Everyday autochthony: Difference, discontent and the politics of home in Amsterdam
Mepschen, P.J.H.

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CHAPTER 5
Homophobia and exclusion.

Sex and secularity in Amsterdam

Between each of us and our sex, the West has placed a never-ending demand for truth: it is up to us to extract the truth of sex, since this truth is beyond its grasp; it is up to sex to tell us our truth, since sex is what holds it in darkness.

Michel Foucault, 1977

In the previous chapter, in discussing my conversations with Stefan, I have indicated one way in which the everyday politics of religious and cultural alterity takes shape in relation to an emotional and visceral secularism. In discussing Stefan’s perspectives, I have pointed to the role of secularism, understood as a historical and social practice as well as a dominant discourse in the Netherlands, in shaping perceptions of self and other in ‘multicultural’ New West. In the Netherlands sexuality offers an idiom to discuss cultural alterity, public religion, and moral community, while bringing secularism into being as a language and cultural practice - something that is discussed in everyday life, embodied

31 Small parts of this chapter have been published elsewhere: Mepschen et al., 2010; Uitermark et al., 2014b; Balkenhol et al., 2015).
and emotionally laden. In this last chapter I want to focus more substantially on the role played by discourses surrounding ‘sexual democracy’ (Fassin, 2010), secularity, and the cultural and religious alterity of allegedly homophobic post-migrants. As I have pointed out in this dissertation, the construction of autochthony relies on the production of the Other as a knowable object. Desire and sexuality have been key factors in shaping this sense of knowing the Other, in producing a ‘truth’ about the Other that somehow turns into a ‘truth’ about the self.

The role of desire and (knowledge about) the sexuality of Others in shaping modern subjectivity has been a central topic of inquiry in scholarship on modernity and bourgeois nationalism (e.g. Foucault, 1985; Mosse, 1985; Stoler, 1995; McClintock, 1995; Van der Veer, 2001). The work of Michel Foucault has been of central importance. For Foucault, sexuality is a construction that has to be understood in its social and historical context. In contrast to approaches influenced by Freud, including the Freudian-Marxism of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, that treat sexuality as a preexisting but repressed natural desire, for Foucault desire is produced in and through the social: it is ‘not opposed to the law, but produced by it’ (Stoler, 1997:34). That is to say, freedom, including sexual freedom, is not the opposite of power. As David Halperin puts it in his *Saint Foucault*, ‘freedom is not […] freedom from power - it is not a privileged zone outside power, unconstrained by power - but a potentiality internal to power, even an effect of power’ (1995: 17).

Modern sexuality and desire in Foucault’s view must be understood in relation to the emergence of a political technology, biopower, for the management of populations and the disciplining of individual bodies. Modern biopower brought into being a plurality of sexualities and ‘through the classification, distribution, and moral rating of those sexualities the individuals practicing them can be approved, treated, marginalized, sequestered, disciplined,
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and normalized’ (Bersani, 1996 in Halperin, 1995: 20). The figure of the homosexual came into being in and through these technologies of power. ‘The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species’ (Foucault, 1990: X).

Sexuality was structured by desires and discourses that were never about sex alone (Stoler, 1997: 43). The production of desire and sexuality has always been closely tied up with other social and cultural classifications, with class, gender, race and - especially important today - religion. The formation of modern, national character was contingent - always - upon the construction of alterity, both ‘at home’ and in the colonial encounter. As Stoler points out, sexuality by definition is connected to the desire of the Other. One domain that was pivotal to the cultivation of bourgeois selves was that of lower-class Europeans, who were widely associated with sexual excess and inappropriate desire. Another domain was that of empire. Stoler argues:

32 The work of the Dutch historian of homosexuality Theo van der Meer has been pivotal in developing a critical approach to the Foucaultian dichotomy between sodomite acts and homosexual subjectivity or personality. Contra Foucault, Van der Meer argues that homosexual self-awareness could already be found in the second half of the 18th century. He says: ‘I am not arguing that this awareness represented modern identity. But individuals not only appropriated meanings attached to their same-sex behavior, they also resisted the negative implications of those meanings, and transformed them in order to look upon themselves as morally responsible human beings. By the late eighteenth century a common understanding had established itself among many of those who held same-sex desires as well as among prosecutors, judges, and parts of the general populace’ (2007: 45). The historian George Chauncey has argued that ‘Foucault may have exaggerated the importance of medical discourse in defining homosexuality: a half-century later, the new classification was still largely ignored in the United States’ (Fassin and Salcedo, 2015: 1117).
If a desiring subject [...] has the philosophical aim of discovering the ‘entire domain of alterity,’ of finding ‘within the confines of this self the entirety of the external world,’ then the imagined and practical world of empire must be seen as one of the most strategic sites for realizing that aim’ (Stoler, 1997: 45).

As various scholars of colonial history have pointed out, what is lacking in Foucault’s account is an extensive engagement with the role of empire in the production of modern sexuality. That is to say, while Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* and in his lectures at the *Collège de France* (Foucault et al., 2003) discusses racism - understood as the effect of modern biopolitics - he neglects to take full account of the role of the colonial Other - the savage, the primitive, the colonized - and of the ‘implicit racial grammar’ that ‘underwrote the sexual regimes of bourgeois culture’ (Stoler, 1995:12; cf. van der Veer, 2001). If sex is, as Butler points out (1987), always about alterity - about the transgression of the boundaries between self and other - the colonial encounter is by definition central to the construction of modern desire and sexuality. Indeed, Stoler argues that discourses on the sexuality of the colonial Other were both voyeuristic and visual - they offered a ‘phantasmic litany of sexual specifications and excesses that distinguished’ colonial Others from European bourgeois selves (1997: 38-39). Sexuality was dangerous, laden with the threat of transgression of class and ‘racial’ boundaries, and this sense of peril produced a large proliferation of scientific and political discourses concerning sexual relations and the sexuality of Others. Indeed, discussing late 19th century and early 20th century discourses, Stoler speaks of ‘scientific pornography’ - a pornography in which racial classification played a key role.

This discursive field, in which modern sexuality, including the figure of the homosexual, comes into being in and through
assumptions concerning the alterity of racialized Others, is still in place today (Dudink, 2012). If the construction of modern sexuality and desire has always already been connected to discourses and fantasies about the sexuality of culturalized and racialized Others, this provides an excellent starting point to discuss the entanglements of sexuality, culture and race in contemporary discourses surrounding gay rights, sexual freedom, and multiculturalism in Amsterdam - and in the Netherlands in general terms (see Balkenhol et al., 2015).

The peripheralization of homophobia
In recent decades the Netherlands has witnessed a quite remarkable shift in the social location of gay politics as they relate to the rise of anti-multiculturalism in Europe (Mepschen et al., 2010; Wekker, 2009; 2014). LGBTIQ rights and discourses are employed to frame ‘Western’ Europe as the ‘avatar of both freedom and modernity’ while depicting especially Muslim citizens as backwards and homophobic. In the words of the queer theorist Jasbir Puar (2007), who coined the term ‘homonationalism’, gay rights have been recast as an ‘optic, and an operative technology’ in the production and disciplining of Muslim others (see also Rahman 2014). Cases of homophobia among Muslim citizens are highlighted, epitomized as archetypal, and cast within Orientalist narratives that underwrite the superiority of European secular modernity. Homophobia is thus represented as peripheral to Dutch culture. This symbolic representation at the level of the nation also plays out at the level of geographical space in Amsterdam: whereas the city center is produced in public discourse as modern, ‘secular’ and as possessing gay capital, its racialized peripheries are often represented as religiously conservative, intolerant, homophobic and perilous for LGBTIQ people.

This complex juncture of sexuality, religion, and race is pivotal. Important to the construction of Dutch autochthony is a peculiar
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anxiety about the recent achievement of ‘sexual democracy’ - the extension of full civil rights to subjects who do not conform to heterosexual ‘normality’. As Fassin and Salcedo argue:

We live in societies that claim to define their own laws and norms immanently, from within, and no longer from above or beyond, through some transcendent principle (be it God, Nature, or Tradition). This self-definition extends to sex; indeed, sex has become a primary battleground in our societies as it raises the question of the limits of this democratic logic: Does it apply everywhere, to everything, or is sex an exception? This accounts for the political battles about sexual liberty and equality—from same-sex marriage to violence against women, sexual harassment, prostitution, and pornography. Sex becomes our ultimate democratic truth.

