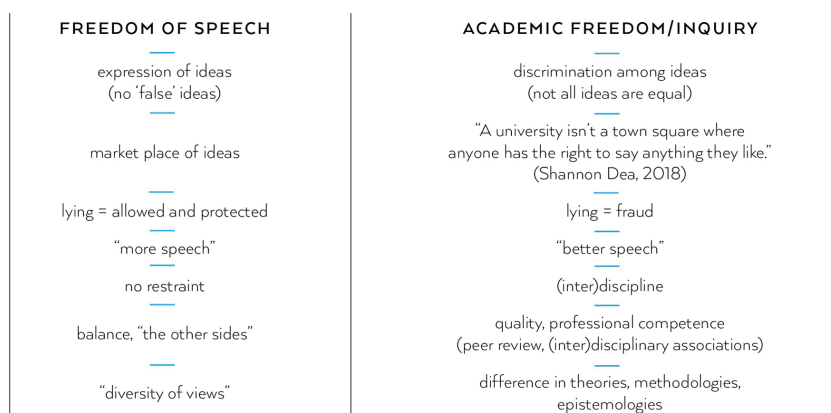


Figure 1: *Drawing boundaries between Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom/Inquiry, by Sarah Bracke (lay-out by Sara S'Jegers).*

Here is the line I draw: Freedom of speech, as a principle organising the relation between citizens and the state, protects citizens from government restrictions on the content of their speech. This free citizen may say that the earth is flat, that vaccines cause autism, that there is no global warming, that race does not exist, or that gender is binary, ... – and all that speech is constitutionally protected from state censorship and violence. Yet, in these halls of the academy, which are organised according to a different principle, namely, academic freedom and freedom of inquiry, such statements are and should be up for scrutiny. And for the statements that I mobilised for my argument, the current scholarship is abundant and solid. In post-truth times, however, such *reliable knowledge* (using Haraway's (1991) words) is under attack. Through economic pressures, through the dismantlement of the public university, and through various political pressures. In the recent years, we have seen hotlines to denounce teachers, the firing of professors, or the closure of programmes and even entire universities. We have also

seen, in more 'liberal' modes, the rise of discourses of 'diversity of views' and 'political diversity' (a compound that belongs neither to a logic of academic inquiry nor a logic of diversity). Post-truths, in other words, are generated, and alt-facts disseminated, in both authoritarian and liberal modes. And the fields of gender and sexuality studies have been at the frontline of these political pressures and attacks (see, for example, Kuhar & Paternotte, 2018; Verloo, 2018).

Yet my problem with relativism is not only a political one; it is first and foremost an epistemological one. Let me, in an appropriate format, introduce the issue at hand with a meme.

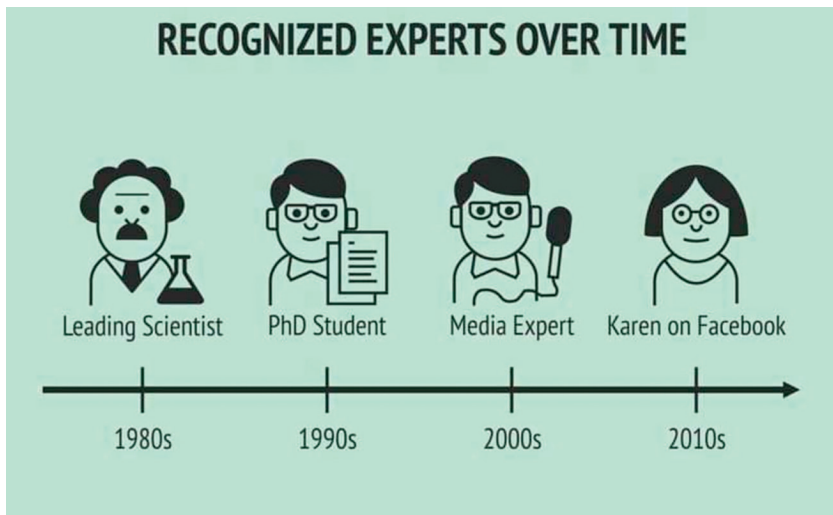


Figure 2: 'Recognized Experts over Time' meme

This version was taken from the online image sharing service Imgur (<https://imgur.com/r/funny/b9bGocD>). Imgur refers to Reddit as the original source (with traces of posts both in r/funny and r/FuckYouKaren, but these posts have been deleted).

