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Discursive violence and responsibility

Notes on the pragmatics of Dutch populism

Michiel Leezenberg

This article discusses the discursive strategies of the Freedom Party (PVV), a contemporary Dutch populist and Islamophobic party. After tracing its ideological roots to mainstream liberalism rather than earlier forms of extreme right political movements, I will discuss its discourse about Muslims. It will appear that this discourse goes far beyond the legitimate expression of opinion. Using some of Judith Butler's ideas about the performativity of hate speech, I will attempt to describe how PVV leader Geert Wilders's language is not only a discourse *about* violence, but is also itself a discourse *of* violence. Simultaneously, however, Wilders systematically denied responsibility for any violence his words might contain, imply, or provoke; instead, he and his sympathizers blamed both Muslims and his political opponents for whatever violence might occur in the wake of his utterances. This appears most clearly in the discussion following Norwegian Anders Breivik's murderous 2011 assault on the Utøya island, an act which he himself claimed was in part inspired by Wilders's political rhetoric.

Keywords: hate speech, performativity, speech acts, discursive violence

In memoriam Niels Helsloot

1. Introduction

The discourse of early 21st-century Western European populist parties raises novel questions about free speech and censorship, and about the possible effects of radical discourse, or what is less neutrally called "hate speech". One famous and influential case of such populist discourse is that of the Dutch Freedom Party (Partij Voor de Vrijheid, PVV) headed by Geert Wilders. Ever since its foundation in 2004, PVV, and in particular its leader, Geert Wilders, has strongly influenced, indeed increasingly dominated, both the style and content of Dutch political debate. A long-time member of parliament for the liberal Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en

Democratie (VVD), Wilders had in the 1990s been active on behalf of the rights of minorities in Eastern Europe; after the September 11, 2001 assaults, however, he followed in the footsteps of maverick politicians Pim Fortuyn (who had run for parliament on a strongly Islamophobic ticket until he was assassinated by an animal rights activist right before national elections in May 2002) and Ayaan Hirsi Ali (who after a meteoric rise to political stardom in the Netherlands left for the United States in 2006), and started targeting Muslim population groups living in the Netherlands. Wilders's increasingly provocative rhetoric posed as a legitimate critique of Islam as a religion, but — as I hope to show below — was carefully crafted in such a way as to denigrate or offend Muslims and to antagonize political opponents.

Unlike a number of earlier populist parties, the PVV advertises itself as a bona fide liberal party: it legitimizes itself by appealing to liberal-democratic values of free speech, the rule of law, and a state monopoly on legitimate violence; and it places itself in an Enlightenment tradition of secularism, critique of religious authority, and rational debate. On the one hand, it successfully (though not necessarily correctly) represents itself as acting against a political and journalistic elite claimed to be “leftist”, while at the same time, and significantly, remaining largely silent about the business and financial elites. On the other, it (again, largely successfully) presents its statements not as xenophobic discourse about immigrant workers but as a legitimate liberal-secular critique of a religion. Yet, as I will argue, in its very appeal to liberal values, it paradoxically and systematically undermines liberal principles such as tolerance and equality before the law.

Below, after a more theoretical introduction, I will discuss, first, the ideological roots of Wilders's particular brand of populism, which lie less in the xenophobic fringe parties of earlier decades than in the liberal, and neoliberal, political mainstream; second, basing myself on a number of his more famous interventions and interviews, I will zoom in on Wilders's language use, with an eye on his use of vocabulary and discursive strategies, and on the intended and unintended effects of those; third, I will discuss a number of issues concerning radical discourse and responsibility, issues that arose in the context of Wilders's 2010–2011 hate speech trial and Anders Breivik's July 2011 assaults; and finally, I will tackle some more general questions concerning the pragmatics of violence.¹

1. The selection of samples from Wilders's public pronouncements until December 2012 is admittedly somewhat arbitrary, focusing on statements that have generated further debate. More elaborate searches in, or discussion of, a corpus that is as repetitive as it is extensive would not, I think, fundamentally affect the claims made below. Part of the material employed here also appears in Leezenberg (forthcoming), and is incorporated by permission of the publisher.

2. Free speech, censorship, performativity

In order to explore these paradoxical effects, one should sidestep the usual, and increasingly repetitive, polemics surrounding Wilders's anti-Islam rhetoric, and the equally repetitive debates whether or not Wilders's right to free speech should be curtailed. Opponents of the PVV have, with little more sophistication or factual accuracy than Wilders himself, brandished the party's ideology as "racist" or "fascist", and have dubbed its leader a new Hitler. Such criticisms have not only proved largely ineffective; they also appear to miss what is novel about the PVV, and about contemporary populism more generally. Wilders and his followers routinely deny being racist, claiming that they are not talking about race but about culture, and not offending people but criticizing a religion, or rather, a political ideology disguised as a religion. Moreover, unlike pre-war parties like the Italian fascists or the German national socialists, and like many another contemporary populist party in Western Europe, the PVV by and large accepts — indeed, insists upon — the rules of the game of the liberal state, including free speech, gender equality, rule of law, and secularism. Further, unlike twentieth-century fascist parties, it claims to accept the liberal state's monopoly on violence and does not resort to physical coercion as a political strategy: there are no bands of PVV thugs. One central question to be addressed below, however, is whether and to what extent PVV's discourse — which presents and legitimizes itself as the mere expression of opinions or as the courageous speaking out on uncomfortable societal truths — amounts to *verbal*, or discursive, violence.

In the public debate, a relation between words and violence is firmly established in the discussions surrounding Wilders and his party, but it hardly, if ever, reflects questions of whether and how Wilders's words *themselves* involve any kind of violence. In recent years, theorists like Judith Butler have questioned the apparently obvious distinction between physical and verbal violence, and the — initially equally plausible — assumption that acts of verbal violence, like abuse or hate speech, are "mere words", and, as such, have no physical consequences. Butler raises the question whether humans are a kind of "linguistic beings", who need language to exist: hence, she argues, a determinate social existence of the body becomes possible only in virtue of the linguistic process of naming.² Thus, the intuitive and initially self-evident distinctions between verbal and physical violence, and between utterances between speakers, become problematic.

Although Butler focuses much of her discussion on pornography and the statement "I am gay" in the U.S. army, she aims at nothing less than a "general theory of the performativity of political discourse" (1997, 72). Employing Althusser's

2. See in particular Butler (1997).

idea of naming (*appellation*) as constitutive of subjects and Derrida's notion of iteration as undermining the idea of the meaning of utterances being determined by speakers' intentions, she argues that speakers are never in sovereign control over their words. On the other hand, she claims, as a speech act's illocutionary force only becomes determinate against the background of the "complete speech situation", which can never be completely delimited, the force of words can no more unproblematically be located in the words themselves than in speaking subjects held to be sovereign. Put differently, hate speech is not in *itself* an act of violence, nor is any violent effect it may have simply *caused* by its being uttered.

With this emphasis on language as constitutive of subjects, Butler tries to avoid the appeal both to the "sovereign [*sic*] freedom of the individual" to express opinions and to state-supported censorship of hate speech by laws and regulations (1997, 41). On her account, the problematization of the distinction between words and actions avoids the implicit censorship of juridical regulation that can qualify (and hence censor) some utterances as "mere words" (1997, 127–164). State censorship, she claims, not only reiterates and reproduces hate speech in its very attempt to regulate it; it also produces subjects as much as it regulates words.

This radical reformulation of speech act-theoretical ideas forces us to pose anew various questions concerning speakers' responsibility and censorship, as it problematizes any attempt to unambiguously locate the effect of statements in either a force residing in the words themselves or in the intentions and social power of speakers. Its immediate political (and juridical) implications are not directly clear; but for a number of reasons, it seems particularly promising in the case of PVV's discourse. Not only does it help us escape the sterile and misleading opposition between free speech and the rights of minorities that has dominated public debate in the Netherlands; it may also do more justice to some of the idiosyncrasies and apparent contradictions of this discourse. To mention but a few of these: first, most of this discourse does not in fact originate with Wilders himself, but merely repeats claims and concepts of foreign Islamophobic circles; on occasion — as with Wilders's notorious short film, *Fitna* — it even boils down to outright plagiarism. Second, PVV's discourse does not always follow the expected chronological sequence of an utterance and its effects: thus, in the run-up to *Fitna's* 2008 release, Dutch media pundits and politicians hotly debated the contents and possible effects and consequences of a movie that nobody had even seen yet, reverting the usual temporal relation between the utterance of a sign and its effect on the audience. Finally, and most tragically, in July 2011, barely a month after a Dutch court acquitted Wilders from inciting hatred, a horrendous hate crime was committed in Norway that explicitly named him as a source of inspiration. These and other developments raise broader questions about power and violence, and about agency and responsibility, surrounding radical political discourse like the PVV's.