This is precisely the issue that is at stake here: there is an anxiety or insecurity at the heart of sexual democracy because it raises important questions concerning democracy and citizenship. This anxiety culminates in a culturalization and racialization of sexuality, in which sexual liberty has become incorporated into a cultural protectionist discourse, in which it is associated with secular liberalism and pitted against the allegedly backward – perilous, sexually undemocratic – ‘cultures’ and religions of postmigrant subjects, especially Muslims. This articulation of secularism, cultural alterity, and sexual democracy operates not only at the level of public discourse and political debate, but also has a significant impact on the lives of individual subjects, affecting and reconfiguring perceptions, routines, habits, and practices that define everyday experience. While academic literature has focused on shifting public and political discourse, much less attention has
been paid to what these transformations mean in terms of the self-understanding and practices of subjects acting in local contexts.

The engagement with LGBTIQ politics by the former district chairman of Amsterdam Slotervaart, a district in New West neighboring Slotermeer, provides an important case study. On a Saturday morning in August 2009, Amsterdam mayor Job Cohen and the chairman of Amsterdam Slotervaart, the Moroccan-Dutch Labor party politician Ahmed Marcouch, opened the annual Gay Pride boat parade in an unexpected place. Unlike previous years when the ‘Canal Pride’ (the signature event of Amsterdam Gay Pride) opened in the liberal ‘cosmopolitan’ center of Amsterdam – an international gay destination – that year a small, but widely mediated, part of the opening took place in Marcouch’s ‘disadvantaged’ pluri-ethnic district that tourists – gay or straight – hardly ever visited. Due to its image as ‘crime-ridden’ and its concentration of citizens with an migrant background - who are often assumed to be ‘Muslim’ - Amsterdam Slotervaart has been described on the website of GeenStijl, the apex of right-wing irony and nih+ilism in the Dutch public sphere (see Oudenampsen 2013), as ‘a permanent danger zone’. The novelty of opening the Pride parade in such a notorious district attracted a great deal of attention across the city and nationally.

In addition to Marcouch and Cohen, various representatives of the COC – the oldest still existing lesbian and gay emancipation movement in the world – were also present. Several prominent public figures were there as Marcouch’s invited guests, while popular artists and comedians entertained the (small) crowd. Most of them joined the mayor and the district chairman on the boat of the Amsterdam municipality, which took part in the Canal Pride.

This was an important day for Marcouch, a self-identified liberal Muslim who had been lobbying for months to bring to his district the opening of this annual festivity – a more or less national celebration in the Netherlands that brings tens of thousands of
people to the country’s capital. During his tenure as chairman in Slotervaart, Marcouch had set in motion a homo-emancipation policy that had gained some prominence, culminating in various expert meetings and other events in Slotervaart. One fruit of this course of action was the hotly debated 2009 policy paper on homo-emancipation in Slotervaart, which catapulted Marcouch into the public spotlight. The chairman had spoken out in favor of making homosexuality *bespreekbaar* (‘discussible’) and ‘visible’ within Muslim communities – to the dismay of some local Muslims, including some of his compatriots in the New West chapter of Marcouch’ Labor party.

Bringing the opening of the parade to this ‘permanent danger zone’ was supposed to be the centerpiece of Marcouch’s initiatives in district-level lesbian and gay politics. The idea had come to him when he was invited by the organizers of the Amsterdam Pride to join them on their Pride boat that year.  

If the organizers wanted real political impact, Marcouch felt, the Pride should not be confined to Amsterdam’s city center, but should venture out to places like New West. He had even lobbied for the Minister of Youth and Education, André Rouvoet, to be present at the opening, arguing that the presence of an orthodox Christian – Rouvoet was a member of the (orthodox and evangelical) Protestant *ChristenUnie* party – would be instructive for orthodox Muslims in his district, whose conservative views on homosexuality Marcouch wanted to provoke, make ‘discussable’ and perhaps change. To Marcouch’s disappointment, the minister declined.

The debates in the Dutch public sphere surrounding this event – and the politics of homo-emancipation in Amsterdam New West in general – were not isolated phenomena, but part of the new configuration of sexuality, nationalism, and cultural alterity discussed above. This new ‘sexual nationalism’ is animated

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33 Interview, 10 January 2011.
by spatialized cultural politics in which ethnically diverse neighborhoods have come to figure in public discourse as places of fear, invisibility, and alienation for LGBTIQ subjects, as ‘danger zones’ that at the same time are places of an assumed immigrant self-segregation (cf. Haritaworn 2013: 63).

Pluri-ethnic neighborhoods such as New West – deemed to be teeming with homophobes who cannot respect gay visibility and rights – have increasingly come to be imagined as a constitutive outside of the celebrated Dutch homo-tolerance. Marcouch’s initiative must be understood in relation to this configuration of sexual freedom and cultural alterity, as played out in the streets of the city. Underscoring the conclusion that homophobia and the lack of a language to discuss homosexuality was a serious problem in immigrant and Muslim circles, Marcouch argued he felt homosexuality had to be put in another light. He wanted to show that homosexuals were ‘normal people’.

The opening in Slotervaart did not have the cachet for which Marcouch had hoped. Few participants in the boat parade were interested in an opening there, and the event seemingly attracted more LGBT officials and public figures invited by Marcouch than New West residents. The event made some waves nonetheless, which had to do with broader anxieties concerning the relationship between LGBTIQ-people and post-migrant populations. Later in this chapter, I will come back to Marcouch to analyze in more detail his approach to questions of gay rights and sexual liberty. Here, I want to underscore the broader discourse going meaning to his initiative in New West.

In September 2011 a media frenzy broke out across the Netherlands when a gay male couple in The Hague accused a group of neighborhood children, aged 8 to 11, of incessant harassment and bullying. The children were said to have verbally abused the

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34 See the interview discussed below.
two men by calling them ‘dirty homos’, to have thrown rotten fruit at their windows and besmirched the walls of their home. The issue was raised by the local chapter of the right-wing, anti-immigrant populist Freedom Party (PVV), which underlined the migrant backgrounds of the alleged harassers, implicitly emphasizing the gay couple’s autochthonous identity. The Freedom Party thus framed these events as battles between inimical cultures. The harassed couple also used an anti-immigrant frame to interpret and represent what had (allegedly) happened to them.

The story was broken on national television by Pownews, a right-wing television show whose cameras were also present when the leader of the Freedom Party, Geert Wilders, visited the victimized couple in their new home, accompanied by an openly gay PVV politician who was a member of The Hague city council. Pownews presented the bullied gay couple as prototypical white victims of devious immigrants in a pluri-ethnic society, while Wilders kept up his rhetoric of support for ‘ordinary’ whites and insisted that the children - ‘the scum’ as he called them - should be removed from the neighborhood - ‘If necessary, we can put them, with their parents, in containers on an industrial estate.’

This was not an isolated incident, but one episode in a series of events that have been framed as a clash between white gay men and minoritized, post-migrant youths. Indeed, anti-gay harassment and homophobic violence in the Netherlands is increasingly seen through a culturalist lens as a clash between white victims and ethnicized young perpetrators, most often Moroccan-Dutch young men. Thus Marcouch’s initiatives surrounding lesbian/gay politics did not emerge out of thin air, but were a response to an increasingly powerful discourse suggesting that the progress made at the level of lesbian/gay emancipation and physical security was under threat due to the influx and influence of cultural and religious Others. These concerns have been especially salient in Amsterdam, the reputation of which as a forerunner in homo-emancipation since
the 1970s has recently reinforced its old ambition to be a global ‘Gay Capital’ - a global city that attracts gay business, gay tourists, and middle class LGBTIQ inhabitants. Of interest to me here is the relationship between the image of the city as a gay capital and the alterity of those Others – especially young men read as Muslim – that help to proclaim certain areas of the city as ‘danger zones’.

