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# Queers and Muslims: The Dutch Case

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# Queers and Muslims: The Dutch Case

Gert Hekma

## I. Introduction

For about a decade, antagonisms have been mounting between Muslim and gay men. In particular, when El Moumni spoke out against homosexuality in 2001, many politicians and gays reacted angrily. White Dutch got the feeling that Muslims did not respect or accept gays, lesbians, and women in general because of their supposedly homophobic and sexist views.<sup>1</sup> That a disproportional part of the anti-gay violence can be attributed to male Moroccan youngsters has become another ground upon which to attack Muslims. Pim Fortuyn, the right-wing leader who was murdered in 2002, exploited the anti-homosexuality stance of a large portion of the Muslim religious leaders and the queer bashing attributed to ethnic minority youth, using it as a stick to beat the Muslims for their backwardness. They should not be able to sufficiently integrate in a Dutch society that is defined, in the eyes of the right wing, by its longstanding support for the emancipation of women, gays, and lesbians. Although the issue of gay-Muslim relations is continuously discussed in Dutch society and politics, the political answers have been unconvincing up until now. Rhetoric has been more important than doing something. In this article, I will first discuss the early history of the gay-Muslim debate, then the subsequent rise of antagonism since the interventions by El Moumni and Fortuyn, and finally the contemporary social and political answers on the issue.

The focus regarding Muslims will be on Moroccans. Although the number of people of Turkish descent is higher than that of Moroccan descent (380,000 versus 340,000) and there are substantial numbers of Muslims of other ethnicities (a third of the 340,000 Surinamese, for example),<sup>2</sup> male youth of Moroccan origin are most often seen as the troublemakers. Of course, not all Moroccans or Turks are Muslim, and there also are differences in religious beliefs between and inside ethnicities. The Turkish Alevites, for example, have less strict views on gender and sexual relations than other groups that sometimes reject them for their religious liberalism. Most of the Moroccans came from the northern Rif area and are Berbers, not urban Arabs. Likewise, most Turks arrived from conservative Anatolia, not from modern cities. Notwithstanding their traditional background, the first generation of immigrants was rather lax in its practice of religion. It was the second generation that could be said to be more modern, for example, because of higher levels of education, but they also became more strict and orthodox in terms of religion. As elsewhere, the number of women wearing scarves has grown significantly since the early 1990s.

## II. Background

For a long time, Morocco was mainly known by gay men as an exciting tourist destination. In particular, Tangier, when it was an international enclave (1923–1956), attracted many homosexual tourists, such as Paul and Jane Bowles, Tennessee Williams,

William Burroughs, Joe Orton, Jean Genet, Juan Goytisolo, and many others less well known.<sup>3</sup> The sexual outcasts from the West found exile in this border city of the Orient. What had been Capri and Taormina in Italy, the French Riviera, or Tunisia and Algeria before the Second World War, became Morocco in the 1950s and 1960s. Single men who visited the main tourist attractions were accosted by young men, who not only sold goods but also their bodies. What has become known as sex tourism was part and parcel of Morocco's attractions for many gay men. Nowadays, Marrakech and to a lesser degree Tangier, Agadir, and Essaouira continue this gay tradition. The Dutch poet and writer Jan Hanlo (1912–1969) left a moving tribute of his visit to Marrakech in which he described his tumultuous relationship with an 11-year-old black boy, Mohamed, in *Go to the Mosk*, a Dutch novel with an English title, published in 1971. As a Catholic, he did not want to have the sex that Mohamed and his friends eagerly offered, but one time he could not resist.

Moroccans came to the Netherlands halfway through the 1960s as “guest workers.” They were mostly single men, often coming from France and Belgium where they had worked. Seduced by the better pay and work conditions, they continued north. Other men were directly recruited from Morocco by Dutch companies.<sup>4</sup> There is little known about how these single men organized their sexual lives, but they certainly had white girlfriends, went to prostitutes, and also had gay sex, both among themselves and with the locals. It remains unclear how actively they participated in male sex work as compared with their compatriots back home. Their rather free social and erotic life ended in the late 1970s, when the guest workers brought their recently founded families or their new brides over to the Netherlands.

A second generation of Dutch Moroccans made its appearance in urban life, the result of fertile families that had arrived since the late 1970s. In the 1980s, a new situation developed, with a growing Moroccan population that started to transform churches and old industrial buildings into mosques or to build new ones. The demographic and urban landscape changed. The single men had become family fathers. Instead of living a male homo-social life in hostels, they now created hetero-social nuclear families and started to pay attention to religion. Most of them began to look more like their fathers in Morocco than their Dutch colleagues or neighbors.

### III. 2001

It took some time before the new situation received critical attention in the political arena and media. The ideal of a multicultural society where many different ethnicities peacefully lived together faltered. Neighbors complained about the loud noises and strange smells the new immigrants produced. Dutch women who dressed sexily were sometimes insulted as being whores. In criminal statistics and the media, Surinamese were replaced by Turks and even more by Moroccans as being the most prone to commit crimes. While the white population of poor urban areas began to complain about their new neighbors, politicians showed concern but no alarm as most of them continued to believe in multicultural ideals.

Slowly, the white Dutch got “realistic,” meaning that they abandoned the ideals of a multicultural society and became convinced that the new immigrants caused many problems that had not existed before on this scale. The extreme Right had always said so,

but they had been politically marginalized. The first respectable politician who voiced this idea in the 1990s was Frits Bolkestein, leader of the conservative-liberal party Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, or VVD). This party represents the capitalist entrepreneurs who brought the guest workers to Holland out of economic interests, but did not take responsibility for the cultural consequences once the guests became locals. The most vocal opponent of immigration was openly gay Pim Fortuyn, whose spectacular rise to celebrity status in 2001 changed the Dutch political landscape radically. His party, Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), received a sixth of the votes in the national elections of May 2002. It put an end to eight years of "purple" government (i.e., non-Christian, with a liberal approach). This cabinet had opened up marriage for same-sex couples and legalized prostitution. It consisted of conservative and progressive liberals (VVD and D66) and the Labour Party (PvdA).