In the beginning, there was the Scientist, and the Scientist was God. And now everyone can just Tweet, post, or like anything. The above meme represents a timeline of the devaluation of knowledge. There is a lot more left to unpack here, but do note that gender is one of the potent ways in which this devaluation of knowledge is expressed: the scientist is represented as a (white) man, the 'laymen's knowledge' is represented as a (white) woman.¹²

Yet, this image, or perhaps the discourse, of a timeline of the devaluation of knowledge holds something more: the suggestion of a causal

relation. This evolution should come as no surprise, the suggestion goes, as women, such as 'Karen', have been doing something to that purported serious science. In a chain of associations, women are linked to feminist theory, which is linked to queer theory, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and then, in some magical move, this is all allegedly captured by 'postmodernism'. I am assuming that it is not the first time that you have heard this argument: the pursuit of truth and the production of knowledge have become relative because of postmodernism. More than a decade ago, in response to encountering climate change deniers who left him shocked, Bruno Latour (2004), a cultural theorist known for exploring how truth claims are constructed (and we could note here that inquiring into how something comes into being is often what elicits the 'postmodern' label), suggested something similar, that is, that he feared that his field of studies was complicit in creating a world in which all knowledge was considered to be relative. Latour's 2004 essay was consequently understood as a post-modern *mea culpa*.¹³

I reject the above framing and I will briefly explain why in what follows. Donna Haraway's 'Situated Knowledges' (1988) – published close to the year I began my university education – has shaped my understanding of this particular debate that preoccupied parts of the human sciences. Haraway – a biologist by training who remains attached to the materiality of the lab – makes a clear epistemological point:

Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity, both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both 'god tricks' promoting vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science. But it is precisely in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained, rational, objective inquiry rests. (1988, p. 584)

Relativism and universalism are two sides of the same coin, Haraway insists. Being situated everywhere (relativism) and nowhere (universalism) both stand in opposition to an understanding of the *situatedness* of knowledge. This understanding of being situated somewhere in particular – *embedded and embodied*, as Rosi Braidotti (2004) articulates it – has informed most if not all of the field of Women's Studies and later Gender Studies. As a result, I can only think of an incorrect reading – or, rather, no reading at all – of feminist theory for it to be equated to relativism. There is much more to say about these kinds of standpoint epistemologies (see, for example, Bracke

& Puig de la Bellacasa 2007; Harding, 2003), as, notably, the 100th president of the American Sociology Association, Patricia Hill Collins, has done, in a long career of building up Black feminist standpoint theory (Hill Collins, 1990). And there is also a critique to be developed: I am thinking of what my colleague Francio Guadeloupe (forthcoming) calls the terra-centric quality of these ways of thinking, asking what would happen if one were not to take the ground for granted but begin with water instead? Water: in the afterlives of the transatlantic Middle Passage; infused with the drowned souls accused of being witches; in times when the Mediterranean has become a graveyard; and in an age of global warming when water is taking back land. What are the epistemological consequences of not taking ground but water as a point of departure? For now, I leave this question (and the Blue Humanities, brought to my attention by my colleague Anya Topolski) to more sophisticated thinkers.

Besides my epistemological quarrel with relativism, I get suspicious about the timeline of these proclamations about the production of knowledge. In my suspicion, I am reminded of an argument Haraway made in relation to the grand 'death of the subject' declarations of the 1970s and 1980s. Just as postcolonial subjects, racialised subjects, women, queers (and these are intersecting categories) reach the stage of subjecthood – or, put differently, when a modern exclusionary concept of subjecthood loosens its grip – the play comes to an end and curtains are drawn. *Really? Nice try!* As Haraway (1988, pp. 585–586) asserted, positionality matters in the process of framing: what the boys in the human sciences have called the 'death of the subject', she suggests, has actually opened up plenty of possibilities for others subjects, agents, and narratives. Which also includes new possibilities for those who embody that old master subject, but that particular transformation requires work on the self, and the anxieties that go along with the process too often lead to a convulsive reproduction of the old, of the same – and of picking up a gun and shooting 'the others' down.

And so I draw a different line – a line that is not one and not straight. Not the line of value freedom, which leaves important values that inform, ground, and situate knowledge production untouched. But, rather, lines, or spirals, of deep engagement with the situatedness of knowledge production, seeking to produce *reliable knowledge* while (1) recognising different ways of doing scholarship (i.e. there is not one scientific method), and (2) contra Weber, engaging with the question of values and not perilously protecting them from critical inquiry. And this notably in the light of violence: a scrutiny of beliefs about gender and sexuality that perpetuate violence (Butler, 1990), and a scrutiny of beliefs in 'physical and mental racial

differences' (Weber, 1958, p. 428) and how they permeate (commonsensical and sociological) notions of culture and civilisation (Abraham, 1991; Hund & Lentin, 2015).