Questions surrounding the homo-tolerant image of Amsterdam are not new: homo-negativity and anti-gay violence have been experienced and represented as ‘on the rise’ since the early 2000s. The alleged rise in anti-gay incidents has been understood in and through the same culturalist lens: acceptance of LGBTIQ rights was seen as typically Dutch, while homo-negativity was associated with cultural ‘outsiders’ – especially young men with ‘Muslim backgrounds’ (see Mepschen et al. 2010; Bracke 2012; Dudink 2012). As the cultural theorist Murat Aydemir puts it:

> [R]eceived wisdom now has it that the relationship between Dutch gays and lesbians – because of our sexuality – and Moroccan young men – because of their culture or religion (read: race) – can only be antagonistic to the extent that the needs, wants, rights, interests, desires, and claims of the two groups can only ever be mutually exclusive. The cultivated conflict between Dutch homosexuals and immigrant teens indicates a perceived rupture between interpellations based on sex and those based on race, a rupture that is part of the very way we think, experience, and live sex and race. (2010: 10)

In what follows, I turn to a short ethnographic vignette to explore how these dynamics concerning religion, race and place are played out in the local context of Amsterdam New West.
Gay men and their Others
In May 2010, while I was doing fieldwork, I was invited to the first reception (*borrel*) of Pink Nieuw West. It was organized by local gay men, some of whom I had already encountered during fieldwork. The ‘pink’ neighborhood receptions taking place across Amsterdam in recent years is a response to the uneven distribution of gay capital in the city and the process of peripheralization described above. While most LGBTIQ people in Amsterdam live their everyday lives in socially mixed, pluri-ethnic neighborhoods outside the exorbitantly priced city center, most of these neighborhoods have no lesbian/gay-oriented social or commercial facilities. Financially and symbolically supported by the local authorities and the COC, the *pink borrels* were seen as a way to build LGBTIQ community and to help LGBTIQ people feel more at home in their local neighborhoods. They aimed to develop gay capital in spaces outside of the ‘globally gay’ city center, thereby including them in the global imagery of Amsterdam as a Gay Capital.

While *pink borrels* had recently been held in middle-class and gentrifying neighborhoods closer to the city center, at the time none had yet been organized in New West. As one of the event’s initiators put it, there was ‘nothing for gays’ in the neighborhood except for the gay cruising area at De Nieuwe Meer, but according to the organizers, the sexual character of this meeting place ‘only contributed’ to the stigmatization of gay men. The *pink borrel* was meant to offer a meeting place for gays and lesbians in their own neighborhood that was not focused on sex (something that Marcouch also mentioned) and to ‘augment’ the level of gay capital in the district.

I went to the *borrel* with Francesco, a gay colleague who lived in New West and who had been invited by his neighbors. The reception was held in one of the neighborhood bars on Plein 40-45, a frequent hangout for mostly autochthonous, ‘working
class’ Amsterdammers. Popular Dutch folk music blared from the loudspeakers; the bar was still draped with orange flags from the Queen’s Day celebration a few days earlier. As I ordered a beer, I encountered Michel, a gay New West politician and district council member for the free-market liberal party (VVD) whom I had interviewed a few days earlier. After greeting me with three kisses, he wrote down our names on a sticker, which we placed on our shirts so that others would be able to address us by name.

I introduced Michel to Francesco and we chatted a bit before Michel had to go and welcome other guests. A group of men soon noticed us and invited us over to talk. One of them, Mark, told me that if all the gay men in his apartment building had come, the bar would be full. He lived in one of the large apartment blocks north of the Sloterplas – owner-occupied and symbolically distant from the less affluent part of the neighborhood dominated by public housing estates. Mark noted that the pink borrel was a good idea because although New West had a large gay population, it was invisible and gay people had nowhere to meet.

The conversation grew interesting when we began to discuss my research. Animated by the discussion, two of the men, both in their fifties, invited me to their home to ‘have a few drinks’. While this was clearly an invitation for more than drinking, the two were genuinely fascinated by my interest in the multicultural aspects of New West. They told me – assuming I would agree – that they obviously could not really be themselves in the neighborhood in which they lived. Part of the ‘leather community’, they often travelled to Berlin to ‘be themselves’, which they felt had become impossible in Amsterdam. They had come to see Amsterdam as a relatively conservative city compared to Berlin, ‘where everything was possible’. One of the men, Frank, told me he could not fully ‘live out’ his fetishes in public: he often went out in the Warmoestraat in the city center which caters to the leather-oriented part of the gay scene, but explained that he would only change into his
'gear’ once he had reached his destination. Otherwise, he said, it was too dangerous, even in the city center. ‘This has nothing to do, by the way, with Moroccans per se,’ he offered – an unsolicited statement. He told me that not long ago he had been beaten up by a couple of right-wing ‘skinheads’ in Schiedam – a poor, working class town close to Rotterdam – because he was read as gay. ‘It’s not just Moroccans; that’s important to stress. You can also encounter homophobic Dutchmen.’

However the conversation turned when the other man, Mark, accused Frank of being politically correct. I summarize: ‘Come on, man! There are too many Muslims in this neighborhood and homosexuality is simply incompatible with their beliefs. It makes things more difficult for us. We are going backward instead of forward [when it comes to gay emancipation – PM]. And that’s because of those backward Muslims (achterlijke moslims).’ At this point Frank started to change his narrative and said, as if confessing, that it was indeed true that there were ‘too many satellite dishes in the neighborhood. Turks, Moroccans. Something has to be done about that. [Er moet wel iets aan gebeuren]. Because as a gay man, one feels uncomfortable among them.’ Frank also pointed out to me that – thankfully, in his view – the apartment building in which he lived was like a ‘bastion of whiteness’ [wit bastion]. He linked whiteness to the presence of gay men in the building. Not that all of his neighbors were gay, but ‘there are many gays you know, there are always a lot of guys around on Grindr.35

Mark, even more animated by now, responded: ‘It has simply become impossible to go on to the street as a gay man. You always have to be careful. That is because of the religion of those people. They are aggressive. Even in Berlin it’s getting worse and worse. And that is because of the Turks... even though the Turks in Berlin seem more progressive than the Moroccans here. At least, I think

35 Grindr is a popular gay dating app on mobile phones.
so. I don’t know exactly, but it seems like that.’

This brief excerpt from the conversation illustrates how dominant images of homosexuality, Islam, and immigrant communities that have emerged in the context of an increasing racialization of sexuality seep into everyday conversation, while deeply affecting experience and perception in everyday life. While Frank was acutely aware that homophobia cannot be reduced to a problem of young immigrant men – ‘you can also encounter homophobic Dutchmen’ – the association between homophobia and racialized Others, especially ‘Muslims’, nevertheless took on a matter-of-fact form. ‘Too many satellite dishes’ came to index the presence of citizens originating from and allegedly oriented towards Muslim-majority countries and – in interaction with hegemonic,
Orientalist discourses concerning the Arab and Muslim Other (cf. Puar, 2007; Butler, 2008) – had created a sense of alienation and fear of abjection among these white, more or less middle class, gay men. Frank’s more nuanced perspective, when criticized as being politically correct, was quickly discarded in favor of anti-Muslim sentiments as anxieties about one’s freedom to be homosexual were projected onto the backwardness and threat of violence from Muslims not only locally, but elsewhere in Europe.

Such representations, it seems to me, derive from a discourse – dominant but not hegemonic – that associates white middle class culture with homo-tolerance and ‘gay capital’, and young post-migrant men with tradition, aggression, and homophobia. In this way, ‘peripheral’ pluri-ethnic neighborhoods, seen as lacking sufficient ‘gay capital’ and containing too many allegedly homophobic immigrants and Muslims, are construed as spaces of discomfort and alienation for LGBTIQ people. One aspect of this dynamic is the implicit – probably unconscious – association of gayness and (sexual) tolerance with whiteness and indeed with Dutchness. The ‘sexualization of citizenship’ denotes a temporal politics shaping an imaginary of modern individualism versus subjectivities embedded in tradition, community, and family (cf. Butler, 2008; Puar, 2007). As part of this process, the ‘Judeo-Christian roots’ of Dutch and European culture have been ‘discovered’, signaling a particularizing universalism that excludes Islam from the European historical and sociological imaginary (cf. Van den Hemel, 2014). Mobilizing Europe’s Judeo-Christian tradition denotes a way of thinking that defines the modern secular West over and against other parts of the world - and most importantly Arab and Muslim societies. The culturalization of citizenship is deemed necessary then, precisely because immigrants who come from societies that are seen as rivals of Europe’s ‘heritage’ and its secular present (cf. Huntington, 1993: 32). Sexual democracy has come to be located at the heart of this boundary formation, as an
icon of this so-called clash of civilizations that is now played out on the streets and in the neighborhoods of European cities.