Some days before the elections of 2002, Fortuyn was murdered by an animal rights activist who opposed his support for the meat and fur industry, rather than his critique of Muslims. Fortuyn had begun as a Marxist professor in the social sciences in Groningen during the 1970s, and had become a typical right-wing politician by the end of the century. He was a populist and against bureaucracy and a strong state. In favor of more police and tougher sentences for criminals, he also wanted to stop immigration. He was popular among many Dutch who praised him because "he dared to say the truth" that other politicians were apparently hiding. One of the "truths" they liked was his critique of multicultural society. His followers did not always like homosexuals, but they admired Fortuyn (like they do the gay comedians on television of which Holland has its share: André van Duin, Paul de Leeuw, Paul Haenen, Jos Brink). In other words, homosexuals are nice at a distance rather than close-by. Fortuyn may have been a faithful Catholic, but he loved dark rooms for sex better than churches for praying, as he told an Orthodox Protestant journalist some days before his murder. He knew very well, he said, that Moroccan culture was backward because he had slept with Moroccan youngsters. In the media, he was typically presented as a gay dandy with expensive suits and cars, and a grand house full of male nude art. He was the complete opposite of the poor young ruffians with whom he had sex.<sup>5</sup> After Fortuyn was murdered, his party had no gay political agenda and no gay politicians any longer. The next governments were led by Christian-Democrat Jan Peter Balkenende (2002–2010). The first of these was with Fortuyn's party, LPF, which was unsuccessful because of internal fighting among the inexperienced ministers of the LPF. Balkenende's cabinets (the next ones were with VVD, D66, and PvdA) gradually became stricter on immigration and integration of non-Western persons. It also promoted conservative sexual policies with a focus on traditional values and the nuclear family. Gays and lesbians became an exception to the conservative rule.

Most straight and gay Dutch believed that homosexual emancipation had been accomplished by 2001. With nearly all gay rights being enshrined in the law, without any discriminatory regulations left over, and with the opening of marriage to same-sex couples, they believed the struggle for equal rights had ended and the gay and lesbian movement could close its doors. Legal rights did not mean social equality, however. Fortuyn was one of the first to denounce the new situation in which queers were bashed, school teachers did not dare any longer to be "out" in front of their classes, and gays and lesbians were chased out of their homes by young neighborhood hoodlums. The media

typically described such incidents as being perpetrated by young Muslim men who did not like queers. This group may have been overrepresented in these cases, but there were many white males involved. Gay and lesbian social emancipation had not been accomplished, although the white majority liked to portray itself as liberal and progressive; it was innocent of such assaults, projecting them onto ethnic minority and, in particular, Muslim male youth. The Dutch, who had only recently started to tolerate gays and lesbians, now created a distinction between a nation that prided itself on having always been tolerant of religious diversity and women's emancipation—now adding support for homosexual emancipation—and Muslims that did not. The latter were accused of regarding their own religion as the one and only true faith, looking down on non-Muslims. They were also thought to have no respect for women and homosexuals or their legal and social rights. After 2001, the dichotomy between a gay-tolerant Holland and Muslims who were intolerant to the level of violence escalated with the affair of Khalil El Moumni.

#### IV. El Moumni<sup>6</sup>

On March 7, 2001, the daily newspaper *De Volkskrant* reported on anti-homosexual violence in Rotterdam, the city of the national Gay Pride celebration to be held in June of the same year. Under the ominous heading “No Gay Man Dares to Go Out to Party in Rotterdam in Latex,” it reported that especially ethnic minorities would be prone to queer bashing. A gay man told the reporter that he had been chased out of his apartment by Turkish neighbors, who had not only threatened him, but had actually beaten him up. They objected to his walking naked in his ground-floor apartment and to his homosexuality. The police had recommended that he move to another part of town. Professor of Sociology Han Entzinger, specialist on ethnic minorities and advisor to the government, suggested in the same article that gay men should restrain themselves and make their sexuality not too public, thus adding white straight norms to the topic of Muslim anti-gay violence.<sup>7</sup>

After this article was published, editors of the daily television program “Behind the News” on *Nova* picked up the issue. They aired the program on the third of May, the day before the national commemoration of those who died in the Second World War, which is a very symbolic moment for the older generation. The opening featured gay men telling about being harassed by Moroccan youngsters. Members of a group of Moroccans then expressed their abhorrence of homosexuality. Interviews with gay Muslims were cut out of the program. The central story was about imam El Moumni, who made statements against homosexuality. He said that it was forbidden in Islam and that Dutch society would disappear if it allowed the disease of homosexuality to spread. Later, it would become known that he had also opposed queer bashing, but again, that part was left out by the editors of the program. This editing policy made the statements of the imam more explosive as it gave the impression that he inspired the violence against gay men.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the imam had at greater length deplored homosexuality and stated in a book that Europeans were less than dogs or pigs because these animals at least do not know same-sex marriages.<sup>9</sup>

The television show caused a storm in Holland. The day after it aired, the gay movement reacted with indignation and a gay member of parliament suggested investing

more in citizenship lessons for imams. Two others suggested extraditing El Moumni to his home country. His position was, however, supported by imams of various mosques. Panels on homosexuality and Islam were organized while journalists, scholars, gays, and straights voiced their opinion. Several gay men filed a complaint against the imam, but the case proved unsuccessful and he was acquitted on appeal.<sup>10</sup> Various Christian leaders had been acquitted in the past after voicing similar anti-gay ideas because of the freedom of religious expression. Islam and Christianity were not that far apart in their ideas on homosexuality, which derive from similar sources, with *liwat* (the sin of the people of Lot) being similar to *sodomy* (the sin of the inhabitants of Sodom where Lot lived). While the main Dutch Protestant churches had changed their interpretation of this story from a condemnation of homosexuality to one of not respecting the laws of hospitality, most Muslims (and orthodox and evangelical Christians) had kept to the traditional view.