3. The ideology of the Freedom Party

The ideology of Wilders's PVV is clearly rooted in the new Dutch populism of actors like Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. In part, it involves familiar populist themes, in its attempt to blend elements of liberal free-market thinking and dislike of state interference with populist measures to protect lower-income groups (albeit specifically those of ethnically Dutch origins) and the elderly, two groups for whom the party's profound Euroskepticism is a welcome idea.³ For years, however, the PVV's ideological hallmark has been less a socio-economic nationalism and populism than a consistent Islamophobia: thus, it was on a primarily anti-Islamic ticket that the PVV entered, and made substantial gains in, the 2006 and 2010 elections. Wilders sees Islam not as a religion but as a totalitarian political ideology, and thus undeserving of the respect and legal protection that other religions deserve. Likewise, he consistently describes the Qur'an as inciting hatred of, and violence towards, women and non-Muslims. In a 2007 op-ed, he even called for the Qur'an, which he called "the *Mein Kampf* of a religion out to eliminate others", to be banned: "in different suras, Muslims are called upon to repress, persecute or kill Jews, Christians, adherents of other faiths and non-believers, to beat and rape women, and to establish by violent means a worldwide Islamic state. Plenty of suras incite Muslims to death and destruction".⁴

This Islamophobic ideology does not, of course, originate with Wilders: it is not only indebted to earlier Dutch populists, but more importantly to "Islam critics" in the United States and elsewhere, like Daniel Pipes and Egyptian-born Bat Ye'or. The latter's alleged criticism of Islam is implicitly or even explicitly shaped by an unfailingly and uncritically pro-Israel ideology, which is likewise shared by Wilders.⁵ Crucial elements of this ideology are, first, Ye'or's notion of *dhimmitude*,

3. I will not elaborate here on the (complex if not contradictory) neoliberal backgrounds of Dutch populism, or on Wilders's main sources of inspiration in figures like Margaret Thatcher in the UK and the former Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. The major difference with the latter is, of course, the fact that Wilders, unlike Berlusconi, managed to dominate the national media even without actually owning them.

4. "In verschillende soera's worden moslims opgeroepen joden, christenen, andersgelovigen en niet-gelovigen te onderdrukken, vervolgen of vermoorden, vrouwen te slaan en te verkrachten en met geweld een wereldwijde islamitische staat te vestigen. Soera's te over die moslims oproepen en aanzetten tot dood en verderf." "Genoeg is genoeg: verbied de Koran." *De Volkskrant*, August 3, 2007, see <http://www.volkskrant.nl/vk/nl/2686/Binnenland/article/detail/870859/2007/08/08/Genoeg-is-genoege-verbied-de-Koran.dhtml> (accessed April 29, 2013).

5. Thus, the party's 2012 electoral program states: "Israel, the sole democracy in the Middle East, deserves our enthusiastic support. Especially now that the country is continually threatened by the Mullah loonies in Iran. For the Freedom Party, Israel always is a beacon of hope,

which turns the Islamic notion of *dhimmi* or “protected peoples” into a sweeping argument that Islam in fact oppresses rather than protects minorities. In a European context, this notion is invoked to brandish every concession to Muslim demands or sensibilities as an act of defeat or self-effacement that will inevitably lead to the eventual imposition of the *shari‘a*, or Islamic religious law. PVV voices claim that this *dhimmi* attitude is especially pronounced in progressive, or as they consistently call them, “leftist” or “socialist”, circles.⁶

A second key ingredient of PVV ideology is Ye’or’s (2005) notion of *Eurabia*, which points to an alleged conspiracy between the European Union and the Arab League to Islamicize Europe in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur war and the ensuing oil crisis; this conspiracy included a deliberate wave of immigration of Arab Muslims that aimed at changing the ethnographic balance of Europe. Ye’or herself has jokingly referred to her book as the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Brussels’, but it is clearly taken very seriously by followers like Wilders. Although it is hailed as fully backed by documentary evidence by its admirers, *Eurabia* does not in fact succeed in documenting any of its more dramatic claims.⁷ Moreover, Ye’or’s hypothesis of a Eurabian conspiracy is nonsensical both chronologically, as the major waves of Muslim labour migration had already started in the 1960s, and geographically, as these waves involved Turks at least as much as (Moroccan, Tunisian, and Algerian) Arabs; and Turks are not known for their pro-Arab sentiments.

A third and final element of the PVV’s Islamophobic ideology is the concept of *taqiyya* or dissimulation. Originally developed in Shi‘ite jurisprudence as a way of allowing Shi‘ites to lie about their sectarian affiliation if their life was in danger, this notion has been reinterpreted in Islamophobic circles as a generic injunction to Muslims of whatever sectarian background to lie about their true intentions

progress, and civilization. On all forums, cheap Israel bashing by the combined forces of Islam and the Left should be countered” (“Israël, de enige democratie in het Midden-Oosten, verdient onze enthousiaste steun. Zeker nu het land steeds bedreigd wordt door de knotsgekke moellahs in Iran. Voor de Partij voor de Vrijheid is de Joodse staat altijd een baken van hoop, vooruitgang en westerse beschaving. Op alle podia moet het goedkope Israël-bashen van de gecombineerde krachten van islam en links worden tegengegaan.”). PVV electoral program *Hún Brussel, óns Nederland*. 2012, p. 5; <http://pvv.nl/index.php/visie/verkiezingsprogramma-2012.html> (accessed September 23, 2014).

6. See Ye’or (1985). The anti-leftist strain is even more marked in the book by Wilders’s ideological right hand, Martin Bosma (2011), *De schijn-élite van de valse munters* [The counterfeiters’ fake elite]. In this work, all the evils of twentieth-century Europe (most notably, Nazism) are conveniently blamed on one entity labelled “socialism”, which stretches from Leninism to post-war social democracy.

7. For a more detailed assessment of the argumentative strength of *Eurabia*, see my review in *INAMO*, no. 53 (2008).

(which, invariably, are said or implied to amount to the worldwide spread of Islam and to violent jihad against all unbelievers). Although unknown to the vast majority of Muslims, this notion is claimed as a key element of Islam by its critics; needless to say, it raises suspicions even against apparently assimilated or secularized Muslims, while simultaneously rendering Islamophobic discourse itself impossible to refute.

In short, the Islamophobic ideology of the PVV and its main sources of inspiration express a paranoid and unfalsifiable worldview of conspiracies, violent jihad and attempts to conquer the world, which goes far beyond any theological critique of Islam as a religion: it places all individuals of Islamic background, no matter how apparently secularized or assimilated, under permanent suspicion of secretly waging or planning a jihad against non-believers. This ideology is not only immune to falsification, but also remarkably silent on possible solutions; in fact, it implies that the only way of dealing with the alleged Islamic threat is either the permanent surveillance or the physical removal, not only of radical Muslims or of youthful troublemakers, but of *all* Muslims. Given the dogma of *taqiyya*, not even the assimilation or mass conversion of Muslims (an idea once floated by Hirsi Ali) will permanently remove the threat allegedly posed by the Muslim presence in Europe, as even converted, assimilated, or secularized individuals with a Muslim background may be merely hiding their jihadist intentions. Hence, taken to its logical conclusions, the PVV's ideology would require not only a stop to all immigration from Muslim countries, but also the expulsion of Muslims already living in the Netherlands, and more generally in Europe. These more radical conclusions are rarely drawn explicitly; but they certainly inform many an Islamophobic author, and as we will see, Wilders repeatedly hints at them.

As PVV statements hardly even pretend to add up to a systematic or coherent whole, it may be somewhat misleading to call them an 'ideology'; thus, the free speech demanded for Wilders is routinely denied to those who would speak on behalf of Islam or of Muslim population groups. This inconsistency, however, may have unexpected implications when extended to other minorities, as became painfully clear when the PVV supported a bill banning the ritual slaughter of animals, which had originally been proposed by the animal-rights and animal-welfare Partij voor de Dieren (PvdD). Ostensibly a bill against the unnecessary suffering of animals, the bill clearly targeted Muslim practices of *halal* butchering. Ultimately, however, the bill was rejected in parliament: it was not only rendered a dead letter by people's realization that they could simply import halal meat from abroad if it were to be banned in the Netherlands; but the bill also, and inadvertently, targeted Jewish practices of kosher butchering, thus undermining the PVV's staunchly pro-Jewish and pro-Israel stance.