**Secular nostalgia**

In recent years various scholars have pointed to the centrality of sexuality in shaping majoritarian Dutchness as ‘secular’, and it is true that the extent of secularization, here understood to denote the decreasing influence of institutional religion, in Dutch society is remarkable (Van Rooden, 2004; cf. Verkaaik, 2009); in one generation, the Netherlands transformed from one of the most religious societies in the world to one of its most secular (Van Rooden, 2004). As secular ideologies and practices have grown increasingly important within cultural practices of belonging and identity, the religious has become framed as out of sync with ‘liberal’ secular moralities, as ‘Other’. ‘Muslims’ - or those perceived to be Muslim - have been the most conspicuous objects in recent years of what Sarah Bracke refers to as ‘secular nostalgia’. People with a Muslim background are framed as trespassing on a sacrosanct, secular moral landscape, distorting the dream of a unified, secular, and morally progressive nation (Bracke, 2011; Mepschen and Duyvendak, 2012; Wekker, 2009).

In a recent piece, Oskar Verkaaik and Rachel Spronk have pleaded for an anthropological, ethnographic approach to secularity. In making this argument, they build on the important work of the feminist historian Joan Scott, who developed the notion of ‘sexularism’ - denoting the ways in which secularism is played out in the intimate sphere of desire, sexuality, and the body. Sexularism for Scott refers to the assumption that secularism ‘encourages the free expression of sexuality and that it thereby ends the oppression of women because it removes transcendence as the foundation for social norms and treats people as autonomous individuals, agents capable of crafting their own destiny’ (Scott, 2009: 1). Secularism is seen as having broken the hold of traditionalism and
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religious particularism, and ushered in an era of individualism, rationalism and sexual liberation. Secularism in such perspectives is thus understood as neutral and modern, while it is connected, intimately, with gender equality and sexual freedom.

Such simple dichotomies must be brought into question. As Scott points out, secularism cannot be seen as sufficient historical explanation for the ‘admittedly more open, flexible kinds of sexual relations that have gained acceptance in some countries of the West in recent years’ (Scott, 2009: 6). The relationship between secularization and increasing sexual freedom cannot be taken for granted, because other factors are (also) at play, Scott argues. Moreover, religion and secularism - faith and secularity - cannot be approached as separate, dichotomous spheres. Rather than taking secularization ‘as the standard intrinsic to modernity’ (Meyer, 2012), the rise of secularity must be understood as redefining the place, role, and understanding of religion in society. The increasing dominance of secularism - and of a secular nostalgia construing faithful subjects as cultural Others - transforms religious practices, emotions, and modes of binding (Meyer, 2012; Beekers, 2015).

It seems to me that the narratives of people like Stefan, Mark, and Frank show one way in which sexuality constitutes an intimate sphere through which secular ideologies and discourses enter into people's everyday lives, engendering certain dispositions, practices and taken-for-granted views. It demonstrates the ways in which secularism operates as a cultural practice: like religion, it constitutes 'historically contingent routines, traumas, joys, and conversion experiences [that] leave imprints upon the visceral register of thinking and judgment'. Indeed, like religion, secularism depends on affect, emotional binding, and the visceral. Rather than approaching the tensions around gender and sexuality as a clash between reason and faith, or between rationality and emotionality, everyday debates concerning religion, culture, and sex in New West point to the affective formation of secular autochthony. Quotidian
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local encounters are structured by public representations. These encounters are always already mediated. They are contingent upon common sense modes of knowing - processes in which the bodies of strangers come to index forms of social abjection - like homophobia: forms of abjection that become transposed upon these Others and as such exorcised from the body social.

In the Netherlands today, this process in which certain images and emotions come to adhere to certain bodies is the work of the increasingly dominant culturalization of citizenship. Culturalization emphasizes alterity and brings the ‘strangeness’ of perceived Others - most notably Muslims - into focus. Racialization is an operative component of these processes: actors enact broadly circulating discourses surrounding religion, sexuality, and culture that equate homophobia with the figure of the racialized stranger and ‘gayness’ with whiteness.

In an attempt to understand the power and performativity of sexual nationalism as a discourse of Dutch society, in the next section I will look critically at my conversation with Ahmed Marcouch on these topics, which highlights a number of central conundrums in the analysis of sexual nationalism. In commenting on the travels of her concept of ‘homonationalism’, Jasbir Puar argues the term cannot be understood as ‘simply a synonym for gay racism’ [....] (2013: 337). Indeed, sexual nationalism is not an identity that certain scholars and activists can ‘assign’ to certain others with whom they disagree, but a logic in and through which we have increasingly come to understand the interconnections of political and sexual dynamics in the Netherlands and beyond. I want to think and analyze sexual nationalism beyond its peculiar articulation with far-right, neonationalism imaginaries. While sexual nationalism is an element of culturalist discourse, it is also, and especially, salient within progressive circles, and has come to play a role in shaping liberal and progressive Muslim subjectivities. Before I turn to Ahmed Marcouch, however, I have
some more general things to say about the faith of progressive and emancipatory politics in the Netherlands.

**A post-progressive nation**
The analysis of sexual nationalism brings into focus the ‘dynamics of power’ in discussions in the Dutch civil sphere surrounding ‘integration’ and national moral and sexual order (see Uitermark, 2012). The culturalist position is dominant (Uitermark et al., 2014b) and culturalists see themselves as revolting against an entrenchment, in public administration and debate, of a ‘leftist’ and relativist approach to cultural diversity and ‘integration’ (Prins, 2004; Uitermark et al. 2014b). Indeed it can be argued that policies related to minorities have traditionally been the province of left-leaning, moderate pragmatists, who have tried to deal with integration issues as practically as possible, by means of a combination of paternalism and management (Uitermark, 2012). Taking a managerial approach focused on regulation, dialogue, and conflict resolution, until the 1990s they have attempted to prevent a large-scale politicization around these issues. It is this pragmatism and an alleged lack of political debate concerning integration and immigration against which culturalists - from Bolkestein in the 1990s to Fortuyn and Hirsi Ali and Wilders in the 2000s and 2010s - have revolted (see the Introduction).

As denoted above, culturalists have consistently done so by emphasizing the Judeo-Christian roots of Dutch and European society and the need - in light of the growing presence of Muslims - to defend these roots by means of a tougher stance on immigration, Islam, and integration (see Van den Hemel, 2014; Geschiere, 2009). In the eyes of culturalists, the presence and visibility of Muslims in postcolonial Europe demarcates the end of the secular contract. This post-secular appeal to Judeo-Christian religious roots is grounded precisely in the notion that some religious values are needed to safeguard society from the religious
practices and ideas of culturalized and racialized Others - Muslims (Van den Hemel, 2014: 28). It is in and through this dynamic that Dutch culturalist nationalism, in its various articulations, has been able to incorporate and appropriate some of the central gains of progressive and radical politics of the past - women’s and lesbian/gay emancipation, secularism, and individualism.

This is not to argue that culturalists have a purely instrumental view of these progressive values or, as Oudenampsen seems to suggest (2013b), that progressive elements play only a minor role in the neonationalist project. Oskar Verkaaik (2009: 91) argues for instance, that in the naturalization ceremonies that he studied, lesbian and gay emancipation was the topic most discussed. I do agree with Oudenampsen however, that it is of central importance to understand the essentialism underlying the peculiar construction of Dutch society within culturalist nationalism. Advancements at the level of emancipation are abstracted from the processes in which they are embedded, understood not as the product of (an ongoing) progressive social struggle, but solidified as inherently Dutch. They are naturalized. Oudenampsen therefore argues that Dutch neonationalism must be called ‘post-progressive’ (Oudenampsen, 2012):

While progressive values are assimilated in post-progressive discourse, the ideal of progress itself is discarded. The idea of a fluctuating but persistent progression on the field of social equality and civil liberties has been replaced with cultural essentialism: progressive values are given a static quality, they are seen as ingrained in Dutch culture, something that must be conserved, and defended from threats from without. (Oudenampsen, 2013b)
It is pivotal to look closely to what this new amalgamation of viewpoints means in relation to the making of citizens and subjects. The ascent of sexual nationalism relies on peculiar, neoliberal constructions of subjectivity. Indeed, it seems to me that post-progressive, sexual nationalism has become possible precisely because of the neoliberal emphasis on individual autonomy and responsibility, choice, and personal advancement. Indeed, Willem Schinkel and Friso van Houdt have argued the amalgamation of neoliberalism, nationalism, and cultural assimilationism can be seen as a new form of governmentality, which they refer to as ‘neoliberal communitarianism’ (2010) - a mode of governing populations, and a process of subject formation, that is simultaneously individualizing and homogenizing and that is grounded in the entanglement of some progressive values - individual autonomy, secularism, free sexual object choice - with collectivist, nationalist representations. In short, these discourses are focused on the formation of an exclusionary community of individually responsibilized subjects that form ‘lean’ consumer-citizens.

