

Riots of the Other: An analysis of societal reactions to contemporary riots in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in the Netherlands

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Abstract

In this article I argue that there has been a change in the dynamics of riots in the Netherlands from the escalated political protests of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s to public disturbances in disadvantaged neighbourhoods that lack a clearly articulated political component in the last two decades. This article examines the societal reactions such recent ‘riots’ evoke and the means by which the demarcated autonomous and exogenous groups are designated as ‘the rioters’ through a process of ‘Othering’. It examines the 2007 ‘Slotervaart riot’ as an exemplary case of such recent ‘riots’ in the Netherlands. It concludes that placing the focus on demarcated groups of *Others* during recent ‘riots’ in the Netherlands allowed broader social problems to be placed outside the ‘normal’ or ‘pure’ societal body.

Keywords

Ethnicity, folk devils, Othering, Moroccan youngsters, riots, The Netherlands

Introduction

All societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to collective disturbances of public order that are labelled as ‘riots’.¹ Such socially complex phenomena always leave us with many unanswered questions, such as: what exactly happened, who were the participants, how did ‘society’ react, and what is the historical specificity of such an outbreak? This article addresses these questions and aims to contribute to the public and

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social scientific debates on the nature and importance of these urban events that have been reignited in the past decade. This will be done by an analysis of riots in the Netherlands in the last five decades and of one exemplary case of a recent riot known as the ‘Slotervaart riots’ of 2007. The focus of this article is thus on collective disturbances of public order in a Dutch context – with a special light on the societal reactions such riots evoke – that highlight the struggle between dominant and subordinate classes and/or cultures, as well as the labelling processes involved.

Analytical approach

The data used in this article are derived from a review of secondary material on riots in the Netherlands in the last five decades and from an ongoing study into societal reactions to Moroccan Dutch youngsters in the Netherlands, consisting of a critical analysis of two riots in which these ethnic youngsters played a prominent role, namely the 2007 ‘Slotervaart riots’ and 2010 ‘Culemborg riots’, and of a riot in which these youngsters did not play any role,² namely the 2007 ‘Ondiep riots’. These three riots, and the societal reactions they evoked, have been examined using Cohen’s (2002) classic moral panic theory, which offers a number of sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1954) for understanding societal reactions to social deviance, including both ‘folk devils’ (Cohen, 2002) and the process of ‘Othering’ (Young, 2007). Following Altheide’s method of qualitative document analysis (Altheide and Schneider, 2013), these sensitizing concepts have been translated into protocol questions and are used as a focus in the analysis of the media discourse. This protocol is a way to ask questions of the documents, in order to capture ‘definitions, meanings, processes and types’ in the media discourses following these riots (Altheide and Schneider, 2013: 44–5). The answers to these protocol questions found in the media discourse were then coded in Atlas.ti, using codes comprising a prefix (an abbreviated precode) referring to the sensitizing concept (the question) and an ‘open code’ derived from the quotation (the answer). Thereafter, the coded data were compared, categorized and conceptualized (Hennink et al., 2011) in *Network Views*. The media discourse is chosen because it is one of the most important arenas of public discourse and is a window on societal reactions in a society. It consists of newspaper articles in Dutch newspapers *Telegraaf* (TG), *De Volkskrant* (VK) and *Metro* (ME), and television news programmes NOVA (NO), EenVandaag (EV) and Pauw & Witteman (PW), published and broadcast in the three months following the triggering event.³

This article is divided into two parts. First, a change in the dynamics of riots in the Netherlands in the last five decades is delineated, and, second, the 2007 Slotervaart riot is discussed as an exemplary case of a recent riot in which these changes are reflected best.