EnGendering Europe's 'Muslim Question'

And now, my patient audience, as you are most likely thinking that you somehow made a terrible mistake and find yourself in the wrong lecture, with a different title, I turn to the research programme that founds this chair in the Sociology of Gender and Sexuality. I turn to Europe's so-called 'Muslim Question' and how gender and sexuality lie at the heart of that question. But note how I have used half of my time to clear epistemological ground to position the knowledge claims that I will proceed to make. Times are such that these claims are too often readily dismissed – and that on political grounds. Research like this is often seen as 'dangerous' or 'based on an assumption that cannot be proven, namely that Islamophobia exists' (these are quotes taken from actual research proposal reviews). Scholars working on these subjects have been involved in court cases, have received death threats, and have been dismissed as knowing subjects. I denounce this kind of politicisation of knowledge – this is a problem, a serious problem, for the social sciences at large. And I affirm – and I know I speak for many in this aula – that I will not have our knowledge claims relativised or dismissed. Thinking with philosopher Frantz Fanon's 'It is not possible for me to be objective' (2008, p. 64), my colleague Nadia Fadil (2019) has sharply analysed what it means to be female scholar of colour in the social sciences in the Low Lands, and the systematic and telling ways in which her knowledge is cast as mere 'experience'. Except when standing on the shoulders of white men, and reproducing their frameworks, knowledge does not stick to her body as it does to other bodies, while experience, opinions, politics, ... apparently do.¹⁴ My positioning in these institutions differs from Nadia's, yet, mobilising a copious 'we', I insist that we must refuse to have our knowledge claims relativised. We refuse a timeline of an alleged late arrival. Trained in the same age-old universities, disciplines, and paradigms, we stand here with new knowledge claims.

So, here are the claims to knowledge I would like to share with you: First, the systematic ways in which Muslims in Europe today are problematised – understood in a Foucaultian sense, that is, when Muslims in Europe are being made into a social problem – renders it adequate to speak of a 'Muslim Question'. The wording is deliberate while at the same time

disturbing – we have historical precedents of modern ‘questions’, such as the ‘Jewish Question’ (Judd, 2007; Traverso, 2018), the ‘Roma Question’ (Thorne, 2011), what Du Bois conceptualised as the ‘Negro Question’ (Du Bois 1898, 1952), the ‘Women’s Question’ (Scott, 1997; and Brown, 2008 on the Jewish Question in relation to the Women’s Question), and Weber spent in fact part of his inaugural on the ‘Polish Question’ (i.e. the ‘Polish Question’ that informed Du Bois’s (1952) later approach to race), and they each tell us something about how modern social and political bodies are constituted and governed. Europe’s ‘Jewish Question’ is particularly relevant for the study of Europe’s ‘Muslim Question’ (see Farris, 2014; Traverso, 2016), as there is a substantial body of knowledge on the ‘Jewish Question’ and it is important to bring this knowledge to bear upon the study of the ‘Muslim Question’, and vice versa. Analogies deserve great care and responsibility – thinking through resonances as well as differences – yet as Peter Gordon (2020) points out in a recent essay, analogical reasoning is indispensable to the human sciences, and refusing analogies condemns us to live in different, incommensurable worlds that share no history and no future. Yet, there is another reason why it is sensible to bring the ‘Jewish Question’ into relation to what is happening with Muslims in Europe today, and that is the conceptual entanglement of race/religion: in this entanglement, the Semitic as both a racial and religious category is set up in contrast to both white and Christian (Anidjar, 2008). Something critical happens in this race & religion nexus that requires urgent investigation and I am grateful for the work of my colleague Anya Topolski, whom I consider one of the pioneers in exploring how this nexus operates in this part of the world today, and I am furthermore happy to see many here today from the race/religion network that Anya and others have founded.¹⁵

Like any study, this research programme comes with its own limitations. Its geographical scope is confined to Europe – even though our study occurs at a time when a law bans citizens from a number of Muslim majority countries from entering the United States, when Palestine has been decimated, when China is locking up hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs in concentration camps, and when the Indian new citizenship law preventing Muslim migrants from becoming citizens was followed by pogroms against Muslims. Clearly, there is a global circulation of discourses and governmentalities that deserves attention as well. The study is also limited with respect to the mode of racialisation it traces: the ‘Muslim Question’ is not the only form of racialisation in Europe. There are other forms of racialisation and racism (and their intersections) that demand attention, and that inform the ‘Muslim Question’, such as anti-Black racism, anti-Semitism, and

anti-Ziganism. And, finally, the qualitative character of the study, investigating deeply into meaning and meaning-making, into tropes and representations, into imaginaries and frames – I am tempted to think in terms of cultural algorithms – allows us to reconstruct 'cultural codes' but not necessarily numbers.

Within these contours, we have begun to consider Europe's 'Muslim Question' from a biopolitical approach – and this is work developed together with my colleague Luis Hernández Aguilar – from which the 'Muslim Question' appears as an accusation of being an *'alien body' to the nation* (Bracke & Hernández Aguilar, 2020; Farris, 2014). The question, then, operates both as a frame in which membership of a political or national community is contested and often denied but also as the means of production of an alien body. Through this problematisation, 'the other' of the nation, who remains intimately tied up to constructions of the national self, is animated. This is a familiar pattern when it comes to the history of European nation-states and its many 'Questions', which have been critical in establishing the material and symbolic boundaries of the nation, notably through producing the subject, the national self, who *asks* the 'Questions' and, in the process of asking, produces (national) difference.