4. The language of the Freedom Party

Wilders and his PVV have not just become famous, or notorious, for their anti-Islamic and anti-European and pro-Israel ideology, however, but also — and perhaps more importantly — for their rude and systematically provocative verbal strategies. This aspect of Freedom Party discourse is such a novel phenomenon in the Dutch political landscape that in 2010, Jan Kuitenbrouwer, a prominent Dutch journalist with a keen ear for linguistic trends and fashions, even published a book-length study of Wilders's vocabulary and framing strategies. In the same year, another, more academic book-length study was published, which similarly focused on framing but paid more attention to Wilders's argumentative style.⁸ Kuitenbrouwer partly bases his analysis of the ways in which Wilders characterizes opponents and frames debates on George Lakoff's notion of political framing; as such, he may be said to focus on the semantics of Wilders's language and the conceptual tools underlying the rhetorical success of his vocabulary. In what follows, however, I would like to shift attention to questions that belong to pragmatics rather than semantics: exactly what audience are Wilders's statements actually addressed to? What effects are they intended to achieve? What linguistic ideologies do they presuppose or reproduce? The most difficult question to answer of all concerns violence: is PVV discourse a call to arms against Muslim violence, or does it instead provoke or incite physical violence, or perhaps even amount to verbal or discursive violence itself? I do not pretend to have a full-blown answer to these questions, which I will tackle with the aid of Speech Act Theory and some of its offshoots, in particular Judith Butler's approach to hate speech; but I hope to make clear that it is important to raise them.

One initial pragmatic question is exactly who is the intended audience or addressees of Wilders's utterances. For the most part, Wilders's remarks, although *about* Muslims, are clearly not directed *at* the Muslim population of the Netherlands, despite their occasional rhetorical appeal to abide by the law or to accept Western values. Nor do they simply target the Dutch electorate at large, as their tone and style antagonize a large part of the electorate. Rather, as will appear below, they almost seem intended to have a polarizing effect, and to aim at a clear separation between opponents and sympathizers. This becomes especially clear from the novel phenomenon of the tweet, a genre in which Wilders excels: tweets are typically brief, to the point, and undiplomatic; they are not directly addressed

8. Kuitenbrouwer (2010); De Bruijn (2010). Kuitenbrouwer employs George Lakoff's ideas about framing as expressed in e.g. Lakoff (2004).

to anyone in particular, and invite similarly pointed responses rather than a debate with arguments and counterarguments.⁹

In other words, despite its claim to form part of a rational debate, PVV discourse typically leaves little or no room for a reasoned exchange of arguments and justifications. But what *does* it aim at, then? One hesitates to speak of “rhetoric” here, a term that may carry associations of eloquence, elegance, and persuasion that are a far cry from Wilders’s verbal style and tactics. Rather, he often uses a rude, crude, and systematically confrontational language that targets both Muslims and leftists for ridicule, and revels in insulting if not discriminatory remarks. This verbal style or strategy primarily consists of a deliberate flouting of unwritten rules of orderly parliamentary debate (and of polite conversation more generally), though not necessarily of any formal legal rules prohibiting discrimination and inciting hatred. Thus, on one occasion, Wilders called the speaker of parliament “raving mad” (“knettergek”); on another, he ridiculed the leader of the social democrat fraction as a “toleration poodle” (“gedoogpoedel”) because of his support for the cabinet, even though at the time, it was the PVV itself rather than the social democrats that formally supported, or “tolerated”, the minority cabinet of Liberals and Christian Democrats.

The cumulative effect of this provocative and polarizing discourse will be discussed below, but there are indications that it is used as a carefully thought-out and implemented communicative strategy: not even maverick politician Pim Fortuyn had as systematically engaged in the insulting or provoking of both his political opponents and Muslims living in the Netherlands. Kuitenbrouwer (2010, 20ff.) suggests that the more picturesque of Wilders’s characterizations have been jointly coined by Wilders himself and his aide, Martin Bosma, and virtually amount to a form of stand-up comedy. He further observes that Wilders’s language is decidedly 1950s in vocabulary, and that, as coarse as it is, never becomes obscene in the way that much present-day debates include sexually explicit terms of abuse.

In general, Wilders appears careful not to make sweeping claims about population groups, as this might easily be construed as amounting to insult or discrimination of groups or individuals. In practice, of course, the distinction among Islam as a religion, political Islam as an ideology, and Muslims as a population group is not always easy to make, and Wilders systematically exploits this blurred

9. To mention but one among many examples that are as numerous as they are repetitive, on October 1, 2013, Wilders tweeted about the new parliamentary speaker, Khadija Arib: “We’ll never get used to it. This afternoon, a Moroccan (Arib) as speaker of parliament with the Qur’an in front of her, in the Dutch parliament” (“Het zal nooit wennen. Een Marokkaanse (Arib) vanmiddag als Kamervoorzitter met de Koran voor haar neus in de Nederlandse Tweede Kamer”). Wilders’s tweets can be found at <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv> (accessed December 22, 2014).

distinction. In fact, some of his most notorious statements deliberately straddle the demarcation lines between Islam, Islamism, and Muslims, as when he proposed a special tax on headscarves during the opening of the parliamentary year in September 2009:

*A better environment starts with yourself. Many Dutchmen are irritated by Islam's pollution of public space. In some places, our streets start looking more and more like Mecca or Tehran. Headscarves, hate beards, burkas, men in weird long white dresses... Let us reconquer our streets and ensure that Holland starts looking like Holland again. Those headscarves are a symbol of an ideology that is out to colonize us. Therefore: high time for a major cleansing of our streets... Why not raise levies on headscarves? A head rag tax... The polluter pays.*¹⁰

In this statement, Wilders clearly crosses the line between criticizing a religion and calling attention to its adherents because of their physical appearance, which he characterizes not only in derogatory terms like “hate beards”, “head rags” and “weird long white dresses”, but also in the more sinister vocabulary of dirt, pollution, and cleansing; and even in a discourse of violence, war, conquest, and colonization. It is not clear if the term *haatbaard* actually originated in PVV circles, but clearly, it was Wilders who made it popular. *Kopvod* may be a translation of the English *head rag*, as it occurs in, among others, William Faulkner's *Absalom! Absalom!* or Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*;¹¹ significantly, both uses have clearly racist contexts and connotations. Kuitenbrouwer (2010, 34), however, suggests that in Wilders's native province of Limburg, the term *kopvod* was a traditional vulgar and derogatory term for the head covering worn by catholic nuns. But whatever its origins, its effects were clearly not what Wilders had hoped or expected: the proposal not only, and predictably, met with unanimous disapproval in parliament, but also caused the PVV to drop significantly in local opinion polls. As a result of the latter, both terms were quietly dropped. Although repeatedly challenged to elaborate and formally launch their plan of taxing headscarves, Wilders and his

10. “Een *beter milieu* begint bij jezelf. Heel veel Nederlanders ergeren zich aan de *vervuiling* van de publieke ruimte door de Islam. Ons straatbeeld gaat op sommige plekken steeds meer lijken op Mekka en Teheran. Hoofddoekjes, haatbaarden, boerka's, mannen in rare lange witte jurken... Laten we onze straten *terugveroveren*, en zorgen dat Nederland er weer gaat uitzien als Nederland. Die hoofddoekjes zijn een symbool van een ideologie die erop uit is om ons te *koloniseren*. Daarom: tijd voor een *grote schoonmaak* van onze straten... Waarom dan niet een hoofddoekjesbelasting? Een kopvoddentaks... De *vervuiler* betaalt.” Emph. added; quoted in Kuitenbrouwer (2010, 32).

11. The literary and other antecedents were noted by Dutch journalist Frits Abrahams, in his column, “Kopvod” verklaard, *NRC Handelsblad*, 22 September 2009 (<http://weblogs.nrc.nl/dag/2009/09/22/%E2%80%98kopvod%E2%80%99-verklaard/#more-1149>, accessed May 2, 2013).

colleagues generally evaded such challenges. The term *kopvoddentaks* did return in the PVV's 2012 electoral program, but not as a major policy item.

Wilders's self-censorship involving the term *haatbaard* is even more remarkable. Both on video footage of the original parliament session and in the parliamentary transcripts (which are approved by representatives before publication), Wilders appears to use the term *haardbaarden* ("hearth beards"), an expression which is simply meaningless. When uttering this term, Wilders was reading from a prepared text; this suggests that his wording may not have been a slip of the tongue but a deliberate malapropism for *haatbaard*, the word sounding closest to it, and indeed the word he was universally understood to have used. Thus, a quick internet search in Spring 2012 revealed 79,600 hits for *haatbaard* and a mere 311 for *haardbaard*, most of which clearly function as a euphemism or stand-in for the former. This act of self-censorship may suggest that Wilders, at this stage, still took some care to avoid language that indiscriminately targeted groups rather than beliefs, possibly with an eye to legal implications.

