



Is it cultural racism? Discursive exclusion and oppression of migrants in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Like elsewhere in Europe, a discourse that is hostile to migrants in general and Muslims in particular has emerged in Dutch politics and media. Can we understand this Dutch migrant-hostile discourse as a kind of racism, i.e. cultural racism? The authors studied this discourse (Dutch political and media texts) and its impact on the lived experiences of Dutch Moroccan Muslims in work settings (21 interviews). They found little evidence of the concept of cultural racism as long as it maintains notions of biological or genetic hierarchy, while it becomes redundant once it abandons such notions. Alternative concepts like cultural essentialism and cultural fundamentalism are sufficient to understand this discourse as well as its impact on Moroccan Muslims' lived experiences. Cultural fundamentalism has become successful because it belongs to a different category than racism.

Keywords

Cultural essentialism, cultural fundamentalism, culturalism, cultural racism, discrimination, exclusion, migrants, Muslims, racism, the Netherlands

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Introduction

Should we attach so much importance to justifications which continue to retain the same structure (that of a denial of rights) while moving from ... the language of biology into the discourses of culture or history, when in practice these justifications simply lead to the same old acts? (Balibar, 1991a: 18)

Studies in many European countries, including France (Taguieff, 1990) and the Netherlands (Vasta, 2007), highlight the rise of migrant-hostile discourses that are based on assumed cultural and religious differences between non-migrants and migrants,¹ particularly Muslim migrants (Tyrrer and Sayyid, 2012). Critical race (CR) scholars (see overviews by Back and Solomos, 2009; Essed and Goldberg, 2002; Hill Collins and Solomos, 2010) take these discourses as representing racism (Miles, 1993). They agree that the racism expressed in these discourses is primarily justified in a language of culture and ethnicity (assumed religious, linguistic and identity incompatibilities) rather than based on the justifications of assumed biological inferiority common to previous racisms like colonial racism or anti-Semitism (e.g. Amin, 2010; Essed and Trienekens, 2008; Lentin, 2008; Modood et al., 1997).

But how are we to assess the differences between biology-based and culture-based justifications? Is there a shift going on in postwar Europe from one variant of racism (biology-based) to another variant (culture-based) within the same category of racism, justifying 'the same old acts' of exclusion and oppression, as Balibar argues in his rhetorical question quoted above? Or are culture-based justifications so very different from biology-based justifications that it makes no sense to put them in the same overall category of racism as colonial racism and anti-Semitism? Do current migrant-hostile discourses belong to a different category than racism and are other concepts than racism, like cultural essentialism (Grillo, 2003) and cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke, 1995), more appropriate to understand them?

This article discusses these questions regarding one such migrant-hostile discourse, the one in media and politics in the Netherlands, and its impact on lived experiences of Moroccan Muslims in Dutch work settings. First, the article briefly discusses the relevant literature. Next, it outlines the characteristics of this migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch media and politics, and subsequently it looks into its impact on the lived experiences of Moroccan Muslims in Dutch work settings. Each of these empirical parts starts with discussing the relevant methodological considerations that guided our study.

Critical race approaches ...

We cannot discuss all CR discussions of the concepts of cultural (e.g. Essed and Trienekens, 2008), neo- (Balibar, 1991a) or new (Barker, 1981) racism in due detail here, but most CR writers criticize notions of 'races' as real existing phenomena in society, as reflected in the Race Relations Acts in Britain for example (cf. Banton, 1987), and stress the constructed and historical nature of racial categories and of justifications of racist practices instead (Goldberg, 1993; Miles, 1993; Wade, 1993). CR authors distinguish various forms of racism, including racism against colonial subjects or anti-Semitism in Europe. They bring current migrant-hostility in Europe on board their concept of racism,

but can only do so when acknowledging that the justifications for this migrant-hostility are different, i.e. based on assumed cultural incompatibilities (Yılmaz, 2012), from the justifications of previous forms of racism mainly based on constructions of biological inferiority/superiority.

Putting this migrant-hostility in the same category of racism as colonial racism and anti-Semitism suggests that these different forms have something in common. CR scholars have basically three arguments for doing so. First, as quoted above, Balibar points to the 'same old acts' of exclusion/extermination/elimination and/or oppression/exploitation that racist justifications lead to (Balibar, 1991b). Whatever its specific form, racism would fuel these same practices. However, it remains to be seen empirically whether biology-based and culture-based justifications result in the same practices and whether these kinds of justifications matter in this respect (Miles, 1993: 19).

Second, CR scholars argue that biology-based and culture-based justifications are connected. Some hold that assumed biology-based *and* assumed culture-based justifications are articulated (Amin, 2010; Lentin, 2008; Tyrer and Sayyid, 2012). Goldberg (1993) and Van Dijk (1993) bring together all sorts of grounds of exclusion, including ethnicity, culture, biological traits, physical appearances, religion, origin, destiny and belonging, into the same category of racism. North American studies demonstrate that 'race' is entwined with religion (Ajrouch and Kusow, 2007) or with ethnicity (Mittelberg and Waters, 1992).