The analytical frame of the 'Muslim Question' encompasses a second dimension, that is, the *demands of integration and assimilation* (Bracke & Hernández Aguilar, under review; Farris, 2014). The production of difference is entangled with forceful calls, as well as concrete measures, to regulate, control, and refashion Muslims' lives and subjectivities. This is where the 'Muslim Question' emerges most clearly as a form of what Foucault (2010) calls governmentality, or the organisational practices through which subjects are governed. These two dimensions are set up in contradiction: the alien body, literally represented as a Trojan Horse (Bracke & Hernández Aguilar, under review), is constructed in such a way that it is, per definition, 'not us', and therefore can never become 'us', despite integration and assimilation measures. The continuous requests to become 'us' then serve as a way to create that alien body. The question is *productive*: producing self and other, in an eternal reminder that 'they' are not 'us'.

My second claim to knowledge revolves around the centrality of gender and sexuality in how this 'Muslim Question' is conjured into being. There are several reasons for this centrality. We know that gender and sexuality are crucial to the modern nation in various ways, as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1993), together with others, have laid out.¹⁶ The reproduction of cultural (national, ethnic, religious) groups in different ways relies on sexual differentiation – on binary gender and heteronormativity – for its

material reproduction (producing babies but also all the reproductive labour that turns babies into dutiful citizens) as well as its symbolic reproduction (the cultural boundaries of a group).

Gender, sexuality, and biopolitics

There is, however, another and more specific reason why gender and sexuality play a crucial role: at the heart of Europe's 'Muslim Question' lies a myth; a conspiracy, which is conceived of in terms of gender and sexuality. This is the myth of replacement, understood as white/Christian populations being replaced by Muslims, in a deliberate and combative strategy of so-called demographic warfare or demographic Jihad. Replacement thinking is on the rise; the Netherlands, for instance, has seen the rapid growth of a new fascist political party that openly propagates replacement conspiracies.

Given the project's interest in analysing representations and imaginaries, in 'cultural codes', the production of images (and imaginaries) is an important site to trace this rise. Consider the following image below:



Figure 3: 'New Germans? We'll make ourselves, trust yourself Germany', by Valodnieks, retrieved from https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Wahlplakat_AfD_Bundestag_2017.jpg

This is one of the posters of the 2017 electoral campaign by the far right *Alternative for Germany* (AfD). The image depicts a woman without a face – she might be any white woman. With one hand she touches, in a protective manner, her partially uncovered, visibly pregnant belly. In our analysis (Bracke & Hernández Aguilar, 2020), this image represents a critical moment in which, in public space, an older discourse that problematises legal definitions of citizenship (i.e. not all Germans are 'real' Germans) that has been mainstreamed in the past decades all over Europe, gets hinged on a more extreme right discourse focused on 'the biological reproduction of

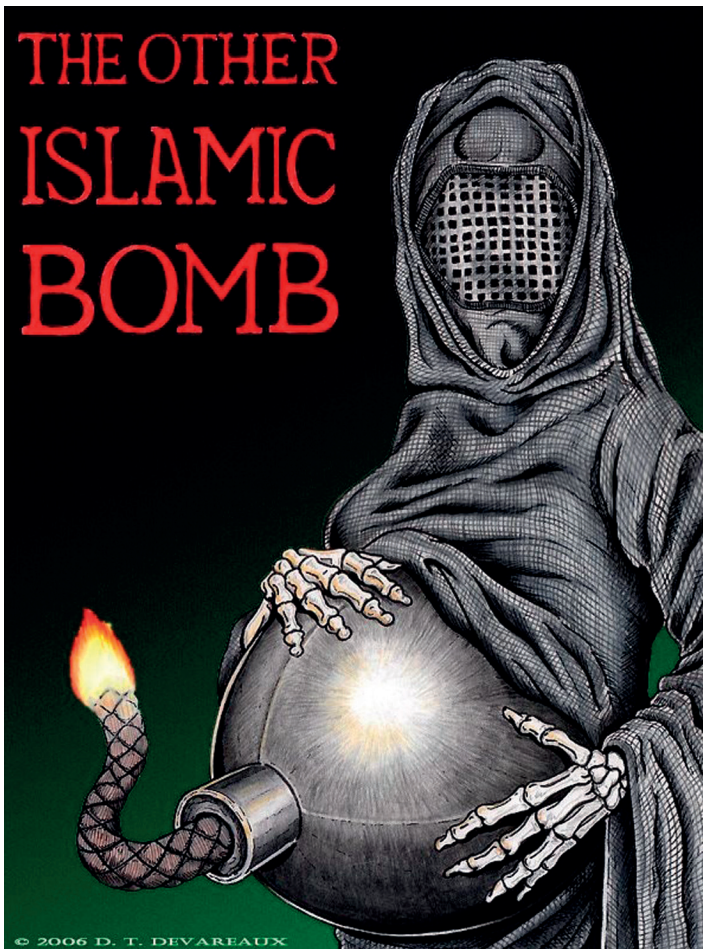


Figure 4: 'The Other Islamic Bomb', by D.T. Devareaux, retrieved from www.planck-constant.org/blog1/gallery/devrx/revengoe09.jpg