In a television debate, party ideologue Bosma did not disown terms like *haatbaard* and *kopvoddentaks*, but trivialized their possible effects, calling them "offensive but clear" (*kwetsend maar helder*).¹² The jocular tone in which Bosma conducted the entire discussion and more generally the readiness of PVV politicians to both introduce and drop items for debate strongly suggest that, almost irrespectively of its speakers' actual political and other beliefs, PVV discourse in large part consists of simply trying out which words "work", in the sense of attracting media attention and provoking public debate. Thus, at one point, the party also proposed a merger with the Flemish-speaking North of Belgium (which had broken away from the Netherlands in the early 19th century); on another occasion, it protested against the alleged undermining of the local Saint Nicholas celebration by politically correct foreign activists; these statements, however, met with indifference or ridicule, and were quietly dropped.

Wilders's statements may originate as a form of stand-up comedy intended to provoke laughter, if we are to believe Kuitenbrouwer (2010, 25); but they often revolve around violence. Although they are most obviously *about* the violence allegedly inherent to Islam, they have also led to substantial concerns that their *effect* may be one of violence. In public debate, questions were raised whether they amount to inciting hatred and may trigger violence *against* Muslims; rather more often, however, fears were expressed that they could provoke violent retaliations *by* Muslims. On this point, PVV discourse clearly involves two contradictory

12. Pauw & Witteman, 29 October 2010. [http://pauwenwitteman.vara.nl/Uitzending-detail.113.0.html?&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=18416&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=1546&cHash=e202233af4c289b82415f5b9a03209de](http://pauwenwitteman.vara.nl/Uitzending-detail.113.0.html?&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=18416&tx_ttnews[backPid]=1546&cHash=e202233af4c289b82415f5b9a03209de) (accessed April 3, 2012).

language ideologies: on the one hand, as will appear below, Wilders construes his own words as words rather than actions, and as constructive contributions to a political and public debate: thus, he implies that his words are *just* words, i.e., that they are legitimate and harmless expressions of opinions.¹³ Others' words, however — whether Muslims' or ethnically Dutch opponents' — he tends to construe as actions rather than just words, and more specifically as threats or demonizations, that is, as inherently violent actions; likewise, he sees the language of the Qur'an as a call for violent action, rather than as the legitimate expression of a bona fide religious faith. We will return to this asymmetry below.

Thus, when confronted with protest that his remarks are offensive to Muslims, Wilders (like his populist predecessors) claims the right to offend as a crucial ingredient of public debate in a democratic society, disregarding any further effects that derogatory language might have on either its addressee or on a third party; more generally, he routinely denies that his polarizing language has, or could have, any violent effect at all. Put differently, he denies any responsibility for his own words, or attempts to shift the responsibility for any violent effects on others. Thus, he elaborated his 2007 call for banning the Qur'an as follows:

It is not me who propagates hatred, it is the Qur'an. It is a fascist book. It is not a book we should have over here. Perhaps [it is admissible] if you take out all those nasty verses, but then little will remain; then the Qur'an will be as voluminous as a Donald Duck magazine.¹⁴

This comment does not only suggest that Wilders intends to depict any resulting polarization, discord, hatred or violence as not being caused by his own words but rather by the Qur'anic text itself.¹⁵ At the same time, his comparisons of the Qur'an to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the *Donald Duck* magazine are carefully calculated to humiliate, irritate and/or provoke his opponents, and at the same time to provoke the laughter of his sympathizers. Predictably, both the cabinet and the other parties in parliament rejected Wilders's call for a ban, giving him the opportunity to

13. For more detailed discussion of this point, see. Leezenberg (forthcoming).

14. "Ik zaai geen haat, dat doet de Koran. Het is een fascistisch boek. Dit is geen boek dat we hier moeten hebben. Misschien als je al die foute verzen eruit haalt, maar dan blijft er weinig over; dan is de Koran net zo dik als de Donald Duck." Interview, "Mensen zijn islamisering spuugzat" ("People are sick and tired of Islamization"), *Algemeen Dagblad*, August 17, 2007 <http://www.ad.nl/ad/nl/1012/Nederland/article/detail/2237022/2007/08/17/Mensen-zijn-islamisering-spuugzat.dhtml> (accessed April 29, 2013).

15. As with many another element of PVV ideology, this factual claim is demonstrably nonsensical: the text of the Qur'an contains very few calls to political action, and even fewer law-like violent sanctions of inappropriate behaviour, let alone calls to violence against unbelievers outside of narrative contexts; cf. Woltering & Leezenberg (2010): ch. 7.

call his fellow politicians “cowards” and “scaredy-cats who do not talk straight” (“angsthazen die met meel in de mond praten”). Wilders’s call led to a barrage of calls to prosecute him for inciting hatred; at the same time, his party skyrocketed in opinion polls, which proved that, this time at least, Wilders’s polarizing tactics had paid off in electoral terms.

The question of whether Wilders’s utterances merely call attention to violence, or instead may provoke (physical) violence by or against Muslims, or even amount to a form of verbal violence in themselves, becomes even more central in the overheated debates surrounding his 15-minute documentary, *Fitna*. Intriguingly, there was far more public debate in the months preceding the movie’s actual release than in the weeks after, with Wilders demanding that his movie be broadcast on national public television in the interest of freedom of expression, and the Dutch government hesitatingly trying to restrict its circulation in the name of public security. Indeed, (fear of) violence by Muslims rather than a concern about discrimination was the main framing factor in the discussion surrounding the movie, long before its actual release. If we take *Fitna* as a sort of macro speech act, one might say that its effect of calling attention to violence in the name of Islam *preceded* its actually being uttered, in a reversal of the usual chronological order of an utterance and its effect. This reversal of temporality constitutes one of the most remarkable pragmatic oddities of PVV discourse.

The “fear of Muslim violence” framing proved very powerful indeed. When *Fitna* was finally released in March 2008, the main reaction was one of relief that no violent reactions had occurred among Muslims either in Holland or abroad — implying a tacit acceptance of the movie’s suggestion that Muslims are prone to violence. Discussion hardly if at all addressed the movie’s factual accuracy or its editing techniques, despite, for example, the demonstrably erroneous or tendentious translation of *all* Qur’anic verses, without exception, quoted in the movie,¹⁶ and despite its breathtakingly crude propagandistic editing that juxtaposed any expression of a Muslim identity in Europe with images of murderous, terrorist violence. This kind of suggestive editing, moreover, was nothing very new: already in 1989, British poet Tony Harrison had written a poem in defence of Salman Rushdie, “The Blasphemers’ Banquet”, which had been broadcast to equally suggestively edited and reductionist video footage that generically associated Islam with violence much like *Fitna* did.¹⁷ More remarkably, *Fitna* appears to have copied entire scenes — including music and subtitles — from *Obsession: Radical Islam’s*

16. For a more detailed analysis of the adequacy of *Fitna*’s Qur’anic translations, see “Slotwoord: heilig boek of haatpamflet?” (Woltering and Leezenberg 2010, 89–93).

17. The broadcast does not appear to be available on the internet; the poem itself is reprinted in Harrison (2007)’s *Collected Film Poetry* (London 2007).

War against the West, a 2005 pro-Israeli propaganda movie by Wayne Kopping and Raphael Shore. Surprisingly, Kopping did not make any objections against this obvious plagiarism; clearly, both movies use material, and even footage, originating in the same pro-Israeli sources, like Palestinian Media Watch and the Middle East Media Research Institute.¹⁸

What is perhaps most striking about *Fitna* is the discrepancy between the documentary's apparent meaning and its actual pragmatic effects. In an interview published shortly before its eventual release, Judith Butler correctly observed that public debate about the movie no longer concerned the factual correctness, quality or novelty of *Fitna* as a documentary, but had turned it into a sign for the freedom of speech;¹⁹ the interesting thing being, of course, that for months, that sign was *not being uttered*. Moreover, *Fitna* became a sign or emblem not only for the liberal and secular right to free speech, but also — and in the same gesture — a sign of the violence allegedly inherent in Islam. As a sign or speech act of violence, however, the movie raises rather different questions: should it be seen as a descriptive statement or as a performative utterance, which aims at bringing about the very violence it represents? Can it be considered to have been successful or felicitous on either account? Clearly, the uptake of this speech act has not been one of either discussing its propositional content or factual accuracy or actually practicing physical violence (either by or against Muslims); but what *did* this utterance bring about, and what was it intended to bring about?