Post-progressivism therefore, cannot be understood as either conservative or progressive, but must be seen as part and parcel of a neoliberal project of producing individually responsibilized subjects. The Marxist sociologist Alan Sears has used the notion of ‘lean citizenship’ (2005), arguing that it is no coincidence that lesbians and gays have won full citizenship in the current, neoliberal period, marked by a transformation from a broad, Fordist welfare state to a post-Fordist ‘lean state’ that prioritizes market morality. While not negating the importance and power of political mobilization and patient and resilient social struggle, Sears points out that neoliberalism has enabled a ‘selective moral deregulation, as the state moved away from established practices of ethical and cultural formation of the population’ (Ibid.), while enabling a market rationality and morality that frames human
relations and human need in terms of individual agency. As Peter Drucker points out in his recent book *Warped*, market rationality often undermines conservative moralizing, certainly when it comes to affluent, middle class lesbians and gay men:

‘[C]ommercial gay scenes and sexual identities compatible with these scenes have advanced and been consolidated in many parts of the world, particularly among middle-class layers, as part of the ongoing commercialization and commodification of sexuality under neoliberalism.’ (Drucker, 2015: 228)

Drucker notes that middle class lesbian and gay identities - anchored in consumption and embodying liberal values of self-fashioning autonomy and personal freedom - are not at odds with market rationality and morality. As such, the ascent of neoliberalism has been a factor in the success of social movements struggling for full citizenship for LGBTIQ people. In fact, it could be argued that neoliberalism has enabled a form of biopolitics in which sexual autonomy is precisely mobilized in the formation of a community of individualized, ‘autonomous’ subjects. Whereas the ‘old’ Fordist state was invested, for a plurality of reasons, in protecting the heterosexual family and heteronormative morality, the ‘lean state’ employs sexuality as an important aspect of the moral regulation of subjects who are seen as not fully assimilated into a post-progressive society of individualized subjects (cf. Puar, 2013; Scott, 2009; Verkaaik and Spronk, 2011).

Indeed, the post-progressive construction of Dutchness goes hand in hand with the construction of migrant, and especially Muslim, culture, as ‘pre-progressive’. This logic - that certain minoritized ‘groups’ are still in need of emancipation - has become increasingly hegemonic precisely because it has salience beyond the populist, neonationalist right. First of all, liberal and
progressive critics of the neonationalist right can only show their commitment to ‘progressive values’ and gay rights by distancing themselves from Muslims’ alleged sexual and gender conservatism. In this way liberal and leftist politicians and public figures come to participate in culturalist logics (cf. Uitermark et al., 2014b).

Second, the construction of migrant and Muslim ‘cultures’ as pre-progressive also makes minoritized ‘groups’ the ideal objects of progressive political passions in post-political times, for instance within social-democratic politics.

There is an important link here with the debate on postfeminism (McRobbie, 2004). Sarah Bracke has recently argued that feminism - understood as a ‘progressive’ social practice - in the Netherlands has become framed as intrinsically Dutch, construing the present as postfeminist (2012). Pim Fortuyn’s invocations of women’s emancipation, she argues for instance, located the necessity of feminism among ‘autochthonous’, ‘white’ women firmly in the past, while simultaneously construing ‘allochthonous’ women as in need of emancipation from pre-progressive cultural and religious constraints. What emerges here is a substantialist representation of gender equality as the property of white European liberal secularists - and a similarly substantialist view that those ‘in but not of Europe are always already excluded from this state of being’ (Lentin and Titley, 2011: 90; Brown, 2006: 8). It is on the basis of such representations that a central figure in Dutch feminism like Ciska Dresselhuys - the long-time editor-in-chief of the feminist monthly Opzij - was able to argue that Fortuyn was an ally of feminists. Political differences between Fortuyn and Dresselhuys (who identifies as a leftist) notwithstanding, ‘they aligned in the absolute priority granted to the emancipation of Muslim women, which elsewhere Dresselhuys affirms as the ‘third wave’ of Dutch feminism’ (Bracke, 2012: 239).

Bracke argues that the alliance between progressive feminists like Dresselhuys and right-wing populists like Fortuyn was less
strange than might at first sight be expected. She argues Western feminism has long relied on a peculiar civilizational script that construed certain women - working class, black, and colonized women - as in need of rescue (Bracke, 2012, 241). Not only were some strands of feminism central to the colonial project - Leila Ahmed argues Western feminism came to serve as the ‘handmaiden’ of colonialism (1992) - but also within Western nation-states some articulations of feminism relied upon such a ‘rescue narrative’. Building on the work of Grever and Waalwijk (1998), Bracke points out:

'The vindication of the rights of (white, ‘civilized’) women [...] relied upon an implicit and explicit ‘othering’ of a range of women whose ‘otherness’ precisely served to establish the ‘civilized’ subject of the new women’s movement. The spectrum of ‘other women’ included most notably the colonized woman, the prostitute and the working-class woman, which reflects how both ‘domestic’ and international (imperial) dimensions were intertwined in the process of establishing the ‘proper’ subject of the women’s movement. (2012: 241)

Bracke underscores that Dutch feminism cannot be seen as a single coherent force (2012: 243), and alternative strands of feminism that are critical of this ‘civilizational’ approach - including the feminisms of black and migrant women - have also developed and played an important role. Nonetheless, it can be argued that important strands of feminism in the Dutch public sphere today build on this civilizational script, in which Muslim women have become equated with religious and cultural oppression, as symbolized by the hijab, and as such framed as in need of rescue (see also Scott, 2009). This particular strand of liberal feminism became the handmaiden, to paraphrase Leila Ahmed (1992), of a culturalist,
'muscular’ liberalism that was focused on the regulation of cultural diversity and the disciplining of culturalized and racialized others in the name of women’s liberation.

**Social-democracy and the ‘new social question’**
The post-progressive and post-feminist construction of Dutch society - as a nation that has already arrived, so to speak, in the emancipated present - creates a conundrum for the social-democratic left. Indeed, what objects of progressive political passions can be found in a society in which emancipation is a more or less finished project? The analysis of this conundrum offers, I think, an important contribution to our understanding of the dominance of culturalist representations of contemporary social problems.

This is well illustrated by the contribution to the debate on integration by the prominent social-democratic intellectual Paul Scheffer (Scheffer, 2000). Indeed, Scheffer’s intervention shows that the critique of pragmatic, managerial, cultural appeasement in the field of migrant integration has not been limited to the new right, but has a genealogy in the social-democratic strand of Dutch politics. In 2000 Scheffer published a very influential article in which he argued that the Netherlands were in the midst of a ‘multicultural drama’, and which contained a strong plea for acknowledging and promoting Dutch national identity as a first step toward a more strict integration policy targeting migrant communities (Scheffer 2000; cf. Uitermark 2012: 66–67). As Geschiere has (implicitly) argued, in writing this piece Scheffer takes a substantialist approach to culture for granted, while building on the opposition between traditional and modern cultures, ‘in which, as usual, the ‘traditional’ pole turned out to be in all respect the negation of the qualities of the ‘modern’ one’ (Geschiere, 2009: 155).