Other scholars (e.g. Wikan, 1999) offer the racism-disguised-as-culture argument. Racism would have adopted culture-based arguments for 'tactical' reasons, to disguise its real nature, since overt racism is no longer acceptable after the Holocaust in Europe and anti-racism legislation in the US. The invoked metaphor of visible culture-based superficiality and deeply-rooted and invisible biology-based racism also criticizes US ethnicity-oriented theories of 'race' that suggest that differences are merely cultural and will disappear with enough communication. Indeed, there is American evidence of a shift from blatant to aversive or covert forms of discrimination (e.g. Deitch et al., 2003).

However, if 'real' racism is hidden behind culture, it may remain hidden from us as scholars as well. If biology-based racism is covered up by claims of cultural incompatibilities, how can we methodically find evidence of the former? If we only find evidence of cultural incompatibility arguments in a discourse without evidence of deeply-rooted biology-based racism below or behind it, are we simply to take the existence of the latter for granted?

Third, there is the racism-without-race argument. Miles (1993) de-centres racism: 'black' people are not the only victims of racism, it has also come to target people like Latinos in the US or migrants in Europe, whose physical appearances render any efforts to classify them as a race implausible. Balibar (1991a) and Miles (1993) argue that the concept of racism cannot only do without notions of race but also without biology-based justifications. Non-racial categories, like migrants or Muslims, have become 'racialized', treated as if they were 'races', on culture-based justifications only.

However, why still call this exclusion/oppression of migrants racism if it has no connection to biology-based justifications? If such justifications no longer define racism, does any negative view on migrants then qualify as racism? If we, like Balibar (1991b: 52–53), bring together the exclusion/oppression of groups as different as current migrants in Europe,

Afro-Americans and Latinos in the US, Jews in the Holocaust and in the Spanish *Reconquista*, slaves and indigenous peoples in the Spanish *Conquista* and so on into the concept of racism, irrespective of justifications, does the concept not run the risk of losing in historical precision and pertinence what it gains in universality (Balibar, 1991b: 49)? Does conceptual conflation of different historical forms result in analytical inflation (Omi and Winant, 2002; Wacquant, 1997), losing sight of the specifics of each form?

CR scholars' drive to apply the concept almost universally may contradict the very historicity and contextuality that CR scholars like Miles (1993) call for. For example, US-inspired understandings of racism cannot simply be transferred to other countries without critical scrutiny and contextualization (Wacquant, 1997). Essed (1990, 1991) applies the concept of racism in her study of women migrants to the Netherlands without such contextualization. Thus, she criticizes her respondents for failing to understand their situation as produced by racism. She argues they should do so just like their US counterparts, without providing supporting Dutch evidence (cf. Banks, 1994; Prins, 1997).

... and their alternatives

The application of the concept (cultural) racism to migrants' exclusion and oppression in Europe is not self-evident. A number of studies do not make use of the concept at all or emphasize discontinuity with racism in the past (Schneider, 2001; Thränhardt, 2002). Grillo (2003) uses the concept of cultural essentialism instead: a system of belief that maps the world into reified homogeneous, bounded and static cultural communities, existing side by side, defining the essence of an individual's identity as belonging to such a community. It triggers cultural anxiety when cultural integrity is assumed to be under threat. He takes on board many meanings of Barker's (1981) new racism concept, but without naturalizing the tendency to form bounded cultural communities and to feel hostility towards outsiders, like Barker does.

Cultural essentialism (see Schinkel, 2007, 2010 on culturalism) does not necessarily entail exclusion or oppression. Multiculturalist views promoting cultural relativism and tolerance are based on essentialist notions of homogeneous and rather static cultural communities living side by side. Exclusion and oppression do come in, though, with cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke, 1995) or culturism (Schinkel, 2007, 2010), when relations between cultural entities are portrayed as incommensurable or incompatible. Then, cultural communities become hostile towards each other and one cultural community excludes other communities by closing itself off in the territory it claims to be its own (Stolcke, 1995). Stolcke (1995) refers to Barker's (1981) work in the UK and Taguieff's (1990) work in France, but argues against the relevance of racism. Grillo, Stolcke, Schinkel and others suggest that an analysis of migrants' exclusion and oppression can do without the concept of racism, but do not imply the superficiality CR scholars attribute to US-based ethnicity theories.

In brief, how are we to understand current discourses that justify migrants' oppression and exclusion in Europe? Do they represent cultural racism assuming some degree of continuity and commonality with previous forms of racism, especially in producing 'the same old acts' of oppression and exclusion, connecting culture-based justifications with biology-based justifications, or racializing migrants attributing a race-like status to them?

Or has the concept of racism, cultural or otherwise, become redundant to understand contemporary migrant-hostile discourses in Europe? Are culture-based justifications of migrant-hostility sufficiently conceptualized by the concepts of cultural essentialism and fundamentalism that frame migrants as cultural subjects, bearers of cultural characteristics that are assumedly incommensurable, incompatible or contradictory to assumed cultural traits of non-migrant citizens?

Methods I

Our study focuses on the Netherlands and has two parts. The first part constitutes an analysis of the current discourse on migrants and migration, particularly on Muslim migrants and Islam, in Dutch politics and media. Next to other relevant studies of this discourse, we analysed relevant political and media texts since the 1980s: key statements by politicians, governmental Acts, policy papers, reports of parliamentary debates, the films *Submission* and *Fitna*, television interviews, public speeches, newspaper articles and websites. We applied indexical field analysis (Blommaert, 2005) and were basically interested in the indexicality of the terms used in these texts to refer to migrants (allochthones, minorities, migrants, Muslims and so on), i.e. the central meanings attached to these terms, the kind of (policy) practices proposed and the kinds of justification for these practices.