It is impossible to determine whether Wilders actually hoped or intended for the film, and his various other remarks, to provoke violence by Muslims; but they clearly seem to be phrased and framed in such a way as to provoke; and undoubtedly, he would have taken any resulting violence as proof of the point he was claiming to make. Intriguingly, the media followed suit: in the mainstream Dutch press, questions of whether the film was discriminatory or incited hatred were drowned out by heated discussions of whether it should be banned in the name of public order, and whether showing it would lead to social unrest or riots among Muslims in the Netherlands, or to economic or physical retaliation against Dutch citizens and interests abroad.

But one may go beyond the claim that Wilders's utterances may aspire at performatively bringing about the very violence by Muslims they claim to be

18. See "De Israel-connectie van Geert Wilders", *Vrij Nederland*, 15 October 2009 (<http://www.vn.nl/Archief/Politiek/Artikel-Politiek/De-Israelconnectie-van-Geert-Wilders.htm>, accessed April 29, 2013).

19. See "Ik snap niet dat de regering zo bang is", *Vrij Nederland*, March 15, 2008 (<http://www.vn.nl/Archief/Wetenschapsmilieu/Artikel-Wetenschapsmilieu/Filosofe-Judith-Butler-Ik-snap-niet-dat-de-regering-zo-bang-is.htm>, accessed March 31, 2012).

representing. One might well argue that these utterances *themselves* involve, or amount to, specific forms of discursive violence, or to what in juridical vocabulary would be called “hate speech”, realizing that they involve not just the expression of individual opinions, but amount to a discourse that is simultaneously sustained by, and reinforces or reproduces, existing power relations and patterns of domination and exclusion. Like Hirsi Ali, Wilders has lived under permanent police protection since the assassination of Theo van Gogh in November 2004; thus, he is not simply a brave individual standing up for free speech, but a seasoned politician whose freedom of speech and movement require the repressive power of the state. Thus, he not only presupposes the power of the modern state as the precondition for his statements by demanding permanent police protection and claiming parliamentary immunity, but he also reproduces, reinforces, and legitimizes the repressive powers of that state in his frequent appeals for state censorship of “hate imams”, as he consistently calls them, and for “radical” imams to be deported or not allowed to speak in public; in his calls for an outright prohibition of the Qur’an; in his frequent criminal complaints filed against real or perceived threats against him; and last but not least in his proposals to send in the Dutch military in urban quarters having problems with immigrant youths²⁰ or to have police troops shoot with live ammunition at rioters.²¹ On his account, the state, having a mo-

20. ‘Wilders: stuur het leger naar Gouda’ (*Telegraaf*, 15 September 2008), http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/20660379/___Wilders___Stuur_het_leger_naar_Gouda___html (accessed April 29, 2013).

21. Various Dutch media, September 15, 2007. Wilders elaborated his comments in a column (accessible at http://www.pvv.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=579, accessed April 29, 2013): “I propose to shoot with live ammunition during serious riots. First, a clear warning should be given, then a warning shot should be fired; subsequently, the police should deactivate rioters, preferably by shooting them in the legs. The unambiguous providing of legally binding impunity for the police in such cases will take away any hesitation on the side of policemen to rigorously engage with and to effectively counter rioters. It doesn’t make any difference whether rioters are soccer hooligans (whether or not Moroccan), squatters, antiglobalists and other despicable scum” [Ik stel voor] om bij ernstige rellen met scherp te schieten. Hieraan voorafgaand moet er eerst een duidelijke waarschuwing gegeven worden, daarna een waarschuwingsschot en vervolgens dient de politie relschoppers uit te schakelen middels een schot bij voorkeur in het been. Het onomwonden wettelijk vastleggen dat bij het volgen van deze procedure de politie straffeloos is, zal aarzeling bij agenten om relschoppers hard aan te pakken wegnemen en de relschoppers effectief bestrijden. Het maakt overigens geen verschil of de relschoppers bestaan uit voetbalhooligans (Marokkaans of niet), krakers, antiglobalisten of ander verwerpelijk tuig.” Note the final sentence, in which Wilders disingenuously suggests that his language has no ethnic dimension, simultaneously and oddly singling out Moroccans as soccer hooligans.

nopoly on legitimate violence, should not hesitate to resort to violence in dealing with unruly population groups.

On occasion, Wilders has even openly called for the deportation and ethnic cleansing of Muslim population groups at large, not only from Western Europe but even from their native lands. Thus, in December 2008, referring to then-ongoing clashes between Palestinians and the Israeli army, Wilders openly propagated ethnic cleansing as the only solution to the problem: referring to the Palestinians, he declared: “knikker de hele bende maar de Sinai in” (“just toss the entire bunch into the Sinai desert”).²² Likewise, in an interview with Danish television, Wilders openly said that Muslims who fail to abide by Western norms should be deported from Europe. Returning to his earlier image of a tsunami of Muslims flooding Europe, he argues that if the percentage of Muslims in a society increases, the remaining population will be deprived of its freedom, suggesting a direct causal link between demographic change, rising crime rates, the alleged Islamization of society, and the alleged disappearance of liberal values. Asked how many Muslims in Europe do in fact represent such a threat, he mentioned that “tens of millions” of Muslim immigrants are causing problems, and added what he called “a very clear message” to Europe’s Muslim population:

if you commit a crime, or if you start thinking about jihad or shari’a, then it is very clear we will send you away, we will send you packing, we will strip you of the Dutch or Danish nationality, and we will send you away... At the same time, we want a stop of the immigration from Muslim countries, from any Muslim countries, to our societies.²³

Note that Wilders does not refer to Muslims who have actually transgressed the law, but to Muslims who “start thinking” about doing so, apparently introducing a category of thought crime in the process. Equally remarkable is the recurrent, and apparently deliberate, slippage from criminality to caliphate and from immigration to Islamization in these remarks, which turns alleged evidence for the one automatically into evidence for the other.

22. “De aanleiding is blinde haat. Daar helpt helaas geen dialoog tegen. Als je volk en land in zijn bestaan wordt bedreigd en beschoten door terroristen, schiet je terug... Knikker de hele bende maar de Sinaï in” (“The motive is blind hatred. Unfortunately no dialogue helps against that. When your people and land are threatened in their existence and shot at by terrorists, you shoot back... Toss the entire bunch into the Sinai”. *De Telegraaf*, 28 December 2008; see http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/2878429/_Wilders_achter_Israel_.html (accessed March 31, 2012).

23. For footage of the interview, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IoeVcslBwgg> (accessed March 31, 2013).

In short, Wilders's discourse is clearly not only *about* violence, it is also itself a discourse *of* violence: he employs a vocabulary of war and physical violence rather than political debate, and openly calls for state violence against unruly Muslims (and to a lesser extent others), apparently presuming that state violence is legitimate by definition. It is, however, a moot question with serious juridical implications exactly *how* his words involve violence: can they be said to provoke or invite violence, not only on the part of the state but also on the part of Muslims, who are ostensibly the people talked about, or of the non-Muslim Dutch population, who are ostensibly the audience addressed? Are they *intended* to provoke such violence, and if so, how can this intent be proven? Such questions are of a juridical as much as of a pragmatic nature; and soon after, they were to acquire a tragic urgency.

5. Criminal responsibility? The hate speech trial and the Breivik assaults

There seem to be good *prima facie* reasons for thinking that Wilders's remarks go far beyond merely criticizing Islam as a religion and amount to the discrimination of, or inciting hatred against, Muslims as a group, and even amount to a call for physical violence to be exercised by the state. Various actors in the Netherlands have indeed drawn this conclusion, and over the years, a number of criminal complaints have been filed against Wilders; in particular the release of *Fitna* led to a barrage of calls for criminal prosecution; but in June 2008, the Dutch State Attorney decided to drop these cases, arguing that Wilders's remarks were "perhaps hurtful, coarse or lacking nuance, but did not amount to insult punishable by law" ("wellicht kwetsend, grof of ongenueanceerd, maar geen strafbare belediging").²⁴ After a group of lawyers had initiated a so-called 'Artikel 12 Strafvordering' (article 12 criminal proceedings) procedure — which allows victims to protest against State Attorney decisions not to prosecute — however, the Amsterdam court ruled in January 2009 that, because of their inflammatory tone and one-sided content, Wilders's remarks did indeed amount to inciting hatred against and discrimination of Muslims, and to criminal insult; accordingly, it ordered a trial, clearly against the preference of the State Attorney.²⁵

In one of the more conspicuous ironies of the ensuing trial, Wilders decided to defend his claims to free speech by exercising his right to silence. In doing so, he once again indicated that he did not want to consider his beliefs or statements

24. For the June 30, 2008 ruling, see http://www.om.nl/onderwerpen/discriminatie/@148328/wilders_niet/ (accessed 11 May 2013).