The resonance between Scheffer’s analysis and rightist culturalist views is important, but seems to me not the most pivotal
aspect of Scheffer’s contribution. What is of central importance, in my view, is that Scheffer - unlike right-wing culturalists - positions himself firmly in the tradition of the social-democratic left. In 2004 he held his inaugural speech, in which he looked back at the early development of Amsterdam New West, in which his grandfather had played a cardinal role (Scheffer, 2006). Scheffer’s inaugural speech is an exercise in social-democratic reasoning, past and present. His concerns are deeply rooted in social-democratic passions and politics. Discussing the history and present of social engineering and the politics of state-led progress in Amsterdam New West, he referred to contemporary social problems flowing out of the growing marginalization and segregation of the racialized urban poor in New West as a ‘new social question’. Moreover, in line with the culturalist approach, Scheffer connects the cultural background of immigrants - the fact that they come from non-industrial countries, for instance - to their increasing socio-economic marginalization and to urban segregation. Fundamental for Scheffer is the question of cultural integration: people, he argues, must not only dwell in the same physical spaces, but also share the ‘mental space’ of the Dutch majority (2006: 29). In a global era in which, in his view, the relationship between modernity and tradition, cosmopolitanism and tribalism, is the central point on the agenda of large cities, this cultural integration can only be the result of stricter regulation from above. Following his 2000 article, he argues in favor of a forceful integration policy and a more self-conscious Dutch nationalism as solutions to the new social question.

By invoking the ‘social question’, Scheffer links contemporary social issues to the historical project of social-democracy and progressive liberalism at large. Scheffer’s approach to the question of integration taps into older civilizational tropes in social-democratic politics: without a civilization ideal, he argues, every political project is rudderless, without direction. Just as prewar
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social-democratic and progressive liberal elites responded to the ‘old’ social question with a moral-cultural agenda, grounded in civilizational ideals and a paternalistic approach, contemporary urban elites in Scheffer’s eyes should also develop an interventionist, moral agenda - a moral-cultural politics focused on the social elevation and integration of those who do not have full access to political, social and cultural resources (cf. Swierstra et al., 2008; Swierstra and Tonkens, 2005).

Reflecting on this project, Scheffer emphasizes the necessity of creating access to cultural resources, by which he means access to collective narratives and reference points (2006: 31) grounded in European and Dutch cultural history. Following his reading of Manuel Castells (1993), Scheffer points out that the ‘new social question’ emerges from a dichotomous urban reality, a cosmopolitan urban elite on the one hand, and tribalist local communities on the other. The central question for him is how can we bring modernity and tradition into balance? What is needed, according to Scheffer, is the reinvention of a modernist civilizational project - a moral-cultural offensive that has historically been central to the social-democratic project and that goes against the grain of ‘postmodern relativism’ (2006).

In response to the ‘new social question’ and the dominance of the culturalist framework, a new, social-democratic moral politics is born that appropriates aspects of the culturalist agenda whilst tapping into older civilizational traditions of the left. This demonstrates that the culturalization of citizenship, first of all, is nothing new, and, second, not something confined to the neonationalist or populist right. Lodewijk Asscher, a very prominent member of the Labor Party, a former alderman in Amsterdam and the current minister of Social Affairs, recently remarked that Geert Wilders should be seen as ‘the bad consciousness of the Labor Party. He points to the things that we have neglected.’ With this remark, Asscher followed up on an older, already established trope.
within social-democracy - as we have also seen in the discussion of Samsom’s street coach adventures in Chapter 3.

Discourses of sexual nationalism fit well with this articulation of progressive culturalism. First of all, in the context of a post-progressive society, sexual nationalism offers lucid objects of moderate, leftist passions - lesbians and gays who must be defended against and rescued of conservative and homophobic pre-progressives, who must be civilized and folded into the post-progressive common-sense.

Civil Islam: Sexuality and liberal Muslim ‘techniques of the self’

After Paul Scheffer’s intervention in 2000, social-democrats with a migrant and Muslim background, like Ahmed Aboutaleb (the Labor Party mayor of Rotterdam) and Ahmed Marcouch (Labor Party MP), have played a key role in taking up culturalist topics. These Labor Party leaders have been particularly vocal about the need to defend tolerance, gay rights, and sexual progress, even if that means being critical of Muslim and migrant communities. Marcouch and Aboutaleb occupy a particular position in the dynamics of power characterizing discussions in the Dutch civil sphere surrounding migrant ‘integration’ (Uitermark, 2012). This position offers an alternative to new right culturalism, while at the same time incorporating elements of the post-progressivism of culturalists. Whereas culturalists have claimed Islam is incompatible with (civil engagement in) Dutch society, and have therefore advanced confrontational, ‘Othering’ politics vis-a-vis Muslim communities, focused on assimilation or exclusion, figures like Aboutaleb and Marcouch have played a role in developing a discursive position that challenges the culturalist construction of Islam as non-Dutch. Uitermark has coined the term ‘Civil Islam’ to describe this position within the civil sphere:
Civil Islam is an integration discourse based on the idea that Islamic and civil commitment can and should go hand in hand. Cultural problems are readily identifiable and have considerable explanatory relevance for analyzing integration issues. Contrary to Culturalism, religion – properly understood – can and does provide solutions, as it demands civil behavior from Muslims. Muslims should be assertive in public debate and clearly state what they do or do not consider civil behavior. Public policy should manage the integration of migrant groups because this is necessary to help migrants emancipate as Muslim citizens. (Uitermark, 2010: 263)

In debates surrounding lesbian/gay emancipation an increasing number of people with Muslim backgrounds have taken up a position within this discourse. This is of central importance to the analysis of Dutch sexual nationalism because this position destabilizes the secular imperative of sexual nationalism - and the notion that (support for) lesbian/gay emancipation relies purely on a ‘Judeo-Christian tradition’. People like Marcouch and others promoting LGBTQ-rights and visibility within Muslim and migrant communities do this for a large part on the basis of their religious convictions and socio-cultural location as post-migrants with a Muslim background. As Muslims, they call upon other Muslims to take civil responsibility - including support for LGBTQ-rights and homotolerance: and they do so precisely on the basis of a particular interpretation of Islam. The growing number of people taking up this position - and the increasing ascent of queer Muslim organizing in the Netherlands - destabilizes the ‘classic’ homonationalist notion that interpellations on the basis of Islam and those on the basis of (homo)sexuality are mutually exclusive (cf. El-Hajjari, 2013; Jivraj and De Jong, 2011).
Civil Islam positions on LGBTQ-rights and tolerance however, must not be seen as separate from sexual nationalism: proponents of Civil Islam tap into sexual nationalist discourse by relying on normative, essentializing notions of ‘gayness’. Before I turn to the relations between Civil Islam and sexual nationalism, I will take a closer look at Civil Islam discourse in relation to sexuality. As we shall see, for liberal Muslims like Marcouch, often proponents of Civil Islam, LGBTQ-issues and the question of sexual autonomy create what the anthropologist Jarrett Zigon calls ‘moments of ethics’ in and through which people fashion and refashion a moral self (see Peumans, 2014). For Zigon, moral dispositions are not unreflective, but come into being in moments of ‘moral breakdown’ necessitating an ‘ethical moment’. As Zigon points out, ethics are ‘a conscious acting on oneself either in isolation or with others so as to make oneself into a more morally appropriate and acceptable social person not only in the eyes of others but also for oneself’ (Zigon, 2008: 165). The notion of moral breakdown should be interpreted broadly here: it refers to moments or events in a person’s everyday life that forces him or her ‘to reflect upon the appropriate ethical response’ (Zigon, 2009: 262). The narrative of Ahmed Marcouch offers an example of the role of such ethical moments in the construction of liberal Muslim subjectivity.

The first time I heard Marcouch speak was in September 2010, when he had left his position in New West after a widely mediated internal disagreement within the local chapter of the PvdA and had just been elected as a member of parliament for his party. Marcouch spoke at an event in a series of expert meetings called ‘Being Yourself in Slotervaart’, which had been initiated under his leadership. His discourse was straightforward and also rehearsed: many of the things he said during this meeting were repeated by him when I interviewed him months later, in January 2011, but he spoke with conviction, trying to bring across how cardinal the issue of lesbian/gay rights and homotolerance was for him.
In Marcouch’s eyes, culturalists are right when they maintain that a broad taboo rests on sexuality in general and lesbian and gay sexuality in particular in Dutch Muslim communities. In an interview on Amsterdam’s local television station he pointed out:

Take into account that there is hardly a positive vocabulary to speak about lesbians and gays in Dutch Muslim circles. I was recently at a school and I asked children there what would happen if they were to talk about gayness at home. They said: ‘The first thing that would happen is that we would get slapped.’ It is a dirty word that you are not supposed to use in public.