Second, we studied how this discourse works out in the lived experiences of Dutch Moroccan Muslims in work settings (see Methods 2 below). We favoured a multi-level approach to discourse analysis, not only looking at the indexical meanings and practices within the political and media texts, but also at how they are received and reworked and the kind of practices they trigger in society as they 'travel' through time (chrono) and space (tope) of social organization (Silverstein, 2005) and become entextualized (Blommaert, 2005) in Dutch work settings. Our study is about the nature and impact of this migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch media and politics; it is not an encompassing study of how Dutch majority members think about (Muslim) migrants.

Migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch politics and media

Since the turn of the century, there has been a high degree of consensus in texts and statements by the government, political parties and leading voices (e.g. Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders) on migrants in general and Muslim migrants in particular (cf. Duyvendak, 2011). Relevant discussions in parliament and media are often quite aggressive and sometimes insulting; contrasting with the composed tone of governmental Acts. In substance, however, almost all agree that the country should be closed as much as possible to migrants and that residing migrants should be forced to assimilate into Dutch culture and society. Dissident reports, like that of the scientific council for government policy (WRR, 2007), have little impact.

This consensus is based on the assumption of cultural incompatibility between migrants and Dutch society, which justifies exclusion. The *Vreemdelingenwet* (Aliens Act) of 2000 and its subsequent refinements aim at closing the country to asylum seekers as much as possible. The number of asylum applications significantly dropped from

52,600 in 1997 to 9700 in 2007, to rise again to 17,190 in 2013 (www.cbs.nl; *NRC Handelsblad*, 4/5 April 2014). Fewer than half of the applications are eventually granted. Any increase in deportations of rejected asylum seekers is welcomed by the minister in charge.

In 2012, the government instructed the police to proactively arrest a target of 4800 foreigners: foreign criminals, foreigners who cause 'inconvenience' and those without a legal permit to stay (Minister voor Immigratie, Integratie en Asiel, Minister van Veiligheid en Justitie en de Voorzitter van de Raad van Korpschefs, 2012). This boils down to illegal ethnic profiling in police surveillance (Amnesty International, 2013). In 2010, 6100 foreigners were detained for an average of 76 days without trial or charge (De Nationale Ombudsman, 2012), in 2013 their numbers dropped to 3670 (*NRC Handelsblad*, 4/5 April 2014). Asylum seekers are detained in prisons that undermine their health (*Zembla*, 20 January 2012); some are driven to suicide (IVJ, 2013). Most international human rights institutions have denounced the Dutch government for systematically violating migrants' human rights.²

The *Wet Inburgering Nieuwkomers* (Civic Integration Newcomers Act) of 1998 and its successors oblige non-western newcomers to take a 12-month integration course, i.e. to assimilate into Dutch culture (Penninx, 2006; Vasta, 2007) and to adopt its language, rituals and key values (Ministerie van VROM, 2007a, 2007b). The government aims to make migrants' stay and their entitlement to social benefits dependent on whether they pass these exams, speak the right language (Dutch) and wear the right clothes (no burkas or veils). This implies a culturist hierarchization of citizenship into first and second class citizenship and a violation of the constitutional principle of equality before the law (Schinkel and Van Houdt, 2010; Siebers, 2009b).

Civic integration programmes do not improve migrants' participation in society (Van Oers, 2013), non-western migrants continue to hold subordinated positions in the labour market (Huijnk et al., 2014; Siebers, 2009a), now also including Eastern European workers. The Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, Lodewijk Asscher, recurrently portrays the latter as people causing problems to Dutch society, whereas in fact they suffer from labour exploitation and poor housing conditions, mainly caused by the lack of law enforcement by the Dutch government. Such inversions, turning victims into perpetrators and vice versa, recurrently appear in Dutch debates on migrants and migration.

In short, Dutch policies focus both on the exclusion of as many (non-western) migrants as possible from Dutch territory and on oppression, i.e. turning resident migrants into second class citizens, irrespective of having a Dutch passport. Apart from the international context (terrorist attacks), several domestic factors help to understand the rise of migrant-hostility as the corollary of the obsession with belongingness (Geschiere, 2009) in Dutch political and media discourse since 2000: culturalization, mainstreaming, de-linking body and culture, and anti-racism.

Culturalization

Since the 1980s, migrants have been defined both in institutional and in cultural terms. Those migrants who lag behind in societal participation – e.g. showing relatively high unemployment rates – and are considered to have a non-western cultural background

are coined 'ethnic minorities' and 'allochthones', and become the object of government policies.

Migrants have been discursively framed in cultural-essentialist terms (Grillo, 2003; cf. Geschiere, 2009), i.e. as cultural subjects who derive their identities from their cultural community membership. Such cultural essentialism had its roots in pillarized Dutch society, which inspired the notion of multiculturalism from the 1980s onwards. At first, the government invested in education to support migrants' 'ethnic-cultural identities' (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken, 1983) – seen as beneficial to their participation in society (Duyvendak et al., 2005) – and took initiatives to improve migrants' position in society, like a soft affirmative action legislation.