25. For the court ruling, see <http://zoeken.rechtspraak.nl/resultpage.aspx?snelzoeken=true&searchtype=ljn&ljn=BH0496> (accessed 2 May 2013).

as in any way open to criticism, debate, or justification; that is, he did not treat them as moves in a rational debate of providing, and listening to, arguments and justifications of differing viewpoints. Initially, Wilders's defence tried to divert the case from the *language* Wilders had been using to the *ideology* expressed by that language, which it presented as a politically inconvenient but scientifically established truth about Islam. For this line of defence, it had called in a large number of alleged expert witnesses, all of whom in fact hailed from the Dutch and international Islamophobic circles described above; but when all but three of these experts were rejected by the court, it switched tactics. Now, Wilders's lawyer, Bram Moszkowicz, repeatedly and ultimately successfully challenged the judges assigned to the case: as a result, a rerun of the trial with different judges was ordered in October 2010. By such and other stalling and diverting tactics, the defence managed to shift attention away from what had originally been the trial's main concern: the question of whether Wilders's remarks transgressed any legal boundaries of discrimination and sowed hatred. After a new trial had started in February 2011, the State Attorney demanded Wilders's acquittal in May, and on June 23, Wilders was indeed acquitted on all counts, with the judges apparently, and uncritically, following the line of defence that Wilders's words were meant as a criticism of Islam as a religion and did not speak out against Muslims as individuals or as a group, even though a good many of his remarks both inside and outside of parliament, like those about the allegedly polluting effect of Muslims and their physical appearance in public space, would seem to suggest otherwise.²⁶

As we will see below, the court's ruling may be criticized on juridical grounds; but the most dramatic refutation of the court's conclusion that Wilders's discourse did not amount to hate speech came barely a month after Wilders's acquittal. On July 22, 2011, Norwegian activist Anders Breivik carried out a twin attack in the Norwegian capital Oslo and on the nearby island of Utøya, where the youth organisation of the Norwegian Labor Party had organized a summer camp, explicitly claiming Wilders as a source of inspiration for his actions. Breivik's attack left a total number of 77 people dead, and a further 110 injured. Although Breivik's actions were clearly ideologically motivated, and explained in detail in his 1500-page manifesto entitled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*,²⁷ there was substantial discussion of whether Breivik could be held accountable for his actions.

26. <http://www.rechtspraak.nl/Organisatie/Rechtbanken/Amsterdam/Nieuws/Pages/Uitspraak-van-de-rechtbank-AmsterdamindezaakWilders,23juni2011.aspx> (accessed April 29, 2013).

27. For a summary of Breivik's manifesto, see e.g. "The Oslo Terrorist in His Own Words," *Washington Post*, July 23, 2011 (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/blog/robbins-report/2011/jul/23/oslo-terrorist-his-own-words/>) (accessed March 30, 2011). A more detailed analysis, in

Initially, forensic psychiatrists concluded that he was criminally insane, and hence could not be condemned to prison, partly on the basis of his writings, which, they held, expressed a universe of bizarre, grandiose, and delusional thoughts. No one, however, has to my knowledge ever seriously claimed that similarly radical discourse like the PVV's, which as noted above shares a good many of the paranoia and conspiracy theories that also shape Breivik's ideas (including those of a Eurabian conspiracy), is pathological.

Locating the ideological motivation and responsibility of Breivik's deeds was found to be difficult. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Norwegian peace researcher Johan Galtung stated that European rightist parties are indeed accessories to Breivik's crime and bear a shared guilt (*Mitschuld*), but added, in a slightly contradictory manner: "they are responsible for hatred emerging against Muslims; but they are not responsible for Breivik's hatred... His hatred of the alleged alliance between social democrats and Islamists has no example."²⁸ The latter claim is demonstrably wrong, however; as Dutch journalist Eildert Mulder has shown in detail, there are various ideological antecedents to Breivik's theories, although many of them stop short of explicitly proclaiming a violent solution.

The question of (direct and indirect) responsibility for Breivik's actions is of course a sensitive one. Breivik himself admitted to carrying out the killings, but pleaded not guilty, instead shifting responsibility to the Norwegian Labor Party: "As long as the Labor Party follows its ideological line and continues to deconstruct Norwegian culture and import Muslims en masse so they must take responsibility for this treason."²⁹ In his final plea in the hate speech trial, Wilders had likewise declared that he would continue to speak out, stating that silence on Islam and Islamization amounted to treason.³⁰ Breivik's words resonate with those of Wilders. Furthermore, a similar conclusion emerged from Ayaan Hirsi Ali. In July 2012, in a classical case of blaming the victims, Hirsi Ali declared in her acceptance speech for the *Bild Zeitung* prize that the causes of Breivik's deeds should not be sought in extremist Islamophobic ideology but in an alleged politically correct repression of open discussion. In an interview following her speech, she elaborated:

Dutch, can be found in Mulder (2012). See also Bangstad (2014), which unfortunately appeared too late to be included in the present discussion.

28. "Wir müssen verstehen, wie Breivik denkt" (interview, *Der Spiegel*, August 3, 2011). Available on <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,777942,00.html> (accessed March 30, 2012).

29. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-24/norway-killing-suspect-may-explain-motives.html> (accessed March 30, 2013).

30. "'Ik wil mijn land beschermen tegen de islam, dus zwijgen is verraad.'" http://www.rtl.nl/components/actueel/rtlnieuws/2011/06_juni/01/binnenland/Zwijgen-is-verraad.xml (accessed April 29, 2013).

Q: *Do you mean: Breivik's assaults are actually caused by the suppression of societal problems?*

A: That is what he says in his manifesto. He also says it in the court case which is now public. So the theory that was initially proposed, that he was inspired by people who are against jihad is wrong. He says: I wanted to use violence because I saw no other way out. Well, I have heard that sentiment before, starting from the year 2000. I have heard it in the Netherlands, Germany, France, Australia: anywhere I went, people complained about political correctness, and so political correctness is not good.³¹

In other words, Hirsi Ali sees not a dehumanizing ideology, but rather the attempt to banish or silence that ideology, as the real cause of Breivik's violence. Thus, she not only uncritically reproduces one part of Breivik's ideological self-justifications while simultaneously downplaying his appeals to Wilders and herself; she also, and disingenuously, downplays the fact that Islamophobes like Wilders and herself had been using a rhetoric of war, violence and disease rather than a rational debate conducted in a peaceful democratic environment, and that they themselves had presented violent means such as forced assimilation or conversion, deportation and/or ethnic cleansing as the only viable solutions.

Despite the obvious similarities in ideology and language, Wilders issued a predictable, and predictably strongly worded, denial of any direct or indirect responsibility for the actions committed by Breivik, whom he called a "lunatic" and a "psychopath":

Neither the PVV nor me are responsible for a solitary nutty idiot who has abused the freedom-loving anti-Islamization ideals in a violent manner... We are democrats in heart and soul. *The Freedom Party has never called for violence and never will.*³²

31. V: *Bedoelt u daarmee: de aanslagen van Breivik zijn eigenlijk het gevolg van het stilzwijgen van maatschappelijke problemen?*

A: Dat zegt hij in zijn manifest. Dat zegt hij ook in de rechtszaak die nu publiek is. Dus de theorie die naar voren werd geschoven in het begin dat hij geïnspireerd zou zijn door mensen die tegen de jihad zijn dat klopt niet. Hij zegt: ik wilde geweld gebruiken omdat ik geen andere uitweg zag. Nou, dat sentiment heb ik vaker gehoord. Vanaf 2000. Ik hoorde het in Nederland, Duitsland, Frankrijk, Australië, waar ik ook naar toe ging, mensen klaagden voortdurend over politieke correctheid. En politieke correctheid is dus niet goed." http://www.joop.nl/wereld/detail/artikel/13954_hirsi_ali_breivik_is_product_van_politieke_correctheid/ (accessed 27 april 2013).

32. "De PVV noch ik zijn verantwoordelijk voor een eenzame verknipte idioot die de vrijheidslievende anti-islamiseringsidealen op gewelddadige manier misbruikt... Wij zijn democraten in hart en nieren. *De Partij voor de Vrijheid heeft nooit en te nimmer opgeroepen tot geweld en zal dat ook nooit doen*". PVV Press statement, 26 July 2011. <http://www.pvv.nl/index>.