the race'. The text itself suggests that something is wrong with how 'new Germans' are made, which resonates with the public debate about who is a citizen and citizenship laws. The image then fully centres the message in biological reproduction. Text and image align in the suggestion that white Germans can and should take care of the reproduction of the nation, by producing more white babies.

This is a mainstreamed expression of replacement anxieties. Now juxtapose this image with the following cartoon that is circulating widely in the right-wing blogosphere: 'The Other Islamic Bomb' also portrays a heavily pregnant female figure – also faceless, also touching her pregnant belly with her hands. Yet, these protective hands represent death, and her pregnant belly is a ticking bomb about to explode. In just a matter of time: she will be giving birth to death and destruction. Here 'womb' is 'bomb' is 'tomb', in a representation of the weaponisation of the womb that is attributed to the 'Islamic Other'. Her fertile body embodies death – by (bearing) Muslim life. And: any response to this is already cast as self-defence (the 'War on Terror').

The current replacement myth comes with a longer history, which I cannot explore with you today. But, I briefly want to point to the importance of the postcolonial moment of the 1970s in that history. Replacement anxieties, not yet specifically articulated with regard to Muslims, were strikingly captured in a popular dystopian novel by the French novelist Jean Raspail about the destruction of Western civilisation through migration: *Le Camp des Saints*, published in 1973. The first English translation, in 1975, was announced, on the cover, as a chilling story about 'the end of the white world'. In a key passage, an Indian official comments upon the mass emigration of Indians, arriving in boats on the shores of France:

There's no Third World. No, not anymore. That's only a phrase you coined to keep us in our place. There's one world, only one, and it's going to be flooded with life, submerged. This country of mine is a roaring river. A river of sperm. Now, all of a sudden, it's shifting course, my friend, and heading west...
(Raspail, 1975, p. 16)

Fantasies of Europe overwhelmed by rivers of sperm from brown men, and the life of 'the other' as tantamount to the death of Europe. In 2011, forty years after its initial publication date, *The Camp of Saints* became a bestseller again.

Another contemporary reference invoking that postcolonial moment can be found in a popular meme that condenses replacement thinking in one quote:

One day, millions of men will leave the Southern Hemisphere to go to the Northern Hemisphere. And they will not go there as friends. Because they will go there to conquer it. And they will conquer it with their sons. The wombs of our women will give us victory. (Camus, 2011, p. 53)

A quote purportedly from the speech of the Algerian political leader Boumediene at the United Nations in 1974. Boumediene did deliver a speech at the United Nations in 1974, yet that speech does not contain anything remotely related to this. The above quote, in other words, is a fabrication in which biological reproduction (i.e. wombs) are enlisted as weapons in a plan for world domination.

A fabrication at the heart of a conspiracy or fantasy that the takeover of a white/Christian (secular) world is near sounds awfully familiar. This is precisely what the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is in relation to the 'Jewish Question': a forged document, a fabrication (most likely written during times of anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire at the beginning of the 20th century) that pours out fantasies of a Jewish takeover of the world. Indeed, both Europe's 'Jewish Question' and 'Muslim Question' have at their core a fantasy of impending takeover of a white/Christian world. Yet, these fantasies are developed on different grounds: if, in the 'Jewish Question', the takeover is fantasised through a financial takeover and building of power behind the scenes, in the 'Muslim Question', the takeover fantasy is centred on wombs and sperm, reproductive sex, and fertility rates. 'It's the birth rates', declares the opening lines of the manifesto of the killer of Christchurch, who put his conspiracies into action on 15 March 2019. From a biopolitical approach, what these deadly fantasies desire and call for are necropolitics (Mbembé, 2003) as well as eugenics – that is, they make ghastly claims about who should live and thrive; who should wither away or be killed; which life should be conceived and born; and, finally, which births should be prevented.

Think we must¹⁷

I began this lecture with epistemological concerns about the production of knowledge, and this is also where I will end, and I will do so with two final thoughts.