Right-wing liberal party (VVD) leader Frits Bolkestein, and other leading voices after the turn of the century, reframed migrants from those who *have* problems in society to those who *cause* problems to society and from those who have a *different* culture that may support them to solve their problems to those who have an *incompatible* culture (cf. Duyvendak and Scholten, 2012; Ghorashi, 2010; Prins, 2010). Their incompatible cultural characteristics, especially Islam, are now seen as fomenting problems for society, including for themselves, particularly involvement in crime, terrorism and female oppression (Duyvendak et al., 2005; Roggeband and Verloo, 2007).

Such overt calls and policies to close Dutch territory to those with 'incompatible cultural traits' are new since 2000. However, we argue that cultural fundamentalism's success is partly due to the fact that it was able to build upon previous culturalization and cultural essentialization (Grillo, 2003) of migrants in Dutch multicultural policies in the 1980s (see Hurenkamp et al., 2012; Verkuyten et al., 1995). Both ingredients of cultural fundamentalism – the culturalization or cultural essentialization of migrants and framing them as people with societal problems – were already there since the 1980s, ready to be rearticulated into cultural fundamentalism after making migrants' cultures responsible for societal problems. Thus, multiculturalism in the 1980s, while aiming to promote tolerance, laid the groundwork for cultural fundamentalism since 2000.³

Mainstreaming

Van Houdt et al. (2011) show how cultural fundamentalism managed to connect to basic discourses of mainstream Dutch politics, i.e. neoliberalism and Christian-democratic communitarianism, in constructing the notion of neoliberal communitarian citizenship. Neoliberal communitarian citizenship takes from neoliberalism the notion of individual achievement, citizenship becomes something one must earn. It takes from communitarianism the idea that individuals need to become part of and accepted by the community through adopting its norms and values. Thus, civic integration programmes can be imposed upon migrants as a prerequisite for citizenship.

Cultural fundamentalism also draws on progressive liberal and social-democratic values like tolerance, equal rights for homosexuals, sexual freedom and gender equality (cf. Duyvendak, 2011). By means of a remarkable cultural-essentialist inversion, leading voices like Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders have qualified these progressive values as typically Dutch, as part of the national identity of Dutchness (Van Reekum and Duyvendak, 2012), and depicted especially Muslim migrants as adhering

to a religion or ideology that opposes these values. Upholding progressive values, they justify intolerance towards Muslims because Muslims are portrayed as enemies of tolerance.

Stolcke (1995) argues that cultural fundamentalism's incorporation into a liberal and democratic framework of equality before the law is facilitated because it abstains from notions of superiority or hierarchy. Cultures are equal but incompatible, so on 'our' territory there is no place for other cultures. Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Theo van Gogh called Islam a 'backward' religion or ideology, suggesting hierarchy and superiority, but defended themselves by claiming the egalitarian right of freedom of speech that applies to all citizens. In policy documents, any notion of cultural superiority is absent. De facto, however, these voices and policies relegate migrants to second class citizens who do not fully comply with Dutch cultural standards.

De-linking body and culture

A third explanation of cultural fundamentalism's success stems from the distinction that both leading voices and government policies make between the persons/bodies of migrants and their cultures/identities. Geert Wilders reiterates that he is not against Muslims, while criticizing Islam as an aggressive ideology. He calls upon Muslims to shake off Islam after which they are welcome in Dutch society (Wilders, 2012). According to civic integration programmes, migrants are admitted to Dutch society once assimilated into Dutch culture.

In theory, this distinction allows for boundary crossing: moving from migrant 'Others' to Dutch citizens. It allows the Dutch government to adopt a humanitarian profile, helping migrants to adopt the cultural qualities needed for societal participation. Especially the linguistic argument, the necessity to learn Dutch, seems plausible. However, the demand for such boundary crossing was created by culturalizing migrants in the first place. Without cultural Othering, there is no need for cultural boundary crossing whatsoever. The notion of cultural boundary crossing legitimizes the idea of cultural boundaries. Again, it means de forma helping migrants to become part of society, while de facto blocking their full citizenship (see Duyvendak, 2011, on the thickening of Dutch identity widening the 'cultural gap' migrants are supposed to bridge).

Anti-racism

We argue, moreover, that migrant-hostility 'managed' to become dominant in Dutch politics and media exactly because it has no affinity whatsoever to racism that infers notions of biological or genetic hierarchy. There are no traces of such notions in policy documents or in statements by leading voices in media and politics. That puts these documents and voices in an altogether different category than far-right political parties in the past that did retain such notions and stayed very marginal (Van der Valk, 2003).

When contextualizing racism in the Netherlands, we have to acknowledge the fact that it was among those countries with the highest 'success rates' of Nazi persecution of (predominantly) Jews, supported by an efficient Dutch bureaucracy. For decades, the Holocaust and collaboration with the Germans was the most prominent topic in Dutch

literature. Any hint of collaboration with this persecution was sufficient to excommunicate anyone from public life. This trauma has produced a strong association of the terms race and racism with Nazism and anti-Semitism, based on notions of biological and genetic superiority. Talk about 'race relations' in Dutch society or even government Acts using such a term, like in the UK, would have been inconceivable in the Netherlands since it would have justified Nazi terminology (cf. Miles, 1993).