Once more, Wilders poses as a bona fide liberal, by emphasizing his party's peaceful character and love of freedom, and by implicitly reaffirming that the state has a monopoly on legitimate violence; simultaneously, however, he once again lashes out at "leftists" for "demonizing" him by suggesting he might be indirectly responsible for the assaults. It was not only leftist politicians, however, that were unconvinced by Wilders's denials. His erstwhile ally Bart Jan Spruyt publicly called Wilders indirectly responsible for the assaults, blaming him for insufficiently distancing himself from the assaults and for creating an apocalyptic atmosphere of conflict and impending Islamic doom that left no room for politics.³³

In the wake of the assaults, many Islamophobic websites toned down their rhetoric or removed some of their more incendiary pages. For several months, Wilders, too, displayed a noticeable shift away from anti-Muslim rhetoric to bashing the Labour Party (which was not even part of the governing coalition) and to rousing popular opinion against migrant workers from Eastern European countries, opening a website where people could file complaints against Eastern Europeans living in the Netherlands. He did not make any substantial changes to his Islamophobic discourse; however, in a lengthy television interview in December 2012, Wilders stated that he would not give up his fight against Islam, stating that "the biggest disease that our country has known in this century is called Islam", perhaps not coincidentally using precisely the discourse of disease that had been explicitly sanctioned by the Supreme Court.³⁴ In this interview, he once again described Islam as being a racist totalitarian ideology in essence, and (departing somewhat from his earlier invective) Muslims primarily as victims being oppressed by the yoke of Islam. This does not mean, of course, that Wilders had finally toned down his rhetoric: in the same breath, he stated that the Netherlands had a "Moroccans problem".³⁵

The attempt to depict Breivik as an isolated lunatic and the denial of the ideological character of his assaults appear to have been largely successful: the Utøya massacres have hardly led to an enduring delegitimation of the radical Islamophobic discourse of Wilders and his allies. Thus, in March 2012, Dutch

<http://component/content/article/36-geert-wilders/4529-verklaring-geert-wilders-noorwegen.html> (emph. added; accessed April 29, 2013).

33. 'Wilders indirect verantwoordelijk voor Breivik', <http://nos.nl/artikel/259288-wilders-indirect-verantwoordelijk-voor-breivik.html> (accessed May 2, 2013).

34. As will be discussed below, in 2009 the Dutch Supreme Court had ruled that a public sign reading "Stop the tumor called Islam" did not amount to group insult; the court trying Wilders explicitly referred to this ruling in its acquittal.

35. Interview with NOS television, 20 December 2013, (<http://nos.nl/video/455679-gehele-interview-met-pvvlleider-wilders.html>) (accessed April 29, 2013).

author Theodor Holman staged a play, *Breivik ontmoet Wilders* (Breivik Meets Wilders), that openly expressed sympathy for part of Breivik's ideas, agreeing with the latter's analyses about the dangers of Islam for the Western world but rejecting his violent solutions. In an interview prior to the performance of the play, Holman openly acknowledged this agreement: "Now we had this killer, who had killed children. I am very sorry, but I find that extremely interesting. Here you see someone who thinks more or less as I do. I feel an affinity with Breivik, and I am not ashamed of it. And yet he took a totally different decision."³⁶ All of this suggests that the extreme Islamophobic rhetoric, involving claims that Muslims as well as their leftist Western apologists are beyond the pale of rational debate — and indeed of humanity — and are not to be seen as reasonable people with whom a dialogue can be conducted, had by then very much entered mainstream discourse and had by no means been delegitimized by the assaults in Norway.

6. Speech acts and violence

The successful disconnection between PVV discourse and Breivik's assaults brings us to broader questions concerning the pragmatics of violence. Clearly, Wilders bears no direct responsibility for the actions of others; but does that mean his words have no relation to Breivik's deeds at all? The above suggests that existing juridical frameworks may not be adequately equipped to deal with discourse like Wilders's. Both sympathizers and opponents of Wilders have by and large agreed on the principle of free speech, which is generally seen as an innocuous, not to say essential, aspect of a functioning liberal and secular democracy. In the public debate, however, few if any observers systematically paid any attention to exactly what other effects Wilders's words might have, beyond putting up a reductionist and misleading opposition between expressing opinions and inciting hatred. As the above makes clear, 'expressing opinions' is hardly an adequate term to capture the intent and effect of a substantial part of PVV discourse.

In the academic juridical literature, there has been more sustained attention for the potential effects of Wilders's language. Thus, in an analysis of the 2009 supreme court decision concerning an alleged insult against Islam, to which Wilders's judges had referred as a basis for their acquittal, Wouter Veraart (2010)

36. "Nu hadden we deze moordenaar, en die had kinderen vermoord. Het spijt me erg, maar ik vind dat waanzinnig interessant. Hier zie je iemand die min of meer denkt zoals ik. Ik voel me verwant met Breivik. En daar schaam ik me ook niet voor. En toch heeft die een totaal andere beslissing genomen." <http://www.dagelijksestandaard.nl/2012/03/theodor-holman-ik-voel-me-verwant-met-breivik> (accessed April 3, 2012).

argues that the Supreme court's overruling of an earlier court condemnation of a man who had publicly posted a sign with the slogan "Stop the tumor called Islam" in the wake of Theo van Gogh's assassination in 2004, reflects a new and more restrictive approach to group insult, which is based on an overly literalist and decontextualized reading of the text. A more balanced judgment, Veraart argues, should also take into account the context in which the statement was made. In his opinion, this context includes not only a critical public debate about the position of Islam as a religion in a multicultural society, but also acts of physical violence like the wave of arson attacks against mosques and Islamic schools following the assassination.

Veraart notes that if the Supreme Court had not focused on article 137c of the Dutch criminal code, which specifies group offence, but also looked at article 137d, which concerns inciting hatred against persons because of their race or religious beliefs, this context — which included not only a public debate but also acts of violence against Muslim targets — would also have been acknowledged in its ruling.³⁷ Against the Supreme Court ruling, Veraart further argues that the distinction between legitimate critique and illegitimate offence (let alone hate speech) cannot be drawn in an abstract and decontextualized manner: a decision whether or not an utterance amounts to hate speech should take into account not only the wider societal context but also the intentions with which the speaker made his utterance. Veraart notes that the Supreme Court's explicit denial that the case under jurisdiction concerns inciting hatred is odd for several reasons: first, it is highly unusual for a court — let alone the supreme court — to explicate what a court case is *not* about; second, the prosecution had in fact charged the defendant with inciting hatred, subsidiary to inflammatory speech and group offence; third, a fuller discussion of whether the slogan concerned amounted to inciting hatred rather than group offence would also have more systematically drawn attention to the context of physical violence against Islamic institutions. This suggests that pragmatic considerations concerning contexts and speaker's intentions of an utterance may become legally relevant in cases like the above. Against earlier

37. The text of articles 137c and 137d of the Dutch penal code call for the prosecution of, respectively "he who publicly, in speaking or in writing, expresses himself in a deliberately offensive manner about a group of people because of their race or religion" ("Hij die zich in het openbaar, mondeling of bij geschrift of afbeelding, opzettelijk beledigend uitlaat over een groep mensen wegens hun ras, godsdienst (enz.)") and "he who incites hatred against or discrimination of people, or violent action against people's person or property because of their race or religion" ("Hij die in het openbaar, mondeling of bij geschrift of afbeelding, aanzet tot haat tegen of discriminatie van mensen of gewelddadig optreden tegen persoon of goed van mensen wegens hun ras, geloof... (etc.)") (http://wetten.overheid.nl/BWBR0001854/TweedeBoek/TitelV/Artikel137c/geldigheidsdatum_02-05-2013, accessed May 2, 2013).

juridical analyses, Veraart rejects any strict distinction between an “offensive utterance in itself” and the “intended communication”, because, he argues, no utterances are offensive in and of themselves, that is, outside a particular context. This is certainly an important point to make, but perhaps a difficult one to elaborate or apply in practice; on the one hand, it is notoriously difficult to use non-observable intentions as a means of explaining observable verbal behavior, and, on the other, Veraart’s line of argument implies that an utterance that is at first blush completely innocuous could be turned into an offence, or even into the incitement of hatred, by the appropriate circumstances, regardless of the speaker’s actual intentions.