The Minister of Urban Affairs rejected the intolerance of the imam, and wanted to talk to El Moumni and his colleagues.<sup>11</sup> This meeting with some hastily assembled Muslim leaders was disappointing. El Moumni regretted his remarks, according to the minister, but immediately after the encounter, the imam repeated (in front of the cameras) his beliefs about homosexuality once more.<sup>12</sup> The stern speech of the Minister of Urban Affairs in support of tolerance and the acceptance of homosexuality was repeated by the Prime Minister, who used the full ten minutes of his weekly interview warning the Muslims to respect Dutch tolerance of homosexuality.<sup>13</sup> It was one of the very few times he spoke in public about homosexuality during his eight years in office. Some ethnic minority members denounced the unbalanced reaction of the Dutch political establishment to the remarks of the imam. The Prime Minister never spoke out against the anti-gay ideas of Christians and the Minister of Urban Affairs never invited the Catholic clergy to discuss the concepts of liberal tolerance and gay emancipation.<sup>14</sup> Although the topic was high on the political agenda, no politician came up with concrete proposals to improve the situation (for example, policies ensuring the safety of gays and lesbians or for an enhanced public visibility of homosexuality). It merely boiled down to the sermons of imams against the pontifications of politicians.

Gay and Muslim organizations, including the Islam and Citizenship Foundation and Yoesuf, the organization focusing on homosexuality, met and issued a declaration. They regretted the remarks of El Moumni and spoke out in favor of continued discussion among all concerned groups, in the best Dutch tradition. This was later done in *Dialogo* meetings. They also urged politicians and police to combat violence and discrimination whether it regarded Muslims or gays, and demanded more attention to sexual diversity in schools and social work.<sup>15</sup> Shortly after the scandal, Omar Nahas of Yoesuf published *Islam en Homoseksualiteit*, which offers a more liberal Islamic view. According to his interpretation, it is sexual abuse rather than homosexuality that is forbidden.

## V. Gay Ethnic Minority Visibility<sup>16</sup>

On several occasions the scandal exploded again. Half a year later, a Surinamese imam declared that, according to the Qur'an, public homosexuality deserved the death penalty.<sup>17</sup> In an Amsterdam mosque, a religious tract was found that stated that men guilty of homosexuality should be thrown from the highest building. Every time, the media reacted loudly and politicians announced measures, but nothing happened except

that most Dutch by now believed that in Islam homosexuality is generally seen as a sin that should be punished with the death penalty.

Another result was a greater visibility of Arab and Muslim homosexuality. Newspapers published long articles on the abundant closeted homosexual life in Muslim countries.<sup>18</sup> Several authors referred to the rich tradition of gay poetry in Arabic.<sup>19</sup> The Foundation Yoesuf was often asked for comments and made clear that Muslim and gay are not mutually exclusive, but may be combined in persons and groups. The day after the imam spoke out against homosexuality, the first gay Arab bar in Amsterdam, Habibi Ana (My Beloved), was opened. After some hesitation, Habibi Ana took part in the annual Gay Canal Parade with an Arabian “1001 Nights” boat that was a big hit in the media.<sup>20</sup> The bar’s owner is a Dutch-Egyptian Coptic Christian. Very few of the gay ethnic spokespersons were, or are, second-generation Turks or Moroccans. The leaders of Yoesuf were exiles from Syria and Sudan, while Cem Ariklar of the International Platform of Turkish Homosexuals (IPTH, 1995–2000) was Christian. The gay Arab spokespersons of Secret Garden (since 1995) and the Foundation Habibi Ana (since 2001) are, respectively, an Algerian and a Palestinian exile. After 2001, the only second-generation Moroccan in this group, Chafik Gadir, started the foundation Nafar for North-African men with homosexual feelings. Hakan Kuyucu, who came to Holland for his studies, founded the Turkish Harem Events, organized parties and participated in panels.

Most gay ethnic organizations are male initiatives, and often rely on the one person who founded it. Consequently, IPTH, Yoesuf, and Harem Events collapsed after their initiators left. Yoesuf became the multicultural Malaica in 2009, and Pink Istanbul took the place of Harem Events in 2007. These organizations are mainly for Arabs, Muslims, and Turks. The last Surinamese organizations, SuHo (Surinamese Homosexuals) and Sister Outsider, stopped around 1986. There has never been a specifically Moroccan foundation. The one mixed ethnic organization, Strange Fruit, was active in the 1990s and dissolved just before 2001. Most gay ethnic initiatives were concentrated in Amsterdam, but SuHo had a strong base in The Hague, and other cities saw some minor activities. In the Bijlmer (Amsterdam South-East), a gay and lesbian black Surinamese underground world of parties and support networks was only known to the initiated. The Arab gay parties of Secret Garden and Habibi Ana are also highly successful, but under the condition that the visitors may stay anonymous.

The ethnic gay movements had complicated relations with the main white LGBT organization, Center for Culture and Recreation (COC). Originating in 1946, this name dates from 1948. The COC did not handle cooperation with the other groups very well due to cultural misunderstandings. It was also too preoccupied with itself and lobbying local and national governments, while paying less attention to the desires and demands of its members, white or black. On the other hand, the ethnic gay organizations never became very professional. They faced problems with the technicalities of planning and grant demands. Their main problem was ambivalence towards homosexuality. They resisted identity and confrontational politics, regarded gay white men as preoccupied with sex and homosexuality, circumvented explicit language, and were not too eager to criticize ethnic cultures that relied strongly on families and religions that were not very open to (sometimes even strongly opposed to) homosexuality. This ambivalence between their “own” ethnic and gay community, between family and individual, and between speaking and silencing (with the closet ajar), made them quite invisible. Sometimes they

denied their identity because in their cultures, sexual identities would not exist. They moved back and forth between romantic ideas of gay freedoms and painful memories of denial or rejection of homosexuality in their cultures of origin. The queer ethnic identities that indeed exist often belong to the most abject: the man who has lost his honor and masculinity because he likes to be penetrated, the *zemel* of Moroccans, the *ibne* of Turks, the *boeler* of Surinamese. For gay-identified ethnic minority men and women, there is in general no way back to their culture of origin. They do not feel at home in white gay culture, and a third way is not being developed. Many of them get stuck in a dead-end alley. The desire of authorities to render them visible and produce gay ethnic role models made politicians invest subsidies in movements that have difficulties in playing the political game of identity, community, visibility, and the clear language of sexual citizenship. One should not, however, exaggerate the level of visibility and strong speech of white gays and lesbians. Certainly in “tolerant” Netherlands, they have become complacent and enjoy the limited freedoms of the gay-friendly enclaves to which they have moved.