The first one is sobering. We are investigating the mechanics, the cultural codes, or algorithms if you wish, of defining and dividing populations and of making a part of that population into a problem – the mechanics of racialisation, of dehumanisation – because the stakes are high. We are bringing our analytics to a politicised field – characterised by what anthropologist Gloria Wekker (2016) has analysed as ‘white innocence’ and marked by fascism and the connections between both. We are producing knowledge, knowing very well there will be various kinds of pushbacks against these knowledge claims. I stand by the necessity of such a scholarly task, but I also see and feel its limitations. We rely on solid critical theory; yet, the power of critique is limited. Critique sometimes unwillingly reproduces. Like today: under the guise of critical analysis, I have shared images that I would prefer not to give a platform. And critique in and of itself doesn’t necessarily undo power, let alone bring forth transformation. Recently, I came across a 1921 New York Times frontpage article, exposing the *Protocols* mentioned earlier as fraudulent (Dunlap, 2016). While there is something impressive about a mainstream newspaper devoting its entire first page to debunk a fabrication such as the *Protocols*, such debunking did not defuse the fabrication. A century later, the *Protocols* are circulating in unprecedented numbers, and ‘Jews will not replace us’ was one of the rallying cries of the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia a few years ago.

My last thought is about entanglement. Much of what I have touched upon in this lecture revolves around *entanglement*: of science and politics; of the ‘Muslim Question’ and the ‘Jewish Question’; of race and religion; of gender and sexuality; of wombs and sperm; of critique and transformation; of the knower and the known and the situatedness of knowledge. We in the social sciences need to foster more ways to think entanglement. We have critical tools, notably actor–network theories, theories of subjectification, power/knowledge, Hall’s notion of articulation, and various understandings of the interlocking and intersectional nature of oppressions developed by Black feminists (Hill Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1993). I could not present this work to you today without these bodies of thought and the ways of thinking they harbour. And I believe we need more of this; conceptualising complexities and intricacies is indeed what is required of us today. In conversations with my colleague Seda Gürses at the Technical University in Delft, which is leading the way to the quantum internet, I have been left wondering why, a century after quantum thinking began changing our understanding of the material world, our study of the social world is not ‘quantum’ yet. Quantum principles teach us that objects are allowed to be in two places at the same time (superposition), that measuring and

acquiring knowledge about the object changes its state, and that two particles can have an extremely strong connection, Einstein's famous 'spooky action at a distance' (entanglement). And when it comes to the quantum internet, bits cease to be binary (0–1) and we are moving into a post-binary world. What would a quantum sociology for the 21st century look like? And perhaps this is another way of asking Franco's question: what would it mean if we took water as our point of departure? I do not possess the answers to these questions, but with this chair, I am committed to create the spaces and foster the communities needed to think together, interdisciplinarily, about the burning questions of today and tomorrow.

Words of gratitude

My time is almost up, and I would now like to take some time to express my gratitude.

I would like to thank the Executive Board of the University and the Faculty of Social and Behaviour Sciences for the trust they confide in me. I would like to thank my department, Sociology, my research group Political Sociology, my research institute, the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR), and the College and the Graduate School – for their trust and for providing a space and community in which I can do my research and teaching. I want to thank our students – we learn from you, you keep us sharp, you are the beating heart of a university. I would like to thank the NWO, for funding the research programme I was able to present parts of today with a Vici grant, and for taking the lead with the Aspasia programme to intervene in the exasperating persistent gender imbalances in the Dutch academic world. Given how universities are dragging their feet, I am perhaps also looking to the I for setting up programmes to intervene in the shocking whiteness of Dutch academia. I am grateful for the Amsterdam Research Centre for Gender and Sexuality (ARC-GS): a chair like this has a longer history, a longer desire, that began with the Belle van Zuylen institute, *homostudies*, and eventually ARC-GS.¹⁸ Thank you, founding members, thank you, programme manager Robby Davidson, co-director Julie McBrian, and the entire board; it is a pleasure to work together. I would also like to thank the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES), and Darshan Vigneswaran in particular – I am hoping ARC-GS and IMES can get more entangled. I am in awe for the *EnGendering Europe's 'Muslim Question'* research team: Luis Hernández Aguilar, Anna Esther Younes, Sherilyn Deen, Lou Mousset, and Berna Toprak, with a research internship

by Roxane Kroon and research assistance by Pilar d'Alò. You might feel as space-invaders (Puwar, 2004) now, but it is clear to me that you, and scholars like you, are the future of the university.

I am at a loss for words to thank family and friends (and the way these get entangled); I would not stand here today without you. For my parents, Anne-Marie and Freddy, for different reasons – reasons of gender, and reasons of social class – the university was very far removed from their childhood visions of where life might take them, and yet they both found their way to the university in stories that I consider to be heroic, and so unlike my smooth transition to university, as a second-generation student. I know that heroic stories harbour struggle and pain, and alienation and loss, and I would like to acknowledge that. And perhaps we share a sense of bewilderment of how life continues: two daughters who are both professors, sharing at least the study of gender (we had a feminist mother!) – and I thank my sister Maud for what we are able to share – as well as two grandchildren who are basically growing up in universities. I would like to thank these children, Amélie Hanan and Kyrell, and other children (and those here today who have been climate striking in the streets of Brussels); we live in times where it seems that children have more sensible things to say about our shared future (including 'listen to the science!') than many adults caught up in business as usual.