All this indicates just how complex is the relation between utterances, contexts, and intended effects and possible unintended consequences on and for speaker, addressee, or possible third parties. Another, closely related question is exactly who or what *causes* the offence: is the effect of hate speech to be located in the words used, in the ideas or ideology expressed, in the context of the utterance, or in the speaker’s intentions? Here, some of the ideas developed by Butler, as already discussed above, become relevant. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler (1997) develops an account of hate speech that proceeds from her Derridean take on speech act theory; thus, she proposes to treat speech acts as embodied actions that are not guided by an antecedently and independently given subjectivity or intentionality of the speaker, but by what Derrida (year) calls “iteration”; that is, by a logic of quotation in new contexts which inevitably and systematically exceed the speaker’s intentions. From such a perspective, she argues, censorship is not simply a repressive form of state power that represses or constrains the sovereign utterances of antecedently given subjects; rather, she claims, it is a productive form of power: “censorship seeks to produce subjects according to implicit and explicit norms, [...] the production of the subject has everything to do with the regulation of speech” (1997, 133). Following Foucault’s (1975) ideas of modern disciplinary power as productive of modern subjectivities, Butler then argues that censorship produces both subjects and forms of acceptable speech. As such, she continues, it posits implicit and explicit norms; these norms, however, involve not so much explicit and codified rules but rather bodily dispositions, or what the French sociologist Bourdieu has called a “habitus”, and hence cannot be fully accounted for in a quasi-legalist vocabulary that assumes both subjects as sovereign over their words and explicit rules as codified in laws. Thus, on her account, the effects of speech, and in particular the effects of hate speech, cannot exclusively be understood — let alone regulated — in terms of juridical power. Hate speech, she provocatively suggests, is produced by the state itself: not only does the state, in the guise of the court or more generally the judiciary, determine which utterances qualify as hate speech; hate speech as a sovereign and effective (or as Austin would

say “felicitous”) speech act is also modelled on the speaking of the sovereign state (1997: 16, 81).

Butler next discusses whether and how speech can be injurious, refusing to reduce the injury caused by hate speech to either a perlocutionary effect bearing no necessary link to the utterance or an illocutionary force bearing a strict causal relation to the words being uttered. Thus, she rejects both the belief that words themselves have a causal effect and the equally reductionist belief that utterances are governed by speakers’ intentions in any determinate way. Instead, she treats these effects, unforeseeable and uncontrollable as they are, in Derridean terms of iteration. A psychic injury, she argues, may affect bodily doxa, “that lived and corporeally registered set of beliefs that constitute social reality” (1997, 159).

By thus undermining the strict and unproblematic distinction between body and soul, and between speaking and acting, Butler effectively exposes the hypocrisy involved in demands for the right to offend or verbally injure as demands for a freedom of expression that is not only harmless but also essential to democratic debate. Indeed, calling attention to the performative character of hate speech helps us understand how, in claiming the right to freedom of expression, the perpetrators of such discourse try to position themselves as the victims of state repression or popular hatred, and the victims of hate speech as perpetrators. As the above discussion suggests, however, it may not be so much the injurious effects on the addressee as much as the possibly inflammatory effects on third parties that matter most in discussing the effects of Islamophobic discourse. Put differently, a critique of Islamophobic discourse should not only discuss the question of whether and how it causes any injury to Muslims; it should also, and perhaps more importantly, explore what Searle (2010, 187–191) has recently discussed under the heading of “libel and slander”. It is to a large extent up to me, Searle argues, to decide to what extent I am hurt by a hurtful utterance directed *against me*; but false or slanderous language *about me* spread to others can do great damage to me in a way that is wholly beyond my control. Hence, according to Searle, existing laws concerning slander should in fact be strengthened.³⁸ Butler (1997) would undoubtedly not agree with Searle’s call for tightened legislation, and hence for greater repressive powers of the state, but the main juridical question at stake here is whether Islamophobic discourse amounts to what in America would be called

38. Recently, other authors from a broadly liberal background have similarly called for tightening the laws on hate speech. Thus, Waldron (2012) makes an eloquent case for increasing the legal restrictions on group defamation in the United States, which, he argues, threatens the basic dignity of individual members of society and undermines their freedom from fear, discrimination, and violence; according to Waldron, in Europe, existing laws are much better tailored to deal with hate speech. For some comments on Waldron’s argument with a focus on the situation in the United Kingdom, see Modood a.o. (2014); see also Herz and Molnar (eds.) (2012).

hate speech, or rather qualifies as libel and slander; or to put the question in more analytical terms: does it primarily have its effects on the apparent addressee (i.e., the Muslim population groups in the Netherlands, or more generally Europe), or rather on a third party, specifically the Dutch public or electorate at large? ³⁹ As noted, Wilders's predecessors like Theo van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi Ali had also demanded a 'right to offend' as essential to enlightened or rational democratic debate; the question of what the beneficial effects of such offence are supposed to be, apart from an assumed undermining of religious authority and, more importantly, the question of exactly how such offence is supposed to further the emancipation of Muslim immigrants in general and of Muslim immigrant women in particular, rather than reproducing contempt for Muslims on the side of the majority population, are never even addressed. To my knowledge, not a single Muslim woman in the Netherlands has declared, whether in public or in private, to have been liberated from the tutelage of Islam thanks to Hirsi Ali's or Wilders's criticisms. In the case of the PVV, it is even clearer that Wilders's discourse is hardly if at all addressed to Muslims living in the Netherlands but primarily to those parts of the Dutch electorate that share, or are susceptible to, xenophobic sentiments.

7. Conclusions

For all its radicalism, PVV's discourse differs from other kinds of past and present populism in that it accepts, indeed insists on, the political and legal principles and values of liberal-secular democracies. It does not amount to a full-fledged, consistent political or linguistic ideology; however, PVV members habitually deny others the rights to free speech, respectability and the rule of law that they demand for themselves, and they systematically construe their own utterances as legitimate expressions of legitimate opinions, that is, as *mere* words; and the utterances of their opponents as illegitimate gestures of discursive or physical violence, that is, as *actions*. Moreover, Wilders routinely denies responsibility for his own words and attempts to shift any responsibility for possible violence that might result from them to Islam as a religion or to Muslim population groups. This asymmetry, or inconsistency, is not an accidental oversight but an integral, if not essential, prerequisite for the functioning of PVV discourse, which thus undermines liberal rights and values by its very act of appealing to them.

39. In a preface written especially for the Dutch translation of *Excitable Speech*, Butler argues against the Freedom Party's alleged instrumentalization of gay rights for promoting intolerance against religious minorities. On the whole, however, gay rights are hardly a dominant item in PVV discourse. See Butler (2007), esp. pp. 7–11.

The PVV's insistence on liberal-secular values in the face of the alleged threat from a fascist ideology posing as a bona fide religion goes a long way in explaining the ineffectiveness of liberal opposition against Wilders: by accepting his discourse as the expression of opinion and ignoring any further effects it may have, and by enshrining the right to freedom of expression as the most important, if not the sole, good to be protected by the laws and institutions of the state, one almost inevitably cedes the entire argument in advance. Paying systematic attention to the pragmatics of Wilders's language may help us transcend the sterile yes-no debate about whether or not his or others' rights to free expression should be curtailed for the sake of Muslim sensibilities or public security; it helps to refocus discussion on the diffuse range of effects of such discourse, not only on the speaker and the apparent addressee but also — and perhaps most importantly — on third parties. Put differently: we should see Wilders's utterances as primarily performative, rather than as either descriptive of facts or expressive of opinions. They are not descriptive: the truth content of most of Wilders's claims, like those of Hirsi Ali and other Islamophobes, is minimal, his statements about Eurabian conspiracies and Muslim *taqiyya* are irrefutable and hence uninformative, and his remarks about 'hearth beards' are completely meaningless. Thus, semantic content, factual truth or descriptive accuracy is obviously not what these statements are about. They are not simply expressive of opinions in a public debate either; they are not presented as negotiable moves in an orderly attempt to reach consensus. Instead, their provocative wording is carefully crafted to offend or humiliate, and to polarize and sow discord. PVV discourse is a language not of rational discussion but of violence and war, and of pollution and disease; moreover, it implicitly — and on occasion explicitly — suggests that the only solution to the societal ills it claims to have uncovered is an escalation of the repressive powers of the state, in the guise of either the forced assimilation of Muslims, deportation, or even ethnic cleansing. Thus, despite the liberal values it claims to presuppose and defend, it amounts to the decidedly illiberal rejection of the principle of equality before the law; that is, it is not only a discourse *about* violence but also a discourse *of* violence.

Language use may help in performatively bringing about what it appears to be describing, and this certainly seems to apply to PVV discourse: the very words Wilders uses aim at bringing about the social polarization he claims to be describing and at bringing about a social reality characterized by a polarisation between Muslims and non-Muslims and by (the threat of) violence of different kinds. Thus, Wilders's Islamophobic discourse reflects the performative power of language to exclude groups of people, precisely in the name of liberal normative ideals like liberty and equality.

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