This strong rejection of race and racism (cf. Verkuyten et al., 1995), closely connected to biology-based anti-Semitism, has permeated Dutch public and political discourse and the legal system. However, this rejection has made this discourse and legal system ill-equipped to counter oppression and exclusion that are not based on justifications of biological hierarchy but exclusively on grounds of assumed cultural incompatibility. Such justifications elude Dutch anti-racism. Any comparison between statements by voices like Geert Wilders and Nazi practices is considered to be inappropriate and the court case against him in 2011 had little chance of producing a conviction since even the prosecutor pleaded for not guilty. The association of oppression and exclusion of particular groups with racism and of racism with biology-based justifications of anti-Semitism have produced a discursive and legal constellation that makes it very difficult to counter or fight oppression and exclusion of migrants that are not justified by reference to biological hierarchy.

In short, the current migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch media and politics justifies oppression and exclusion of migrants, but the kind of justification matters very much. The fact that the justification in this discourse contains no notions of biology-based hierarchy and denies such notions (de-linking body and culture assumes cultural differences but bodily or biological sameness) has been crucial for the success of this discourse since it turned Dutch anti-racism ineffective, opened the door for the mainstreaming of this discourse and allowed it to build upon progressive and tolerant notions embedded in previous multiculturalism. Cultural fundamentalism has become dominant exactly because it is something else than racism, as racism is understood in the Netherlands.

Methods 2

To explore the impact of this migrant-hostile discourse on lived experiences of migrants in Dutch society (cf. Siebers, 2010), we conducted 21 semi-structured, face-to-face and open-ended interviews with 23 respondents in 2011. We selected respondents with a Moroccan and Muslim background since they are prime objects of Dutch debates in politics and media. Currently, 21% of the Dutch population have a first or second generation migration background, 2.2% of them have a Moroccan background (Statline.cbs.nl). Five per cent of the Dutch population are Muslim migrants (Maliepaard and Gijsberts, 2012). We applied snowball sampling on the basis of some initial key-contacts. The sample is described in Table 1.

The mean age of the respondents was 35.6 years, range 24–55. Probably due to snowball sampling, women and highly educated respondents are overrepresented in our sample, but we argue that our interview data are indicative of a larger pattern in the experiences of Dutch Moroccan Muslims.

Table 1. Sample characteristics of interviewees.

	Gender	Educational level	Generation
Individual Interviews	Men 9	Academic 6	First 11
	Women 11	Higher vocational 10	Second 9
		Lower vocational 3	
		No education 1	
Group Interview	Men 0	Academic 1	First 2
	Women 3	Higher vocational 1	Second 1
		Lower vocational 1	

We asked our respondents about how they experienced the mediatized discourse in Dutch politics on migrants, more particularly on Moroccan Muslim migrants. We were interested in our respondents' lived experiences in specific social conditions, in this case work settings, rather than their general and abstract opinions and evaluations. Therefore, we primarily asked about their lived experiences of discussions and interactions with colleagues triggered by what they saw on television or read in the newspapers about Islam and Moroccans. Their answers are not factual reports of such events, since these events were interpreted by our respondents when they took place and, again, during the interview. However, we asked them to stay as close as possible to their lived experiences in these work settings themselves. We asked them what actually happened and what they thought and felt in these events.

Therefore, we argue that our data are fairly reliable regarding our respondents' lived experiences (Ezzy, 1998), i.e. cognitively and emotionally reworked events in work settings triggered by the discourse in Dutch politics and media on Moroccan Muslim migrants. These experiences are shaped by these events themselves and by our respondents' direct reception of mediatized statements by politicians, for example by watching television. For data analysis, we used Miles and Huberman's (1994) steps of data reduction (selective, open and axial coding), data display and drawing conclusions, using the interview topics as initial codes.

Migrants with a Moroccan background have 46% net labour market participation compared to 70% of the non-migrant population and 20% of the Moroccan labour force is unemployed compared to 5% of the non-migrant labour force (Huijnk et al., 2014). Such a position of weakness fuels feelings of uncertainty among migrant employees (Siebers, 2009c) that will have amplified their fear and insecurity resulting from the impact of the aforementioned discourse.

The impact of the migrant-hostile discourse in Dutch politics and media

Our respondents hardly used the term race to tell us what their colleagues told them in work settings, to explain how they themselves made sense of these colleagues' statements or how they understood statements by politicians. We did not pose questions using this term nor did respondents themselves bring it up.

Respondents occasionally told us about colleagues and the media using words that infer physical differences, like 'coloured' and 'blacks', but without implying any negative connotations of biological traits. Instead, these terms were used as ethnic markers, i.e. as signifiers that denote assumed cultural differences. For example, a woman respondent (age 33, first generation) stated: 'You still are a black person, black hair' to point out her visibility as a woman with a Moroccan background that infers cultural differences from non-migrants. In other words, visibility may entail ethnic markers that suggest cultural differences, not necessarily biological differences (cf. Balibar, 1991a; Skinner, 2006).