From ‘political’ riots to ‘social’ riots of the Other

A recent history of riots in the Netherlands

During the secularization and cultural and sexual revolutions of the 1960s, social movements, action groups and countercultures, mainly consisting of students, squatters and

left radicals, flourished in the Netherlands. Their resistance manifested itself in protests, provocations and confrontations in public spaces directed at the established order (Bouabid et al., 2010: 23–5; COT, 2002: 14–20). Some of these politically motivated demonstrations escalated into riots against the police. On 10 March 1966, a protest by a left radical anti-authoritarian social movement called Provo, against the engagement of Princess Beatrix to ‘ex-Wehrmacht soldier’ Claus von Amsberg, escalated into riots against the police. Three months later, a protest by unorganized construction workers against vacation salary cuts, supported by Provo and other left radical movements, escalated into riots against the police and a newspaper headquarters (COT, 2002: 17–19; Duivenvoorden, 2005: 20–4; Fijnaut, 2007: 150–2). Three years later, students’ protests against the Board of the University of Amsterdam, demanding democratization and consisting of demonstrations and the occupation of a part of the university, ended with a significant confrontation between students and the police (Bervoets, 2011: 343–6).

These escalated protests of the turbulent 1960s proved to be the prelude to more political riots in the two following decades, mainly involving squatters and members of environmental and anti-nuclear movements. The squatters’ movement, which originated in the 1960s and gained more and more influence in the 1970s and 1980s (Van Gemert et al., 2009: 17–22), was mainly involved in riots that broke out during evictions, such as in the 1974–5 ‘Nieuwmarkt riots’ in Amsterdam (Bervoets, 2011), the 1981 ‘Pierson riots’ in Nijmegen and the 1990 ‘WNC riots’ in Groningen (Van der Varst, 2011). But the climax of these ‘squatters’ riots’ was during the coronation of Princess Beatrix in 1980. In these latter, so-called ‘coronation riots’, squatters clashed with the police in several places in the Amsterdam city centre under the motto ‘no houses, no coronation’ (Duivenvoorden, 2005). The other major riots in the 1970–90 era, mainly involving the environmental and anti-nuclear movements, were preceded by protests against or blockades of nuclear power plants, such as in Almelo (1978), in Borssele (1980 and 1987) and in Dodewaard (1981), or against nuclear weapons, such as the blockades of ammunition trains in 1982 and the Woensdrecht military airbase in 1986 (Bezuyen et al., 1999).

From the 1990s onwards, the readiness to take action appeared to decline among Dutch people (Bezuyen et al., 1999: 373–4; Bouabid et al., 2010: 26–7), and the remaining protest movements and other left activists resorted more and more to legal resistance, or were progressively absorbed into the political system (COT, 2002: 26–33). Concurrently, the dynamics of riots changed from escalated politically or ideologically motivated protests, evictions, blockades and other forms of resistance to increasingly ‘apolitical’ and isolated incidents triggering riots lacking such clearly articulated political components (COT, 2002: 33–4). These ‘social’ riots of the last two decades largely took place in urban neighbourhoods, in contrast to the symbolic places where the earlier political protests were held, such as the universities, squats and power plants. In addition, they tended to be triggered by isolated incidents, for example a police shooting of a resident (see the Graafsewijk 2000, Ondiep 2007 and Slotervaart 2007 riots) or common New Year’s Eve disturbances (see the Oosterparkwijk 1998 and Terweijde 2010 riots). The urban neighbourhoods that served as stages for these riots are largely disadvantaged neighbourhoods that harbour an accumulation of social problems (for example, poverty, unemployment, poor education and housing, nuisance and crime), a general feeling of injustice and marginalization among the residents, tensions with the police and other

public authorities, and a neighbourhood stigma (COT, 1998, 2000; De Haan et al., 1998; Terpstra and Easton, 2013: 13–16; Van Dam, 2011; Van den Brink and Bruinsma, 2010; Van Stokkom et al., 2011: 8–11).