## VI. Right, Left, and the Gay Cause

In the years following the El Moumni affair and the Fortuyn murder, the Netherlands saw a major new novelty. The extreme Right had nearly always been opposed to homosexuals, gay rights, and queer visibility, but nonetheless homosexuals often had leading positions in right-wing parties and groups, the most well-known case being Ernst Röhm, comrade in arms of Hitler and leader of the SA, or, much less known, in the 1970s in Holland, Henri Brookman and Alfred Vierling. With Fortuyn, it embraced for the first time a gay leader and gay rights (or some people would rather say *tolerance* of gays and lesbians). Soon Fortuyn would find followers like Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Rita Verdonk, and Geert Wilders, who all belonged to the VVD, but Verdonk and Wilders later created their own parties, Trots op Nederland (Proud of the Netherlands) and the Partij van de Vrijheid (Party of Freedom). Like Fortuyn’s successor in Rotterdam, Marco Pastors, they all spoke out forcefully in favor of homosexual rights and often at the same time against the Muslims that endangered Dutch gender and sexual freedoms because of their sexist and homophobic ideology. Their outspoken perspective created a dichotomy of the “progressive” Dutch and the “backward” Muslims who had no respect for Dutch tolerance and should be taught what Western morality meant. Multicultural society had been a mistake of the “Left church,” which developed a very negative meaning and many journalists and intellectuals who had been leftist turned to the right. They contended that the Dutch should become proud of their nation and history again. This has led to various initiatives going from more citizenship lessons or classes about Dutch history to the initiative for a national museum dedicated to stricter immigration laws.

The support of the right-wing leaders was very different in quality. Fortuyn himself was an openly gay man but his party had no homosexual agenda. Verdonk, Minister of Immigration and Integration for the VVD (2003–2007), was a real “fag hag”: she loved gay men and was surrounded by a gay clique. When she started her own party, Proud of Netherlands, in 2007, her main advisor and supporter was Ed Sinke, a gay man who had been chairperson of the Amsterdam VVD. The COC leader, Frank van Dalen, belonged to this group, and he invited Verdonk to be on the jury of the annual Gay Parade in 2007.



Her party lost its one seat in the parliamentary elections of 2010, but still had a boat in the annual Amsterdam Gay Canal Parade that year. In her youth, she had been leftist and a member of the pacifist-socialist party, forerunner of the Green Left (GL). As VVD Minister, she obliged new immigrants to the Netherlands from the Global South to pass an examination at the Dutch Embassy in their home country. They must be able to speak some Dutch and know about Dutch culture. The 2005 documentary “*Naar Nederland*” (Coming to the Netherlands) was part of the teaching material. It showed images of women with nude breasts on a beach, half-naked people at a pop festival, a lesbian and a gay marriage, and two men kissing in a landscape.<sup>21</sup> Because in Muslim countries this imagery was deemed obscene, an abridged version was produced without this material. Some queer theorists have denounced this documentary as Islamophobic because of the gay material used to frighten Muslims,<sup>22</sup> but at the same time it fulfills the demands of the LGBT movement to include gay and lesbian material in public representations of the Netherlands, from history books and museums to tourist information. The critique of the movie by queer theorists backfires because no gay or lesbian visibility will ever be possible as long as it offends orthodox (and other) people who dislike or reject homosexuality.

Many Dutch also would rather not see kissing gay men representing their country. In fact, some 42 percent of the population rejects two men kissing in public, as was shown in the documentary. A tension apparently exists between Verdonk’s liberal image and the lack of tolerance that nearly half of the Dutch voice. Liberal and secular attitudes toward sexual imagery frighten many people, but this should be no reason to halt the struggle for sexual citizenship rights. Sexuality is not solely a private affair without public consequences, as many Dutch people would rather like to see it.

Hirsi Ali had worked for the Labor Party but walked over to the VVD and became one of its Members of Parliament. She was very concerned with the plight of Muslim women, but found little support in the concerned group because she was considered to be too harsh on Islam, for example accusing the Prophet of child abuse because he had sexual relations with his wife Aisha when she was nine years old. Her documentary, “Submission” (2004), showed a woman whose naked body was totally veiled but still visible. Verses of the Qur’an that expressed the secondary role of women in Islam were written on her body while female voices told stories of abuse and violence by Muslim men. The movie created a worldwide scandal.<sup>23</sup> She and the producer, Theo van Gogh, received death threats and the same year, Van Gogh was murdered by an orthodox Muslim who left a letter stuck with a knife on his dead body addressed to Hirsi Ali (who was probably too well protected to be the murderer’s target). Hirsi Ali had wanted to make a movie about the persecution of gays by Muslims as a sequel to “Submission,” that showed gay men rather than women as victims of Islam. That documentary was never made.

In 2006, Hirsi Ali gave a speech at the opening of the first Dutch exposition on the persecution of homosexuals in Nazi times. Her presence was already controversial beforehand because some gay and lesbian intellectuals protested against her appropriation of the gay issue, but they found little support. Their tactics were not very convincing, as they downplayed the discrimination against gay men and lesbians, both in Holland and in Turkey, suggesting that Hirsi Ali exaggerated the problematization of the gay issue.<sup>24</sup> In her speech, Hirsi Ali stressed how important the topic in fact was, and also how much she

learned in this regard from her first teacher of Dutch, a gay man. This is a recurrent theme in the integration story of leaders with Muslim backgrounds: Mohammed Sini, Hacı Karacaer and Rotterdam's mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb told similar stories. Sini even translated the love letters of his gay teacher to a Moroccan lover. This speech was the final public performance of Hirsi Ali as Dutch MP, because her Dutch identity was questioned some weeks later by then Minister Verdonk (both women being of the same party) as she had not given her real name when she sought asylum in Holland. In the end, Hirsi Ali was allowed to keep her Dutch passport but sought refuge in the United States where she now works for the neo-conservative American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research (which would never allow her to make a gay "Submission").