Strong racial language was only used by two respondents in reference to migrant colleagues: one was criticized by a fellow migrant on her Islamic religion; another was told by a migrant colleague that 'her people' murdered Theo van Gogh. Both felt badly enough about being stigmatized by Dutch media and politics, and became especially angry when similar criticism even came from fellow migrants. The term racism popped up only twice with one respondent stating that it does not apply and another using it once to criticize negative views about her culture.

Cultural essentialism in media and politics ...

The almost complete absence of references to race and racism in our respondents' accounts of their lived experiences contrasts with the abundance of evidence of cultural essentialism in almost all our respondents' accounts. This holds true for their direct experiences of media coverage and politicians' statements about Islam and Moroccans and for their experiences of interactions with colleagues triggered by this coverage and these statements.

Seventeen respondents indicated that the media and politics portray Muslims and Moroccans as homogeneous communities that are responsible for negative things like crime, terrorism and female oppression. Some argue that the media and politicians pick out Muslims and Moroccans to exemplify these negative things and that they only mention the background of perpetrators of crimes in the case of migrants, not in the case of non-migrants. Others said that some Muslims and Moroccans are indeed involved in these negative acts but that politicians and the media take these few cases as exemplary for the whole community.

Moreover, these 17 respondents feel the media and politics address them personally as a member of these communities and hold them responsible for crime, terrorism and female oppression, allegedly committed by 'fellow' Moroccans or Muslims. They respond saying that they are not responsible for what someone else has done. They feel portrayed as individuals who derive their identity from their community membership and who reproduce the assumed negative traits of that community (see Grillo, 2003, on cultural essentialism).

For example, five respondents reacted in an almost identical way to reported events of violence in the media (the murders of Pim Fortuyn on 6 May 2002 and Theo van Gogh on 2 November 2004; when someone drove his car into a crowd welcoming the royal family and killed eight people on Queen's Day 30 April 2009; or the killing of six people in a shopping centre on 9 April 2011): 'Oh, Allah, please do not let it be a Moroccan' (woman, age 44, first generation). Others substituted 'Moroccan' for 'Muslim'. These respondents feared having to face violence themselves as a supposed fellow member of

the same community as the perpetrator in case s/he turns out to be a Muslim or Moroccan. Three respondents explicitly stated that Geert Wilders and the government spread hate and fear in society.

... and in comments by colleagues

Media coverage and politicians' statements trigger colleagues to make comments (remarks, questions and jokes) at work about their background and religion, as reported by 21 respondents. Some face such comments on a daily basis, others on rare occasions (e.g. during Ramadan). Some experience them as harmless, others complained about colleagues who repeatedly pose the same questions with a disapproving undertone.

Cultural essentialism and anxiety are experienced by 17 respondents who face colleagues' comments reproducing the negative connotations that media and politicians attribute to the Moroccan or Muslim community. Colleagues treat these respondents as members of the Muslim or Moroccan community and make comments to them referring to these negative connotations, i.e. crime, terrorism and women's oppression (the headscarf, being married off and physical violence committed by Muslim men). For example, a female, first generation, 38-year-old respondent was told a 'joke' by a colleague at an after-work party: 'Ha, are you allowed off the chain?' Most respondents do not take such jokes as innocent. A 35-year-old woman and second generation respondent felt 'traces of hate' in those jokes.

One woman respondent (age 38, first generation) told us that colleagues recurrently hold her responsible for terrorism:

I am constantly being asked [by colleagues]: 'Why are those Moroccans doing that? ... Why do they place bombs?' ... Well, I don't know. I cannot explain that. Those people [colleagues] thought that was very strange: 'Yes, but you are a Muslim as well, aren't you?'

According to our respondents, the same negative connotations that media and politicians attribute to Muslims and Moroccans instigate comments from their colleagues that reflect the same cultural essentialism that characterizes the discourse in media and politics. Four respondents said that they believe that their colleagues have no knowledge and experience with these topics directly and thus depend on media coverage and statements by politicians about these issues. In the words of a 41-year-old woman and first generation respondent, talking about colleagues' aggressive remarks to her: '[It] was really politics, eh?! It was just Wilders! ... It was Wilders talking!'

Geert Wilders' PVV party particularly pops up in collegial interactions in election times. Four respondents experienced colleagues' votes for the PVV as an act of aggression towards them. As a woman, 35-year-old, second generation respondent said:

When someone proclaims to have voted PVV ... this affects me. ... So, what I believe, my parents, and my descent, that's something you want to see eliminated.

Cultural fundamentalism and its consequences

The cultural-fundamentalist turn in the discourses in media and politics on migrants since 2000 corresponds with a shift in the experiences of our respondents. Four of them

stated that it is no longer possible to talk about their beliefs and backgrounds in harmony like they could before. Comments have become 'harder', 'rougher', 'less friendly', 'more extreme'.

Respondents feel that their colleagues adopt from the media and politicians the connotations they attribute to Moroccans and Islam (i.e. crime, terrorism and women's oppression) as well as notions of their incompatibility with Dutch norms and values. These connotations are perceived as part of an homogenizing idea of Islam and Moroccan culture and therefore represent the overall incompatibility of Islam and Moroccan backgrounds with what is supposed to be Dutch culture. Twelve respondents experienced colleagues calling on them to cross the cultural boundary by abandoning their culture or religion, for example to learn the Dutch language, to take off their headscarf, to eat pork, to drink coffee at Ramadan or to renounce their religion. Our respondents distrust such suggestions. Regarding the civic integration programmes a second generation, male respondent (age 25) asked in a rhetorical way: 'What is actually the aim of this civic integration exam? Does it want to promote integration or to limit immigration?'