Otherring the rioters

With this lack of clearly articulated motives in these contemporary social riots, it is more difficult for the authorities, the politicians, the media, scientists and the general public to determine who these rioters are and what their motives are. Simultaneously, despite this lack of clarity or precisely because of this obscurity, ‘folk devils’ (often the usual suspects) are yet simplistically designated in the societal reactions as the rioters, who are then demarcated as exogenous groups and often differentiated from the neighbourhood residents as autonomous groups. For example, whereas in the Oosterparkwijk, Slotervaart (2007) and Terweijde riots, the rioters were claimed to be groups of ‘criminal youngsters’ who it was suggested had been terrorizing ‘the neighbourhood residents’ long before the riots, in the Graafsewijk (2000 and 2005) and Ondiep riots, thrill-seeking ‘football hooligans’ and so-called ‘riot tourists’ flocking from all parts of the city and country for a ‘moral holiday’ were held responsible for the neighbourhood disturbances. In the Slotervaart (1998 and 2007) and Culemborg riots, an ethnic Other was constructed, because Moroccan Dutch youngsters were designated as the folk devils.⁴ This designation of simplistic demarcated groups of Others as the culprits (Otherring) is explained by Young (2007) as a natural reaction or solution of a society to increasing ontological and economic insecurity and increasing pluralism in late modernity. This solution consists of distancing – the blaming of ‘factors or groups which are seen as unrelated to the normal functioning social order’ (Young, 2007: 142) – and of an inversion of the society-and-crime relation in which riots are seen as an autonomous problem ‘for’ society instead of ‘arising from’ the problems of society (Young, 2007: 142). Thus, it has tended to be claimed that the underlying ‘problems of society’ that are strongly reflected in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (such as poverty, social exclusion and class differences) have not, or at least not primarily, caused the disturbances. Rather, the demarcated groups and their conduct are pushed forward as an autonomous problem for society. For instance, the analysis of societal reactions to the three-day Ondiep riots revealed a focus on the so-called ‘football hooligans’ and ‘riot tourists’ as the main culprits, whereas the neighbourhood itself and its residents, including their ongoing anger and discontent about the actions and reactions of the police, their own socioeconomic status, the gentrification process instigated by local authorities, and ongoing problems with loiterers, were more usually discussed as the setting for the riots than as the roots of the riots (see also Van Hulst and Siesling, 2010).

A similar observation is made by Schinkel (2007) in a broader Dutch context, where he describes a similar urge of the Dutch dominant cultural majority to place social problems outside of the normal, pure and healthy societal body, by linking them (more specifically) to migrant cultures and thus enabling assimilation into the ‘flawless’ Dutch culture and society to be brought forward as ‘the’ solution. This linking of social problems to ethnic groups, and those of Moroccan ethnicity in particular, can be seen in two of the most recent riots that took place in the Netherlands, in the disadvantaged

neighbourhoods of Slotervaart (2007) and Terweijde (2010). The first of these two riots, the 2007 Slotervaart riot, will be presented in the remainder of this article, because, despite being one of the least serious social outbursts of the last two decades, it excellently illustrates the nature of these recent 'social' riots in the Netherlands and the Othering processes they put in motion. Being one of the least serious riots, one could ask whether these public disturbances can qualify as a riot when compared internationally? In practice, these disturbances *are* riots from a Dutch perspective, in which small-scale and/or one-day riots are more regular than large-scale and/or multi-day riots (Adang et al., 2010; COT, 2010: 51–2).

Slotervaart 2007: Riots of 'the Moroccan Other'

The prelude: The social construction of 'the Moroccans drama'

Since the arrival of Moroccan 'guest workers' in the 1960s and 1970s, and then their wives and children during the 1970s and 1980s, the social situation of some of this immigrant group has improved, with increasing numbers of Moroccan Dutch succeeding in education, the labour market and the housing market, and a Moroccan Dutch middle class emerging as a consequence (Dagevos et al., 2006; SCP, 2009). However, despite these positive developments, this community, complex and fragmented as it is, is also subject to a number of negative images and representations, which focus in particular on some Moroccan Dutch male youngsters who 'stand out' in social problems, such as criminality, nuisance, unemployment, high school dropout rates (CBS, 2014) and Islamic radicalization (AIVD, 2007; Buijs et al., 2006) when compared with other ethnic groups in the Netherlands. These social problems have gained a prominent role in Dutch public discourse, especially around high-profile events such as the earlier riots in Slotervaart (1998), the murder of cinematographer Theo van Gogh (2004), the activities of the (alleged) Islamic terrorist group known as the 'Hofstadgroep' (2004–5), the nuisance and crime in the Gouda neighbourhood of Oosterwei (2008–9), the travelling of Moroccan Dutch fighters to Syria and Iraq since 2011, the rise of a 'Moroccan mafia' and related gangland killings since 2012, and the failed jewellery robbery in Deurne (2014). As a consequence of these events and societal reactions, Moroccan Dutch youngsters have become the prime symbol of nuisance, crime and Islamic radicalization in cities such as Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht, but also in smaller towns such as Gouda, Veenendaal and Ede. These social problems and debates in the media, political and scientific discourse of the last decade, are now being referred to as 'the Moroccans problem', 'the Moroccans debate' and 'the Moroccans drama' (De Jong, 2007). The 2007 riot in Slotervaart is constructed as just another episode in this long litany of trouble.