Wilders and his Party for Freedom (PVV) are nowadays the main voice of the right wing. The party has grown from nine (2006) to 24 (2010), out of 150 seats in parliament, and is now a candidate for government participation. They use the question of gay rights as a way to denounce Muslims because of their homophobia. Any occasion of queer bashing is being used by his party against Muslims, notwithstanding the many young white men who also commit this kind of violence. According to the former responsible minister, Ronald Plasterk, without referring to any data, half of the youngsters involved in anti-gay violence belongs to an ethnic minority. The PVV, however, is convinced it must be 80 percent.<sup>25</sup> The party also complains that the minister is too soft on this issue, and has suggested that he replace his approach with the punishment that the perpetrators should clean the dark sex rooms of gay bars.<sup>26</sup>

In 2008, Wilders followed in Hirsi Ali's steps by making an anti-Muslim film, "*Fitna*." It denounced both the oppression of women and gay men in Islam, and included footage of the execution of two gay youth in Iran.<sup>27</sup> The Dutch feared the reactions of Muslims and Muslim countries, but the film did not create the national and international commotion that "Submission" produced, probably because of its amateur quality in terms of production and acumen.

Most of the right-wing support has remained rhetoric. At the same time, the Left and liberal parties, who have supported gay rights for a longer time (although often half-heartedly), became more wary of continuing to do so. They were afraid they could lose their important constituency of ethnic minority voters, who have no strong inclination to discuss homosexuality, let alone engage with gay rights issues (most clearly the case with the PvdA). In 2004, leftist ideals of multiculturalism were once more shattered with the murder of Theo van Gogh. At that time, Amsterdam's mayor, Job Cohen (PvdA), started an intensive program of urban solidarity, *We Amsterdammers*, which was intended to combat the antagonisms that also appeared to be part and parcel of ethnic diversity. In the past, the Left had always underlined the positive sides of multiculturalism. Cohen has often been accused of "drinking tea" with the different groups, and although he himself claimed its utter necessity, his right-wing opponents would see it as façade politics. After several incidents of anti-gay violence, the city also included gays and lesbians more actively in their strategies for urban cohesion. Apart from antagonisms regarding ethnicity and religion, homosexuality and sexual morality became regarded as issues of controversy between tolerant old Amsterdammers and intolerant Moroccans (and other ethnic minorities) that divided society. Although the city stepped up its subsidies for LGBT emancipation, especially for ethnic gay organizations, very little was structural. It was based on short-term repression, like security cameras in gay areas, rather than on

long-term prevention. What the queer movement always regarded as essential—more investments in sexual and gender diversity education—was never realized, although some of the LGBT projects were intended for schools.

The year 2009 witnessed the rise to national prominence of Ahmed Marcouch, mayor of the Amsterdam borough of Slotervaart, because of his pro-homosexual policies. This former police officer and Labor party man of Moroccan descent had already become known because he did not defend youngsters of his own ethnicity, but said without qualms that they were real nuisances for everybody. In 2009, he published a report in which he stated certain aims for his neighborhood. First, he wanted a gay/Muslim bar (all Amsterdam gay bars are in the center city) and suggested the annual Gay Parade should start in his district. The first topic is still pending, but the second happened. In 2009, the city's own boat, with Marcouch and Amsterdam mayor Job Cohen, took off from Nieuwe Meer (New Lake), which is also the location of Amsterdam's largest public cruising area. Marcouch, moreover, suggested two more long-term aims: sexual citizenship education that definitively would include LGBT topics for the schools in his vicinity and looking behind the front doors of homes, meaning that he intended to control parental education in terms of the treatment of girls and LGBT children. In a country where the nuclear family has a "holy" status, this was radical. It also was too drastic for his own party, which became very divided. Many accused him of moving forward too quickly or of being overly engaged in gay emancipation.

By breaking through Labor's hesitating attitudes, Marcouch showed how ambivalent his party remains on gay issues. He also attacked both Christian parties that were in the government with Labor, the Christian Democrats (CDA, then Holland's largest party) and the Christian Union (CU, a small orthodox Protestant party). According to him, the leaders of both parties, Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende and Vice Prime Minister André Rouvoet, should come forward in support of LGBT emancipation, not only for the country but also because the topic remains difficult for their own voters and inside their own parties. A black evangelical female member proposed, for example, to exclude open gays and lesbians from official posts in the CU. When Balkenende was questioned by Muslim students in Indonesia about Dutch gay marriage, the first thing he remarked was that he himself had voted against it, thus showing his homophobia while being in function.<sup>28</sup> In January 2010, Marcouch lost the election for the social-democrat leadership in his district by a narrow margin to an unknown Moroccan opponent. The strong support of local and national leaders of his party had not helped him, showing how controversial his pro-gay policies were in his own ethnically diverse district. Because of his popularity among the party's leaders for being one of the very few charming and convincing Labor politicians, his career did not end there, and he became MP for Labour in the 2010 elections.

The attitudes of Left and Right show how confused the situation in Holland is. All secular parties support gay rights and in orthodox Protestant circles they discuss the issue with vehemence while the CDA remains silent but tolerates in its own ranks married gays and lesbians. The CDA had in the former cabinets an openly lesbian minister of agriculture and an openly gay minister of economy, both married to a same-sex partner. Notwithstanding this "openness," homosexuality is still regarded with ambivalent feelings. Although same-sex marriages have been legal since 2001, under the present government, civil servants are allowed *not* to register such weddings if they have moral

objections. This would never be allowed with Jewish, Muslim, or mixed marriages to which civil servants might object. All parties hesitate to fully embrace LGBT emancipation, and often only pay lip service to it. As previously noted, the political support is more project-based than structural management, more rhetoric than investment. It is often very normative because of the condition that queers must behave in a “normal” way.