Why did Marcouch choose to profile this topic in this way? He is a practicing Muslim who has been active in the Muslim community for decades. Before he became a politician he was a police officer - and one of the founders of a network of Dutch-Moroccan police officers. Not gay himself - he is married with two sons - he became interested in the question of homo-emancipation in 2001, during the El-Moumni affair, when a conservative imam in Rotterdam, Khalil El-Moumni, caused commotion in a television interview in which he commented on the introduction of gay marriage laws in the Netherlands. ‘What Islam says about homosexuality,’ the imam argued, ‘is known among all Muslims. It is a sin.’ The affair, which caused much commotion in the country, created in Marcouch’s life, and also as a result of his contacts with the network of lesbian and gay police officers, such a ‘moment of ethics’ that forced him to reflect on the appropriate ethical response and functioned as a starting point for a refashioning of a moral self. That is to say, sexuality and lesbian/gay rights here become part and parcel of a

37 For an elaborate analysis of the El-Mouni affair, see Mepschen et al., 2010 and uitermark et al., 2014
politics of ethical formation - the formation of a particular kind of a moral (Muslim) self, structured by liberal ethics (Fadil, 2011: 86). More broadly speaking, lesbian/gay issues - in the Netherlands - have offered an idiom and ethical ground for the formation of liberal Muslim (moral) selves - articulations of Muslim subjectivities that have come to play an important role in the Dutch civil sphere and in political debates.

Making homosexuality ‘bespreekbaar’

After the El Moumni affair, it became clear to Marcouch that ‘young Dutch-Moroccans played a big role in homophobic incidents’ in Dutch cities, including Amsterdam (cf. Buijs et al., 2012). This worried him; he felt responsible for it and he wanted to understand why this was the case. So he started to discuss these issues within the Muslim community. As he became increasingly active within the Moroccan religious community - as a board member of a foundation [koepelorganisatie] of Amsterdam mosques - he was in the position to take the lead on this issue.

But it was not just because of my work in the religious community. I also saw it in my circles. You just know, coming from that community, that homosexuality is something that is not talked about. There is no language, no vocabulary, and to talk about something you need a language. A lot of Moroccan, Muslim gays - and I have met many of them in the last couple of years - cannot talk with their parents, family, or friends. And throughout the community, this is the core problem. So I tried to explore how we could develop a language to discuss these issues within Moroccan and Muslim circles.

Marcouch’s initiatives to bring the question of homosexuality to the table were met with support, but more often with anger and
frustration. In 2003 members of the foundation of mosques of which he was a board member filed a motion of no confidence, against which he had to defend himself. The motion protested precisely Marcouch’s argument that homosexuality should be made ‘discussible’. Marcouch told me:

For me, that experience showed me more than ever how necessary it was to talk about these issues. And after the murder of Van Gogh (see the Introduction - PM) this became even more urgent. I felt, we have to do something about these taboos - to discuss sexuality, to discuss homosexuality. Yes, Muslims did speak out against violence, but that was not enough, that was banal. We had to do more. So I tried to contribute to discussing these issues within the religious community. And another thing had to be brought to the table - the position of lesbians and gays within our own communities.

Marcouch became increasingly convinced, he declared, of the centrality of the topic of homosexuality. Indeed, we can see in his words the centrality of lesbian/gay issues in creating ‘moments of ethics’ in which Marcouch was able to refashion a moral self - and a moral self moreover, that was construed and performed vis-a-vis ‘orthodox Muslims’ but also ‘conservative’ family members and personal friends that disagreed with him. The sense of moral self developed, I suggest, into moral politics, directed at changing the Muslim community in order to make a better cultural integration possible. His discourse was deeply concerned with countering suspicion about Dutch-Moroccans and Muslims, and with also countering the rise of right-wing culturalism by taking away these suspicions:
Often we would discuss the rise of Wilders’ populism. This also worries me of course - I am a Dutch Muslim. But I said, look, as long as the Muslim community keeps silent about sexuality and lesbian/gay rights, etcetera, we will be vulnerable. People will start ‘guessing’, they will start thinking we condone misconduct toward gays, that we think it is OK. That it is our standard [een gedragen norm]. We cannot say: this is not our priority, this is not our concern.

Marcouch created quite a number of waves within Dutch-Moroccan and Muslim communities. He pointed out to me that his ‘provocative style’ had ‘at least’ made people discuss questions surrounding sexuality and LGBTQ-visibility. While many have supported him, he was also harshly ridiculed, for instance in a popular video on YouTube depicting Marcouch as gay himself and suggesting he has a sexual interest in young boys.  

38 He also told me many young Dutch-Moroccans write or tweet to him complaining homosexuality was the ‘only’ thing he ever talked about.

It says something about the emotionality of this topic. I feel I do not talk about gays that often, not more than I talk about good education, integration of Muslims, and the right of Muslims to have their own identity, the right of orthodox people to express their views. You see, for me these questions are connected. But when it comes to homosexuality, it hits people like a wave and they become emotional.

38 See the youtube video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHLqdlAzzzY
When in 2006 Marcouch became the district chairman of Slotervaart, his public profile grew and he felt he should use his position to put more pressure on the issue. He wanted homosexuals to be seen differently, as normal people wanting to live in the kind of cultural safety or security that would enable them to exercise their freedom. His approach to gay issues is grounded, in my view, in three interconnected discourses. First, in what he calls ‘Dutch norms’: ‘a humanist approach, an approach based on human rights. That is our common idiom in the Netherlands, our moral Esperanto. So that has nothing to do with theology.’ In Marcouch’s view, Dutch norms are thus equivalent to human rights and humanist ideals. Second, however, Marcouch also argues his support for LGBTQ-rights is grounded in his particular interpretation of Islam, and here we can see the central role played by questions of sexual freedom in fashioning a moral self vis-a-vis ‘orthodox figures’ [orthodoxe figuren]:

Islam advocates individuality and freedom of religion. Sexuality is the domain of people themselves. And sexual morality in Islam is highly progressive. Yes, there are guidelines, but there are hardly any rules for punishment. Even in the case of adultery - in Islamic law there must be four witnesses before an adulterer can be punished. That makes it almost impossible, theologically, to punish people for adultery - if Muslims really did follow the law, it would not be possible. There is a lot of humaniteit [humanism/humanitarianism] in Islam. [...] Moreover, there is the obligation of Muslims to behave decently to other people, to let them be.

Marcouch thus links his approach to his interpretation of Islam - which he sees as containing a lot of ‘humaniteit’ - with Dutch norms, that he collated with humanist traditions and human rights.
In this way, he claims a place for Islam within - not outside - the Dutch moral, national community. At the same time, he promotes his view of Islam as a disciplinary practice: it is focused on shaping Muslim individuals and practices to become more in line with ideals of sexual democracy:

There is another topic that is important to me. I introduced a new term, the Muslim gay. It was very interesting to see what happened when I used that term. Even the most progressive religious people told me: ‘We are with you all the way, but this is not possible: to be Muslim and gay.’ But it is possible. They exist. I told them: ‘Is it your right to deny someone the right to be both gay and Muslim? Who am I? That is something that belongs to that person and to the Creator.’ And I said the same thing to the homo-network within the Labor Party. We had a discussion about the ‘contradiction’ between article 1 [the anti-discrimination article - PM] and freedom of religion. I said there is no contradiction. You are doing precisely what some orthodox religious people do who deny lesbians and gays the right to be religious. But there is no contradiction. If you are gay, you are gay. If you are a Muslim gay, you are that. You, and no one else, decide about that. I enjoy article 1 just as much as I enjoy the freedom of religion.