The drama: The police shooting of Bilal B

Slotervaart, a disadvantaged neighbourhood in the Dutch capital of Amsterdam, is known for its relatively large Moroccan Dutch community, comprising 20 percent overall (Gemeente Amsterdam, 2015a; 16 percent during the riots in 2007, see Stadsdeel Slotervaart, 2007) and is often linked to many social problems, including poverty,

overcrowded housing, dysfunctional parenting, unemployment, high welfare dependency, high school dropout levels, language delay, nuisance, crime and Islamic radicalization (for example, in municipal reports: Gemeente Amsterdam, 2007, 2015b; in the media: TG, 19 October 2007: 5; PW, 17 December 2007). In 2007, it was also one of the so-called ‘Vogelaar neighbourhoods’, the 40 most problematic neighbourhoods in the Netherlands that were part of a national programme for urban improvement led by Secretary Ella Vogelaar of Housing, Neighbourhoods and Integration (VROM, 2007). On Sunday 14 October 2007, neighbourhood resident Bilal B., a 22-year-old schizophrenic Moroccan Dutchman on leave from a mental hospital, was shot dead by the police after walking into the neighbourhood’s police station and stabbing two officers. Out of fear of a recurrence of the 1998 Slotervaart riots, where Moroccan Dutch residents clashed with the police after a young Moroccan Dutch resident was arrested, the local authorities quickly contacted several influential people and representatives from the neighbourhood in an attempt to eliminate rumours and speculation about the shooting (Adang et al., 2010: 136–41).

The next day, the identity of Bilal and his Moroccan ethnicity were revealed in an afternoon press conference, and in the neighbourhood the media had an increasingly high profile, which caused some tensions with residents and resulted in a television camera crew being threatened, assaulted and chased away by some residents (for example, NO, 15 October 2007). Yet the local authorities and neighbourhood residents and representatives still managed to maintain calm throughout the day, until around 11 o’clock in the evening, when residents gathered on the August Allebé Square in front of the police station, some out of curiosity and others demanding answers about the police shooting. From within the crowd, dozens of youngsters began to vandalize public and private property, damaging cars and setting one on fire, and throwing stones at the police station, smashing some windows. It took until midnight before the police, who were surprised by the outbreak, were able to take control of the situation, though even then they were not able to make any arrests. From that point on, extra police, including riot police, were deployed to guard the August Allebé Square and to keep the calm. Nevertheless, 19 cars were set on fire in and around the neighbourhood during the rest of the week, and only eight people were arrested on suspicion of trying to set cars on fire, none of whom was subsequently convicted. This collective and spontaneous disturbance of public order on Monday evening 15 October in Slotervaart and the 19 car fires that disturbed the nights that followed in the rest of the week have been defined as ‘the riots of Slotervaart’ in public discourse by different actors (local authorities, politicians, media, etc.), and have eventually been stored as such in the collective memory.⁵

The audience: Othring the rioters

It never became clear to the law enforcement agencies, however, who (exactly or even roughly) the dozens of rioters at the August Allebé Square on Monday were, who continued setting cars on fire in the ensuing nights, let alone what their (political or ideological) aims and motives might have been, assuming they had any. Information about those arrested does not provide an answer, for there were only about 17 in all (and no one was arrested during the riot on the Monday), the vast majority of whom were quickly released and never convicted because of a lack of evidence and/or just cause (Police Chief Bernard