## VII. The Situation of Gays and Lesbians

In 2006, a government commissioned report on the acceptance of gays and lesbians, to which I contributed, was published.<sup>29</sup> In general, up to 95 percent of the Dutch population is said to have no objections to homosexuality. This is the highest score of being gay friendly worldwide. Yet when more specific questions are asked, and homosexuality gets “closer,” the percentages drop quickly. As mentioned, 42 percent of the Dutch do not want to see two men kissing in the streets, 31 percent object to two women doing the same, while only eight percent states so about a mixed couple. In different fields (adoption, gay and lesbian neighbors, best friends, private physician, teacher) and with various groups, numbers of homo-negativity remain high. Additionally, one wonders about the “politically correct” nature of these answers. The government also wanted to know about levels of discrimination. The report concluded that intolerance, including insults and violence against gays and lesbians and non-acceptance in schools, in families and workplaces still continued at levels that were difficult to assess because of dark numbers. Two-thirds of Dutch gays and lesbians report negative experiences related to their sexual orientation despite the assumption that they will not experience these because they often behave in “normal” ways and many will do so out of self-protection. Many gays and lesbians, and also authorities, continue to accept discrimination as being routine and often do not record the relevant cases. A usual reaction of teachers, school directors, and parents to a youngster being insulted is not to protect them but to say it does not mean anything.

What was most remarkable from the interviews done with gays and lesbians on experiences in the workplace was the heteronormativity. The gay men in particular strongly desired to be seen as normal in terms of gender. Coming out was not really an issue any longer, because if they did not come out themselves, their colleagues would out them. Being out was a positive thing, however much struggle it might have cost. People who were suspected of being gay or lesbian and who were not out were not highly regarded. But being out for gay men meant that they should not behave in “unmasculine” or overly sexual ways. The terms of communication were set by straight people who could say that gay men should not be too preoccupied with their sexual preference and should “shut up.” At other places and moments, straight people would not hesitate to ask the most intimate questions that they themselves would never discuss with others, for example about “male” and “female” roles in couples, dark rooms, cruising, or kinky sex. Gay men were never allowed to physically touch straight colleagues who would not hesitate themselves to do so “for fun.” In general, lesbians were as always much more invisible. Gay parades often functioned as a negative reference point for both gay and straight. They were considered to be too transgressive in terms of gender and sexual behavior: too much drag, nudity, and kinky sex. The acceptance of gay men was always

under the condition that they must not be too visible, unmasculine or sexual.<sup>30</sup>

When it comes to ethnicity, the report concluded that anti-homosexual attitudes were to be found among people who were actively involved in religion and had less education. These factors are higher among ethnic minorities. Websites of Moroccans and Turks, but also those catering to right-wing young males, had higher levels of anti-gay remarks than orthodox Christian ones. So the picture of tolerance for gays and lesbians was not very comforting and the high expectations of 2001, when legal equality was realized, did not materialize in the social world of 2006. Gays and lesbians remained second-class citizens and if they were accepted, it was under the aforementioned conditions for gay men, while the lesbians remained invisible, and many of them appear to like it that way.

The report came to several conclusions. Stricter policies should be enacted to counter concrete examples of discrimination. Vulnerable groups among gays and lesbians—like the young, the elderly, and ethnic minorities—needed additional support. Greater visibility was needed, particularly in schools, where most prejudices about homosexuals, “sissies,” and “sluts” are learned from peers. As always, since the beginning of gay and lesbian emancipation politics in the 1980s, the visibility of lesbians should be enhanced.

In the follow-up study of 2010 the acceptance of homosexuality among the Dutch was still higher than in 2006, but on the other hand, the pressure to behave “normally” had not changed, or perhaps had even become stronger for students in primary and secondary schools.<sup>31</sup> Straight students were said to accept gay and lesbian classmates if they would be “authentic,” meaning not behaving differently in terms of gender and sexuality. In other words, only heterosexual behavior was seen as authentic, and sexual and gender variation was rejected. Survey data indicated that it takes young queers three to four years from the realization of same-sex feelings to telling someone else about this, a surprisingly long time for a country that praises its levels of acceptance.<sup>32</sup> A full fifty percent of the young queers surveyed had seriously considered committing suicide, while psychological problems such as depression were common among gay and lesbian young people.<sup>33</sup>

Part of the study concerned ethnic minorities (Surinamese, Moroccan, Turkish, and Chinese) and orthodox Protestants. In these groups, acceptance of homosexuality is far from realized. The attitude is that gays and lesbians should keep silent and not trouble straight culture. Homosexuality continued to be rejected because it is “sinful,” pathological, and/or unnatural, and because gays and lesbians did not marry and reproduce, were gender dissidents, engaged in filthy sex, and made visible what should remain invisible. Most gays and lesbians from these groups kept silent and remained invisible out of consideration for their parents and families, as well as indisputably fearing or having already experienced negative reactions. Few people, and mainly politicians in the case of ethnic minorities, took up their defense, and with limited success. Acceptance of homosexuality has become a litmus test for Dutch citizenship. Although one may question how many “white” Dutch would pass it, ethnic minorities, like orthodox Protestants, are seen as the people who do not accept gays and lesbians. Because of the pressure to integrate, a considerable number of ethnic people—in particular Muslims—opt out, migrate, or radicalize. As long as they are “white,” orthodox Christians are seen as less foreign to Dutch culture, and so they get less criticism, but the black evangelicals among them have been the object of social ridicule and contempt.

Another report I participated in regarded anti-gay violence in Amsterdam.<sup>34</sup> The city requested a study after several incidents were widely reported in the press in the aftermath of the Gay Canal Parade of August 2007. The aim was to know the motives of the perpetrators. What was surprising was the rhetoric of the city officials who claimed that mayor and alderwomen and aldermen discussed the topic on a nearly daily basis, and the subsequent lack of the promised support for the study by these politicians and civil servants who had claimed great interest. Other local institutions, such as schools, sport and ethnic organizations, and youth social workers, were hesitant to cooperate as well. Ambivalence regarding homosexuality remained the rule in Holland's gay capital. The results of the research confirmed the national study. Some 200 cases of anti-gay violence were reported to the police in 2007, from insults to robberies and severe physical injuries. The perpetrators were mainly young men, with Moroccans being overrepresented. Of the 47 perpetrators arrested for physical violence, 36 percent were white and 36 percent Moroccan, while their representation among youngsters under 25 years in Amsterdam is, respectively, 39 percent and 16 percent. Surinamese were clearly underrepresented, accounting for four percent of the perpetrators but twelve percent of the youth. Both perpetrators and young men from the groups that they belong to were interviewed: white hooligans, marines and fraternity (corps in Dutch) students,<sup>35</sup> and urban street youth of Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese, and Antillean descent. Additional cases were used from court and probation offices,<sup>36</sup> and a survey was done among secondary school students.