The third discourse in which Marcouch’s approach is grounded, in my view, is that of contemporary social-democratic thought and practice. Echoing accusations about the left’s uncritical multiculturalism, Marcouch argues that social-democrats have ‘too long’ had the feeling that they had to ‘choose’ between supporting cultural minorities and supporting LGBTIQ-people. He feels social democracy has to refashion itself in relation to these cultural and
sexual issues and has a key role to play in, as he puts it, ‘teaching Muslims’. Social democrats must stand for the right of Muslims - including orthodox Muslims - to ‘be there’ and to be visible - but that also means, in his opinion, that there should not be any taboo on ‘criticizing Muslims’. Whereas Marcouch prefers pragmatic dialogue, he says: ‘What Wilders does is not forbidden’. Echoing Scheffer’s plea for a new moral-cultural offensive, he argues:

Social-democracy has always been based on a kind of moral, civilizational politics [een morele verheffingspolitiek]. We mustn’t think this is a dirty notion. Paternalism is part of this tradition. But it must be in balance. And that’s what makes it complex. We no longer know how to show leadership. […] What we need are institutions - the police for instance - that guarantee safety. Safety is fundamental to freedom and to human existence. And these institutions must be vital - the political sphere, the juridical sphere, and education. These spheres must play a role in building personalities. So that young people, who are sixteen or seventeen and happen to be lesbian or gay, can stand up to their parents and say: this is who I am.

Marcouch combines a defense of Islam against culturalist attacks with a politics of (sexual and gender) emancipation and securitization and safety, and as such attempts to bridge the gap between pragmatists and culturalists. Like culturalists, Marcouch posits that homophobia among Muslims should be passionately and uncompromisingly countered. His political agenda is rooted in a belief in the necessity of a moral and strong state. He thereby bridges classic social-democratic passions, tapping into older social-democratic civilizational tropes, with important elements of culturalist discourse, but at the same time, he and others destabilize
the secularist imperative in sexual nationalist discourse by transcending the taken-for-granted contradiction between religious (Muslim) subjectivity and ideals of sexual progress. For Marcouch, defending gay rights is a question of being a good Muslim in the contemporary Dutch context. He says: ‘We as Muslims are not barbarians, we can talk about homosexuality. The right of a Muslim to be Muslim is the right of a homosexual to be a homosexual.’ He thus opposes the essentialization of Muslim communities as static, without fully negating the culturalist framework.

Conclusion
I began this chapter in Foucaultian fashion, discussing the central importance of a sexual politics of truth in shaping autochthony and secularism and thinking these ‘positions’ together. As I have argued, sexuality is entangled with power, the product of power. The focus has been on the culturalist production in the Netherlands of ‘gayness’ as universal - secular and modern. In these dynamics, gayness becomes associated with whiteness, while homophobia becomes associated with post-migrant communities, most notably young men whose parents or grandparents were born in Morocco and who are often read as ‘Muslim’.

The focus on visibility and discussability within this discourse builds on a notion of homo-emancipation that focuses on self-emancipation - on becoming a particular kind of individual - and that ‘requires a particular standard of inhabiting one’s sexual identity that replicates the dominant recognizable Western model’ (Jivraj and De Jong, 2011). As Jivraj and De Jong point out, this paradigm enables certain LGBTQ Muslims - who come out of the closet, speak out and make themselves visible - to be folded into Dutchness, absorbed into the (homo)national community. The paradigmatic status of this articulation of LGBTIQ sexual identity - and the emblematic status of visible, ‘out’ queer Muslims - cannot be understood as always and only inclusionary. Such
‘homonormative’ representations of lesbian/gay identities also have exclusionary effects: non-performative, ‘non-emblematic queers of color become invisible, nonexistent, or perceived of as ‘not quite there yet’, a kind of ‘gay in progress’ for whom the closet door still needs to be opened fully’ (Ibid.). Civil Islam discourses surrounding questions of lesbian and gay emancipation are grounded in peculiar, normative notions of gayness as something that should be made discussible, visible and otherwise performed (cf. Foucault, 1990). Moreover, this notion of gayness rests on a particular, triumphant representation of the ‘global gay’ - an autonomous, liberal, middle class, 'spaceless' gay subject who has come be emblematic for gay emancipation.

These assumptions about contemporary homosexuality ground a construction of non-performative gayness as lacking behind, as ‘pre-progressive’ - a temporal politics that is central to the culturalist discourse. Moreover, many proponents of this discourse, including Marcouch, partake, to a certain extend, in a culturalized and ethnicized understanding of homophobia. Indeed, Marcouch underscores the analysis of Muslim communities as ‘pre-progressive’ and therefore a necessity of ‘integration’, regulation, discipline, and emancipation. This focus on integration and disciplining goes hand in hand with one on securitization and policing - it is characterized by a strong faith in ‘the right hand of the state’ - which Marcouch argues is a necessary tool in protecting LGBTIQs against homophobic violence and harassment. In this way, Marcouch’s discourse cannot be seen as separate from what I have above called the ‘peripheralization’ of homophobia. Some neighborhoods need to be made safe for LGBTIQ people. In the context in which we live today, this may mean an increasing policing of young post-migrant men precisely because they are construed and read as homophobic (Haritaworn, 2013).

Within the dominant discourse in the Netherlands we see different articulations of Islam and homosexuality emerge.
CHAPTER 5

Culturalists frame homosexuality and Islam as mutually exclusive, as do some (orthodox) Muslims (Rahman, 2014). We have seen how this discourse takes shape in the context of New West by zooming in on the everyday narratives of people like Stefan, Mark, and Frank. These narratives not only show how dominant cultural and sexual truths concerning the conservatism and homophobia of migrants seep into and construct everyday narratives, but also how secularism and religion materialize in everyday life. In the process, certain bodies and things come to be associated with homophobia, resulting in a de facto racialization of sexuality.

These representations of the entangled relations between sexual politics, religion and the racialization of young, post-migrant men are inscribed in the urban fabric. That is to say, the ‘gay capital’ of the city – the visibility and cultural and commercial presence of ‘gayness’ in Amsterdam that plays such a key role in the city’s global iconography – is unevenly distributed across space, with areas that possess more ‘mainstream’ gay capital represented as more Dutch. While Amsterdam’s city center and some of its surrounding affluent neighborhoods are seen to have a large amount of gay capital, the less affluent and more peripheral neighborhoods are represented as potentially homophobic and dangerous. We can thus identify a dynamic in which Dutch homo-tolerance and Amsterdam’s ‘gay capital’ come into being in and through a process of peripheralization of urban spaces marked by greater ethnic or racial diversity; as homo-tolerance and gay capital come to be associated with the cultural and spatial center of the city, homophobia becomes tied up with imaginaries of the city’s culturalized and racialized peripheries. Amsterdam New West, I suggest, is one of these racialized peripheries, a post-migrant space deemed perilous for LGBTIQ subjects.

The debate on sexual emancipation and gender equality has had a strong impact on how some self-identified liberal Muslims have discussed the situation concerning people categorized
as Muslim - and as perilous to the moral integrity of the post-progressive nation - in the Netherlands. First of all, pragmatists are drawn into the logic of neoculturalism, which represents Dutch society in terms of an opposition between sexual progress and Muslim moralities. The investments of pragmatists and social-democrats in the discourse of sexual and feminist progress have made it increasingly difficult for pragmatists to find a language to negate culturalist framings of Muslims as traditional and intolerant. Second, the position of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders and women within Muslim communities has become a rallying point of liberal Muslims, like Ahmed Marcouch, for whom LGBTQ-issues offer ‘ethical moments’ in and through which they refashion their moral and political selves.

What holds these different articulations of the relationship between homosexuality and Islam together is a homogenizing culturalism: within culturalist representations, ‘homosexuality’ emerges as singular and universal category. This stands in stark contrast with Foucault’s analysis. For Foucault, sexuality - including homosexuality - had to be understood as ‘the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations by a certain deployment deriving from a complex political technology’ (1990: 127). Sexuality is not singular, but asymmetrical and plural - and the same can be said about heterosexuality and homophobia. This, it seems to me, is a crucial insight for the analysis of LGBTIQ-practices and identities in a globalizing world. The culturalist framework overwrites these complexities. Struggles for sexual liberation emerge from this modern regime of sexuality, and the effect of this liberation has not only been an increasing freedom to express our sexuality, but a requirement to do so. In other words, if we take a Foucaultian perspective, increasing sexual freedom since the ‘long 1960s’ is a double edged sword. It has created increasing freedom of sexual expression while it has also enslaved us more profoundly to the categories and classifications that distinguish
truthful sexual expression and identity - a ‘right’ way to be gay - from articulations and expressions that are considered hypocritical in a time of sexual truth. It is precisely this politics of truth, or so it seems to me, that we have to transform: gayness is not universal.