Welten in PW, 17 December 2007; Mayor Job Cohen in NO, 19 October 2007). Despite this lack of a clear view, the rioters were nevertheless defined as an autonomous and exogenous group of 'Moroccan youngsters' in societal reactions. Police Chief Welten (for example, ME, 19 October 2007: 2), Mayor Cohen (for example, ME, 18 October 2007: 1), District Chairman Ahmed Marcouch (TG, 19 October 2007: 5) and other state officials and politicians (for example, NO, 19 October 2007) explicitly pointed to the usual suspects: a group of Moroccan Dutch criminal youngsters who it was claimed had been terrorizing Slotervaart for years. Different estimates were roughly given, with this group claimed to vary from 20 (TG, 17 October 2007: 3) to 60 youngsters (EV, 27 October 2007), or even sometimes suggested to be surrounded by 150 to 1500 'aspiring criminals' in the whole Amsterdam-West borough (for example, Mayor Cohen in: TG, 1 November 2007: 37). In the more general social reactions to the violence, Bilal and the rioters were broadened from a small number of problem youngsters in Slotervaart to all 'Moroccan problem youngsters' in Amsterdam, and at the same time, as we will see subsequently, were implicitly and explicitly linked to Moroccan ethnicity and culture, and then linked to the more general so-called 'Moroccans problem' in the Netherlands.

Distancing the rioters. This symbolization of the Slotervaart riots as just another episode of 'the Moroccans problem' and 'Moroccan youngsters' as the folk devils in societal reactions, comprises the distancing of Bilal and the rioters as 'Moroccans'. The first distancing, concerning Bilal, symbolized him as a typical 'Moroccan folk devil', beginning with the use of his Moroccan ethnicity as a signifier (ethnicization). This started after the press conference on the day after his death, where the Chief Public Prosecutor of Amsterdam, Leo de Wit, said of the incident: 'It concerns the 22-year-old from Amsterdam of Moroccan descent, Bilal B.' (NO, 15 October 2007). What followed was a great many references in public discourse to the 'Moroccan' (VK, 1 November 2007: 3), the 'Moroccan youngster' (VK, 23 October 2007: 12), the '22 year old Moroccan' (TG, 16 October 2007: 1) and the 'Moroccan from Amsterdam' (ME, 17 October 2007: 3).

The second distancing contained a discussion of three strongly intertwined themes in public discourse. The first, in which Bilal was presented as 'a psychiatric patient', comprised an elaboration of his psychiatric history (for example, VK, 16 October 2007: 3) and a public debate on the treatment of mental illness in the Netherlands in general (for example, EV, 17 October 2007). The next theme was one in which Bilal was spoken of as 'a hardened criminal', and involved an elaboration of what was taken to be Bilal's criminal and violent history, despite his not having any police contact in the previous two years (for example, TG, 16 October 2007: 1 and 3). The final theme involved suggestions that Bilal was 'a terrorist', and claims were made about alleged ties between him and Mohamed B., the Moroccan Dutch murderer of cinematographer Theo van Gogh in 2004, Samir A., a Moroccan Dutch youngster convicted of planning terrorist attacks in the Netherlands, and the 'Hofstadgroep', an alleged Dutch terrorist network (for example, NO, 15 October 2007). Using these three themes (psychiatric patient, hardened criminal and terrorist), Bilal was linked in the public discourse to wider anxieties that were part of a perceived 'Moroccans problem', namely the relatively high number of Moroccan Dutch youngsters with mental health issues and criminal records, and the problem of the radicalization of Moroccan Dutch youngsters in the Netherlands.