The perpetrators and the male youth generally stated they accepted homosexuals, but, again, on the condition that they should not behave in unmasculine, too sexual, or too visible ways. Most problems arose when the young men felt they were the object of unwanted gay attention. In most cases, this gay interest was probably more imagined than real, and interestingly, some of the perpetrators visited gay places (discos, cruising areas) out of curiosity, and then discovered that in those situations, gay men are not only objects but also subjects of desire. The straight youngsters did not want to become an object of desire, a position they consider to belong to females. (Their ideas show little rationality because they were afraid of the overtures of gay men, but why should they be afraid of those unmasculine men?) They disliked homosexual visibility, although the Moroccan men in particular preferred queers to be visible (so as to prevent unexpected proposals from gay men who behave "normally").

They found homosexuality so filthy that they eagerly wanted to watch it. And their idea that men should be the subject and women the object of desire has little to do with sexual reality in which roles are not dichotomous, but are mixed in different ways. Their ideas about homosexuality focused mainly on gender and sexual issues. When the young men in the focus groups were asked to give their first impressions about homosexuality, it was all about anal sex and gender and not about religion. It does not mean that their negative attitudes had nothing to do with religion, but that their spontaneous ideas regarded gender and sexuality.

Although the survey also showed more accepting attitudes, the abusive climate of schools and schoolyards became particularly clear. Up to fifty percent of the male pupils were confronted with insults that targeted their gender and/or sexual behavior as being inappropriate (meaning too unmasculine or non-heterosexual). To twenty percent, this happened frequently. Only ten percent of the male students expressed homosexual preferences, indicating that not only young gays and lesbians are targets of such

disciplining behavior, but also many others that deviate from what are deemed to be appropriate gender and sexual roles. This study also made clear that heterosexuals are being created and that this production of straight kids demands great coercion. This goes together with the enforcement of dichotomous gender roles: boys should become men and girls should become women. It is likely that the presence of large numbers of ethnic minority students strengthens this sexual and gender disciplining, on the one hand because they come from families that are more prone to impose dichotomous gender roles and are more likely to deny homosexual inclinations, and on the other hand because school teachers in “black schools” (with a majority of non-white students) are more hesitant to discuss, let alone criticize, traditional gender and sexual norms. Teachers and authorities do little to counter them out of the fear of having to deal with “difficult” themes, such as AIDS, homosexuality, or masturbation. Sometimes they even enhance them by lax policies, not defending insulted queer adolescents, and not changing a school climate that is intolerant of gender and sexual diversity. The minimal investment in sex education, which is not obligatory in Dutch schools, has not changed. If it happens at all, it remains focused on the biology of sex organs, STDs, and how to prevent unwanted pregnancies.<sup>37</sup> Due to the very ambivalent and sometimes prejudiced attitudes of the secondary school students, the study suggested that more attention is needed for sexual citizenship education, certainly in black schools. Topics like Arab pederast history or Surinamese lesbians could be included for all schools because social forms of homosexuality are not particular to Western countries, as some people assume.<sup>38</sup>

### VIII. Conclusions

We have gone a long way from Morocco as a gay paradise to the present situation in the Netherlands, where Moroccans are considered homophobic. There is now a cultural divide that differentiates, in white Dutch eyes, the liberal, pro-gay Dutch from the conservative, anti-gay Muslims. It is an artificial divide. Nowadays, prejudices against homosexuality remain strong among young Dutch men and are not very different between white and ethnic minority groups. Gay men are often seen by male youth of all ethnicities as unmasculine, oversexual, and too visible, and may only be accepted under the condition that they do not show any of this behavior. On one hand, Dutch politics and institutions proclaim that they reject anti-gay attitudes, but there are few signs that these proclamations are more than empty rhetoric. Little is done to defend gays and lesbians, certainly not “sissies” and “dykes,” and nothing is done to break through the heteronormativity of Dutch culture. Homosexuality has become a big issue and gays and lesbians may enjoy the pleasure of receiving much attention but their situation is not being improved. In fact, the mounting number of gender- and gay-related slurs and insults in schoolyards seems rather to indicate that gender roles are more strictly imposed and heterosexuality becomes an increasingly rigid norm. Gay and lesbian emancipation may work out well for those who identify as homosexual, but the relative openness and visibility are creating an ever stronger separation of homo- and heterosexuality because the former remains the marginal and rejected category.

This goes with a normalization of queers who should not be obvious, overly sexual, or unmasculine. According to straight journalists, gay men should give up public cruising and the promiscuity of dark rooms because they can marry. The gay movement has by

now successfully distanced itself from pedophiles, accepting an age of consent of sixteen years. This delivers the younger queers to heteronormative institutions like family, school, and sports. Young queers will have great difficulties in defending variant gendered and sexual expressions of themselves and others against the pressure of parents, peers, and others, or to begin to understand queer institutions of the past such as a gay community, public and kinky sex, or promiscuity. This leads to questions of sexual democracy or citizenship rights in contemporary societies. At what age do such privileges start (for the United Nations, at age 18); what do they include and exclude; why should monogamy, marriage, heterosexuality, and privacy be the sexual norm; and why do certain sexual practices like pedophilia, bestiality, public sex, and sex work become unthinkable?

The homosexual situation in the Netherlands looks very much like what Joe Massad fears for the Arab world once the “Gay International” has imposed gay identities on a world that does not know them.<sup>39</sup> His fear that the Arab world will be divided between a normative heterosexual majority and a marginal gay minority has become true in the Netherlands, and in the Western world more generally. There is even a growing group of gay-identifying Arabs and Turks. Massad’s idea that homosexual identities are imposed by LGBT movements is overestimating their influence. Rather, NGOs, media, movies, sciences, churches and other social institutions spread the gay and straight messages. It is a global development in which the “Gay International” plays a minor role, even in the West. On the one hand, Massad does not even offer the suggestion of a solution about how to counter the imposition of Western sexual ideologies. On the other hand, he has little compassion for the miseries that non-normative Arabs suffer for their sexual behavior (i.e., girls that “should” stay at home or do not accept arranged marriages; *ibnes* and *zemels* that face abjection or even worse, in some countries, the death penalty). Such agonies are too easily attributed to (post)colonialism. Many criticisms are possible about gay and lesbian emancipation and sexual identity politics, but numerous male, female, and transgender queers profited from those models and defend them.