I need to talk about reproductive work upon which all so-called productive work rests: I would like to thank all those who do the necessary reproductive work in an institution like this that make teaching and research possible. So much of my productive work has been made possible by the reproductive labour of my mother, Anne-Marie Grieder. Including the writing of this inaugural lecture, in the beautiful *Bibliothèque nationale du Luxembourg*, while she took care of meals and childcare.

Friends, you are too many to name – although some of you were already named. I exist and breathe and think and do through and with you. And I am grateful for the ways in which intellectual communities and friendships have been entangled in my life: to name but a few, the *Autonom Feministisch OnderzoeksKollektief*, Sophia (Belgian Gender Studies network), the NextGeneration network, Women's Studies/Gender Studies at Utrecht University, and the Women's Studies in Religion Program at the Harvard Divinity School.

I want to end these words of thanks by briefly acknowledging some of my teachers, who have been crucial in shaping my thinking and my way of inhabiting the space of academia. Rudi Laermans at the KU Leuven gave me the gift of taking pleasure in theoretical sociology, in doing conceptual

work. Only later did I fully grasp the significance of this pleasure, after understanding what Toni Morrison (1981) meant when she suggested we must write the books we want to read but that have not been written yet. It is not different with theories: when livelihoods and lived experiences have been overlooked or marginalised by theories, we should not cramp them into the existing theories – we need to conceptualise anew.

In the library in Leuven, I had my first encounter with Stuart Hall, through reading *Resistance through Rituals* (1975). The encounter was electrifying, and eventually made me find my way to Birmingham, to Cultural Studies. When I finally met Stuart, I am afraid there was no elegant or non-pathetic way to convey my gratitude to him than to go down on my knees (he was resting in an armchair) and telling him that he changed the course of my life.

Rosi Braidotti created a home for my doctoral research at Utrecht University, for which I am forever grateful. Rosi has deeply shaped my thinking on difference: her philosophy lays bare the profound inability, at the heart of modern European metaphysics, to deal with difference other than always already structured in inferiority/superiority. A metaphysics that accompanies histories drenched in the blood of genocide and colonisation. Rosi taught me that we need to go to those philosophical roots and rethink and redo difference if we want to make different worlds possible.

Utrecht University is where I encountered Gloria Wekker and witnessed how she put intersectionality on the academic agenda in the Netherlands and inaugurated the first chair in Gender and Ethnicity in this country. Gloria taught me Black feminism and taught me how to think racialisation and race in the Netherlands against the suffocating tide of white innocence. I am grateful for this pioneering work, so much against the tide and met with so much resistance. I want to acknowledge how exhausting and lonely it must have been. But it has transformed Dutch academia, and it is up to many of us now to continue the work.

Through European networks on the critical study of Islam and secularism, my paths crossed with Annelies Moors, then director of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM). Annelies taught me a love for ethnography (I am aware I do not live up to her standards!), an analytical and ethical commitment to one's interlocutors, and an attitude towards institutional power that can be described as no-nonsense, unimpressed by status, manipulation, or likability. The commitment to content and integrity that she embodies make these institutions more inhabitable.

Then there was Judith Butler. Judith's thinking and writing has a way of undoing, an undoing that makes our fundamental vulnerability and

dependency upon each other tangible, while invoking horizons of possibilities and hope. Judith taught me to never lose sight of violence, and to resist its normalisation, whether it is the violence of gender norms and heteronormativity, or of the War on Terror and nationalism. And she also taught me to always keep an eye on the cracks where the light shines through. When one day I wanted to know how to thank her for everything, she insisted that the point was not to give back, but to 'give forward'. I hope that I am able to give forward at least a fraction of what my teachers have given me.

And last but not least, Saba Mahmood. The encounter with Saba began with *Politics of Piety* (2005), yet another book that made all the difference, and led to friendship. Her intellectual sharpness. Her laughter that still rings in my ear. Her intensity – a light that shines so bright – including the intensity with which she faced her death. In the weeks before she died, she inquired if I already knew about the NWO grant. We all knew the end of her life was near. She was the first one I wrote when I received the news, and I am grateful we got to share that joyous moment. Saba, you are missed. In a couple of days, on March the 10th, it will be two years since you left us. This work, and the fact that the first chair in Sociology of Gender and Sexuality in the Netherlands was established through a project on *Europe's 'Muslim Question'*, embodying the entanglement I believe we need, is dedicated to you.

In different ways, from different perspectives, with different vocabularies (including those very critical of the language of the human), I learned from these scholars, these teachers, and with this chair I will continue to teach, that, in the light of violence (material, symbolic, and epistemological), the task is not to humanise one another. Our task is to remember, always, that we are all already fully human, and that our humanity is wrapped up in one another, which, as Judith Butler (2004 and 2009) taught us, makes us vulnerable and dependent upon each other.