Our respondents feel that their intentions to make their own personal choices and meaning-making in a non-essentialist way, selectively drawing on Islam and Moroccan culture *and* on Dutch cultural resources, are not recognized, neither by Dutch politics nor by their colleagues (cf. Ketner et al., 2004; Siebers, 2009c). Five respondents said they try to answer the questions and remarks made by colleagues; another nine respondents told us they had stopped doing so because they are unable to convince their colleagues. One respondent said she felt like a Doña Quixote fighting windmills when trying to convince her colleagues. Ten respondents told us that sometimes they are called exceptions by their colleagues: 'But you are different'. Exceptions that apparently confirm the rule.

Respondents brought up both emotional and social consequences of oppression and exclusion. Nine of them expressed these in strong emotional terms like being hurt, anger, fear, frustration and pain resulting from these interactions with colleagues. Several respondents said they felt that their right to stay in the country was questioned. One respondent no longer dared to actively participate in the team after a colleague had proclaimed that he was voting for the PVV. Some respondents had left their previous jobs because of colleagues' comments. One respondent said that she would not apply for a management job because she feared lack of acceptance due to her headscarf. Another respondent spoke about a colleague who had said about Moroccans: 'I don't mind if they were shot'.

Discussion and conclusions

When writing about our findings, we recognize the same feelings of condemnation as when CR scholars write about cultural racism (see Wacquant, 1997). Our respondents' experiences fit into Balibar's (1991b) concepts of exclusion and oppression, but do they qualify as 'the same old acts' that Balibar refers to in the starting quote of our article? A closer look at the particularities of these experiences within the overall categories of exclusion and oppression reveals that these experiences have no precedent in Dutch history. The overlap between the categories of people that have to endure current exclusion and oppression and those who suffered from Dutch colonial racism or from the Holocaust is very limited. Moreover, space does not allow a detailed elaboration on this point, but

the particular acts of exclusion and oppression our respondents experience are not the same as those experienced by Dutch colonial subjects in the Dutch East Indies. They are not the same either as those experienced by the slaves who were transported by Dutch traders to the new world or those the Jews suffered from during Nazi occupation. The victims of colonial racism, anti-Semitism and our respondents share experiences of oppression and exclusion, but that does not make these experiences the same. Differences in historical particularities cannot be overlooked.

Differences in the kind of justifications for these acts of oppression and exclusion matter as well. The rise of current migrant-hostility in Dutch politics and media, and therefore its impact on our respondents, has been made possible exactly because it is exclusively justified in terms of cultural incompatibilities and on a denial of notions of biological hierarchy. This specific kind of justification has been crucial to enable the main factors that explain this rise: continuity with previous multiculturalism, intertextuality with dominant political discourses, de-linking body and culture, and the ineffectiveness of anti-racism. For the 'success' of culture-based oppression and exclusion, continuities with previous multiculturalism have been more important than continuities with colonial racism and anti-Semitism.

Neither in policy documents and statements by leading politicians nor in the ways our respondents talked about their interactions with colleagues are there references to biological or genetic hierarchy that would justify migrants' oppression and exclusion. CR scholars' claim of articulation of culture-based and biology-based arguments does not apply because of the total absence of the latter. They might argue in support of the racism-disguised-as-culture argument that in the Netherlands, apparently, biology-based racism has good reasons to disguise its real nature. However, we find that argument difficult to accept since there is no evidence whatsoever for the presence of such deep-rooted racism hidden below or behind the cultural argumentation based on which migrants are excluded. The absence of any evidence of biology-based racism cannot serve as a confirmation of its presence.

We found that the terms cultural essentialism (Grillo, 2003) and cultural fundamentalism (Stolcke, 1995) serve perfectly well to understand and typify both the exclusively culture-based justifications in politics and media, and the dynamics of oppression and exclusion our respondents suffer from. We do not see that terms like racialization and racism-without-race (Miles, 1993) or the search for parallels with Dutch colonial racism or anti-Semitism have anything substantial to contribute to our understanding of the Dutch discourse itself or of its impact upon our respondents.

In short, we argue that the term cultural racism is not appropriate to apply to our Dutch data as it assumes similarity in acts of exclusion and oppression with colonial racism and anti-Semitism, tends to underestimate the fundamental importance of different justifications and assumes connectedness between biology-based and culture-based justifications. Where it no longer assumes such connectedness (Miles, 1993), the concept becomes redundant since there are other concepts that are better able to capture the discourse and related acts of exclusion and oppression and can do without the noun racism.

Our study shows that understandings of the concept of racism cannot simply be transposed from one country to another without a critical contextualization of the concept (see Wacquant, 1997). Miles (1993: 19–20) argues that for reasons of historical particularities,

the concept of 'race' cannot be transplanted from the UK to countries like the Netherlands; we argue that the same holds true for his concepts of racism and racialization as well. However, by rejecting the applicability of the concept of (cultural) racism to the Dutch discourse in media and politics and its impact on our respondents we do not play down the oppressive, exclusionary and aggressive characteristics of this discourse and its impact. Its consequences may turn out to be just as violent and aggressive as racism, but that does not make it ontologically the same as racism.