Queer scholars have taken the position that we should reject the Islamophobia of the Right, and of gay men, but have not formulated an answer to the homophobia of Muslims and sometimes deny its existence. The same people who have rarely hesitated to attack the Catholic church for its stance on homosexuality, abortion, or condoms, suddenly hesitate to criticize the similar ideas of Muslims. There is little chance that the compassion queers feel for Muslims will diminish the Islamophobia of “secular” Dutch people. It neither helps themselves, queer Muslims, their families, nor third parties. It will not make the orthodox Muslims accept gays, lesbians, queers, transgenders, and certainly not the abjected *ibnes* or *zemels*.

It is interesting to think about queer practices and cultures of homosexual pleasures in the Orient and Occident without gay identities. There is little chance to see such a situation given the global emergence of LGBT communities and movements that embrace this identity. It is unrealistic to denounce its middle-class character. A better answer is to defend local and global sexual alternatives while struggling against straight and marital norms and strict gender roles—to discover and stimulate queer paradises in Holland, Morocco, and elsewhere. It is much better not to oppose Oriental or Occidental queer worlds, but to use common grounds to resist straight norms and the imposition on queers to behave “normally.” Perhaps the East is closer to such a utopia than the West.



## Notes

1. Although I prefer the term *anti-homosexual* to homophobic, I will use both. One should read both terms in their social dimension: social rejection of homosexuality. Homophobia, which is most often used in Dutch, sounds too psychological. Anti-queer attitudes are a social more than an individual or psychological problem because they are hammered into youngsters' heads by families, peers, schools, and other social institutions. See Murray (2009) for an international overview.
2. Numbers for 2010 are on their website, [cbs.nl](http://cbs.nl) (Dutch Central Office for Statistics). I will use in this article Moroccan, Turkish, Surinamese, Antillean, and Chinese for Dutch-Moroccan, Dutch-Turkish, Dutch-Surinamese, Dutch-Antillean and Dutch-Chinese. It will become clear from the context when I use these terms for Turkish Turks, etc.
3. Green 1992.
4. Cottaar et al. 2009.
5. Pels 2003.
6. This and the next part of the article are partially based on my earlier article (Hekma 2002), which discusses this affair in greater detail.
7. Of course, sexuality has its public sides and, in fact, gay and lesbian emancipation has always been about going public—coming out of the closet—and visibility. These have been the aims of the gay movement and the government, at least in contemporary Holland, since the 1980s. Heterosexuality is utterly public as an institution, with its families and marriage. Advertisements, scarves, prostitution, media, education, and sex laws also make sexuality a public affair (see Leap 1999).
8. *NRC*, 31 May 2001. All quoted journal references regard 2001.
9. *Vrij Nederland* (26 May 2001); *Parool* (15 June 2001).
10. *NRC* (5 May 2001).
11. *AD* (5 and 7 May 2001).
12. *Parool* (21 May 2001); *AD* (25 May 2001).
13. *NRC* (12 May 2001).
14. *Parool* (9 June 2001).
15. *AD* (23 May 2001).

16. This section is partly based on research reported in Saskia Keuzenkamp, ed., *Steeds gewoner, nooit gewoon. Acceptatie van homoseksualiteit in Nederland*. Den Haag SCP, 2010. Colleagues at the University of Amsterdam and I contributed the final part on the views about homosexuality of ethnic minority groups—Surinamese, Moroccan, Turkish, and Chinese—and orthodox Protestants to the collection. I am personally acquainted with most of the aforementioned activists.

17. *AD* (2 and 5 November 2001).

18. *NRC* (19 May 2001); *Trouw* (26 May 2001).

19. *AD* (21 May 2001).

20. *NRC* (3 August 2001); *AD*, *Parool* and *Volkskrant* (6 August 2001).

21. The movie also wavers between pride of the Netherlands, its history, and its richness and a serious warning for new immigrants that their homes will be in neighborhoods with poverty, bad housing, and high levels of criminality. In stark contrast with tourist information, the sun rarely shines in this documentary and the immigrants are warned about the rain and cold in Holland. The topic of slavery is mentioned very briefly in a much longer scene that celebrates the Dutch Golden Age.

22. Butler 2008.

23. See de Leeuw and van Wichelen 2005.

24. *Trouw* (20 and 21 April 2006).

25. *Volkskrant* (29 February 2008).

26. *De Pers* (9 November 2007).

27. The young men, Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni, who were hanged on the 19th of July, 2005, were condemned for a crime that they had committed when they were legally minors. The “crime” has variously been said to be homosex with each other or the homosexual rape of a 13-year-old boy. Other reports claimed racism, the boys being Arab. The picture is widely used as a symbol of state violence against gay men, for example, on the first boat in the Amsterdam Gay Canal Parade in 2005. For one of many discussions, see *Pukaar* 57 (October 2005).

28. *NRC* (12 April 2006).

29. Keuzenkamp 2006; Keuzenkamp and Bos 2007.

30. I prefer “unmasculine” to “feminine” because the rejection of gay men concerns more their inability or refusal to act masculine than that they would perform something feminine.

31. Keuzenkamp 2010.

32. Ibid., p. 143.

33. Ibid., pp. 184–194.

34. Buijs et al. 2009.

35. In the case of fraternity students, we interviewed gay instead of straight ones to prevent “politically correct” answers that we assume students will provide, knowing the Dutch ideology of tolerance. One gay student told us that he worked so hard in “doing straight” that he got confused about his sexual preference.

36. van der Vlies 2008.

37. van de Bongardt 2008.

38. See El-Rouayheb 2005; Wekker 2006.

39. Massad 2007.

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