In closing, I would like to leave all of us with these words by Toni Morrison:

This is *precisely* the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal. (Morrison, 2015, para. 14)

It is time now – after this Shabbat, after the Women's March for International Women's Day on Sunday – it is time to go to work.

Ik heb gezegd.

Notes

- 1 The recorded version of the inaugural lecture can be viewed here: <https://webcolleges.uva.nl/Mediasite/Play/9e72090ae3e14accabc68d06f7f190561d>
I would like to thank the *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* for the warm invitation to publish this inaugural lecture, and in particular Evelien Geerts for her meticulous editing labour.
- 2 'No science is absolutely free from suppositions, and no science can prove its fundamental value to the man who rejects these propositions' (Weber, 1958, p. 132).
- 3 The influence of Kant on Weber's thinking has been noted by others, see, for example, Kim (2017).
- 4 Steven Shapin (2019) offers a fine account of the performative quality of said lecture: what Weber was doing with words, the way he was enlisting his audience into his position, was part of a political intervention.
- 5 'It is said, and I agree, that politics is out of place in the lecture-room. It does not belong there on the part of the students. [...] Neither does politics, however, belong in the lecture-room on the part of the docents [...]' (Weber, 1958, p. 123).
- 6 His political positions, moreover, appeared to radicalise: in the year following the *Science as a Vocation* lecture, as Marianne Weber (1975) reports, Weber publicly proposed to lead a student militia to ensure that Polish officials entering Danzig would be shot.
- 7 This included concerns about high Polish birth rates and German–Polish intermarriage, see Abraham, 1991.
- 8 Abraham (1991, p. 35) calls this the 'anti-pluralist social outlook' of Weber's work on the Poles and argues that this outlook is 'not just an embarrassing footnote' but central to Weber's work as a whole, and notably visible in his criticism of other minority groups such as the German Catholics (from the 1880s onwards) and the Jews (after 1911).
- 9 In the original text, Weber uses the terminology '*physischen und psychischen Rassendifferenzen*', which Zimmerman (2006, p. 63) translates as 'physical and mental race differences'.
- 10 For a more elaborate analysis of Weber's concept of race (including a discussion of Weber's debate with Alfred Ploetz), see Abraham (1991) and Zimmerman (2006).
- 11 Zimmerman (2006, p. 53) considers Weber to be 'perhaps the first theorist' of what Étienne Balibar (1991) has called 'neoracism', that is, a type of racism that denies the importance of biological race while carrying a system of cultural differences that functions like race.
- 12 One of the things in need of further unpacking is the reliance on 'Karen' to make this point. Karen is a female character, who represents a bigoted white middle-aged (working-class) mum with a general lack of knowledge, an unawareness of her white privilege in particular, and a strong sense of entitlement ('speak to the manager'), who has come to life in different corners of social media, with different political stakes (notably Black Twitter, but also in more incel-oriented environments). Karen has been used in jokes and memes as well as in direct commentary about current events, notably to denounce racist acts by white women, and more recently to denounce Covid-19-related science denial and conspiracies but also to make misogynist (and sometimes classist) claims. This particular meme focuses on Karen embodying a gendered ignorance and lack of knowledge, which renders her into a decisive factor in the demolition of science.

- 13 Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) has responded in a critical and visionary way to Latour's (2004) 'matters of concern' with 'matters of care'.
- 14 See Fadil, 2019, para. 10, and specifically the following quote in Dutch: '*Niet-witte lichamen kunnen "meedoen" aan het wetenschappelijke bedrijf als ze tonen dat ze zich die criteria hebben eigen gemaakt. Maar wat ze vooral niet kunnen pretenderen is vernieuwend werken, want dan verliezen ze hun wetenschappelijke stem, en worden ze herleid tot "ervaringsdeskundigen" (die niet objectief zijn).*'
- 15 For more information on the Race, Religion, and Secularism network see: <https://racereigionresearch.org/>.
- 16 A reproduction that has more recently been rethought as regeneration, as non-heteronormative modes of the reproduction of life have found their place within the folds of the nation, as Puar (2007) has argued.
- 17 While these words of Virginia Woolf (1938/1993, pp. 184–187) often spring to mind, they feel even more pertinent on a ceremonial day like today: 'For we have to ask ourselves, here and now, do we wish to join that procession, or don't we? On what terms shall we join that procession? Above all, where is it leading us, the procession of educated men? [...] Think we must. Let us think in offices, in omnibuses; [...] let us think at baptisms and marriages and funerals. Let us never cease from thinking – what is this "civilization" in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them? What are these professions and why should we make money out of them? Where in short is it leading us, the procession of the sons of educated men?'
- 18 For a more elaborate account, see: <https://arcgs.uva.nl/events/10-years-of-arc-gs/10-years-of-arc-gs.html>.

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