Coming back to Balibar, whose quote we started our discussion with, his essays published in 1991 included remarkable predictions of a number of developments that were to occur in the Netherlands only a little more than a decade later, including the justification of migrants' exclusion and oppression based on claims of cultural incompatibility, the appropriation of the progressive anti-racist multicultural discourse by this justification, its drawing on 'crowd psychology' and claims of 'realism' (cf. Prins and Slijper, 2002), and its de forma abstention from notions of hierarchy while constructing the idea of cultural handicaps that obliges migrants to assimilate (Balibar, 1991a: 23). At the end of his first essay (1991a), though, he argued that the disjunctures between current (culture-based) neo-racism and former (more biology-based) variants of racism might lead to a 'post-racism', breaking out of the conceptual boundaries of racism. We argue also that this prediction has materialized. A conceptualization of the current culture-based discourse of exclusion and oppression of migrants in the Netherlands with sufficient eye for historicity and details had better leave the concept of racism behind. We hope our findings will stimulate further debate about the nature of migrant-hostile discourses in other parts of Europe and beyond.

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Notes

1. We use the term migrants to refer to those who themselves or whose parents came to the Netherlands – regardless of their nationality, whether they came as asylum seekers, labour migrants or via family reunification.
2. These include European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2013) *ECRI-Rapport over Nederland*. Strasbourg: ECRI-Secretariat; Human Rights Watch (2003) *Fleeting Refuge: The Triumph of Efficiency Over Protection in Dutch Asylum Policy*. Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch; Human Rights Watch (2008) *The Netherlands: Discrimination in the Name of Integration: Migrants' Rights under the Integration Abroad Act*. Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch; The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (2006) Resolution 1483 (2006) Policy of return for failed asylum seekers in the Netherlands; at: www.semantic-pace.net/default.aspx?search=Y2F0ZWdvcnlf3RyX2VuOiJBZG9wdGVkIHRleHQi.

3. We argue that there are both continuities and discontinuities in policies and discourse since the 1980s. On the one hand, claims by writers like Sniderman and Hagedoorn (2007) that current conflicts regarding migrants are produced by a continuation of earlier multicultural policies are incorrect. They simply miss the important shift towards monoculturalism since the turn of the century, and Duyvendak and Scholten (2012) demonstrate that multiculturalism had already lost much of its relevance in institutional terms and for concrete policies by the 1990s (cf. Hurenkamp et al., 2012). On the other hand, that does not ignore the continuity of cultural-essentialist framing of migrants in political and media discourse since the 1980s as 'bearers' of different norms and values. This framing provided the groundwork for the shift towards monoculturalism since 2000.

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Résumé

Comme ailleurs en Europe, un discours hostile aux immigrants et aux musulmans en particulier se développe dans la politique et les médias néerlandais. Pouvons-nous considérer ce discours hostile envers les immigrants aux Pays-Bas comme une forme de racisme, c'est-à-dire un racisme culturel ? Nous avons étudié ce discours (textes des politiques et des médias néerlandais) et son impact sur les expériences vécues par les musulmans marocains des Pays-Bas dans leurs lieux de travail (21 entretiens). Nous avons trouvé peu d'éléments attestant l'existence d'un racisme culturel dans sa dimension hiérarchique biologique et génétique, ce concept devenant superflu quand il abandonne ces notions. D'autres concepts pertinents comme l'essentialisme culturel et le fondamentalisme culturel paraissent suffisants pour analyser ce discours et son impact sur les expériences vécues par les musulmans marocains. Le succès du fondamentalisme culturel s'explique par son appartenance à une catégorie distincte du racisme.

Mots-clés

Discrimination, immigrants, racisme, racisme culturel, essentialisme culturel, fondamentalisme culturel, exclusion, culturalisme, Pays-Bas, musulmans

Resumen

Al igual que en otros lugares de Europa, un discurso que hostil a los inmigrantes en general y a los musulmanes, en particular, ha surgido en la política y en los medios de comunicación holandeses. ¿Podemos entender este discurso holandés hostil a los migrante como una especie de racismo, es decir, un racismo cultural? Estudiamos este discurso (textos políticos y medios de comunicación holandeses) y su impacto en las experiencias vividas por los musulmanes holando-marroquíes en entornos de trabajo (21 entrevistas). Encontramos poca evidencia del concepto de racismo cultural, siempre y cuando se mantengan las nociones de jerarquía biológica o genética, mientras que se hace redundante una vez que abandonan tales nociones. Conceptos alternativos como esencialismo cultural y fundamentalismo cultural son suficientes para entender este discurso, así como su impacto en las experiencias vividas por los musulmanes marroquíes. El concepto de fundamentalismo cultural se ha mostrado exitoso, ya que pertenece a una categoría diferente que el racismo.

Palabras clave

Discriminación, migrantes, racismo, racismo cultural, esencialismo cultural, fundamentalismo cultural, exclusión, culturalismo, Países Bajos, musulmanes