In a process paralleling the presentation of Bilal, the rioters were also symbolized as typical 'Moroccan folk devils', again through ethnicization and by linking them to the perceived general 'Moroccans problem'. First, through ethnicization, the rioters were linked to the Moroccan ethnicity with frequent references to 'Moroccan youngsters' (PW, 13 November 2007), 'Moroccan criminals' (TG, 21 November 2007: 33), 'Moroccan rioters' (for example, VK, 17 October 2007: 7), 'rioting Moroccan youngsters' (ME, 30 October 2007: 8), 'Moroccan ringleaders' (TG, 19 October 2007: 6) and 'riot mocros'⁶ (ME, 24 October 2007: 16). Second, this symbolization as typical 'Moroccan folk devils' also consisted of the linking of the rioters in public discourse to a number of other social problems usually linked to 'Moroccans', including crime, nuisance, unemployment and school dropout. Anti-social and criminal behaviour in particular were most commonly attributed to the rioters and 'Moroccan youngsters' in general. They were spoken of as 'nuisance makers' (for example, PW, 15 October 2007), who were claimed to be 'terrorizing the streets' (VK, 27 October 2007: 15), 'loitering' (for example, PW, 16 October 2007), 'aggressive' (for example, VK, 23 October 2007: 12), 'troublemakers' (for example, ME, 19 October 2007: 18), 'using profanity' (for example, EV, 16 October 2007) and 'intimidating' (for example, TG, 19 October 2007: 5), and to be 'criminals' (for example, ME, 18 October 2007: 1), associated for example with 'theft' (for example, EV, 16 October 2007), 'criminal threatening' (for example, PW, 17 October 2007), 'vandalism' (for example, ME, 19 October 2007: 18), 'burglary' (TG, 21 October 2007: 3), 'arson' (for example, VK, 27 October 2007: 7) and 'recidivism' (VK, 3 November 2007: 22–3). Furthermore, the rioters were linked to the general social problem of 'problem neighbourhoods' (for example, VK, 20 October 2007: 22–3; TG, 27 October 2007: 5) and to other riots in which 'Moroccans' played a prominent role, such as the 1998 Slotervaart riots (for example, EV, 27 October 2007) and the 2005 French riots (for example, NO, 18 October 2007).

Inverting the cause. The roots of this deviant and immoral behaviour by these constructed 'Moroccan' folk devils were mainly sought within two intertwined explanatory frameworks: culture and structure. The cultural framework locates the overall problem in 'Moroccan culture', mainly by referring to a lack of 'integration' into Dutch society or culture (for example, TG, 17 October 2007: 3) or too much 'segregation' from the Dutch (for example, VK, 20 October 2007: 22–3). Criminologist Hans Werdmölder (VK, 26 October 2007: 11) and journalist Fleur Jurgens (TG, 19 October 2007: 5), for instance, claim that the deviant culture and morality of 'the Moroccans' is *the* cause for the many social problems Moroccan Dutch youngsters experience, and they were supported in this view by several columnists (for example, VK, 27 October 2007: 15; VK, 2 November 2007: 11; TG, 19 December 2007: 3). According to Schinkel (2007), this linking of social problems and fears to cultures is a result of what he calls *culturism* (a contraction of 'culture' and 'ism'), an equivalent of *racism* that has risen in the Netherlands since the 1990s, in which social problems are linked not to race but to cultures, and the social exclusion or stigmatization of peoples is based not on racial but on cultural characteristics (Schinkel, 2007).

The structural framework focuses on the disadvantages of an 'underclass' (for example, VK, 17 October 2007: 13), including, for example, poverty (for example, VK, 24

October 2007: 11), unemployment (for example, PW, 17 December 2007) and poor education (for example, ME, 24 October 2007: 16). Yet it is the combination of these two frameworks that became the most common explanation, with structural disadvantages being linked to the Moroccan ethnicity, not least by referring to the relatively high number of Moroccan Dutch suffering from these disadvantages, thus placing these problems under the umbrella of 'the Moroccans problem' (for example, VK, 1 November 2007: 3). Hence, instead of speaking of general alienated poor suffering from socioeconomic disadvantages, the public discourse focused on the ethnic and cultural background of these designated culprits. An example of the structural cultural link is the association of the Moroccan ethnicity with dysfunctional families living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These 'dysfunctional Moroccan families' are herein linked to 'poverty' (TG, 19 October 2007: 5), 'large families in small houses' (TG, 21 December 2007: 6), 'dysfunctional parenting' (for example, NO, 19 October 2007), 'domestic violence', harmful 'imports', 'forced', 'cousin' (VK, 17 October 2007: 13) and 'inbred marriages' (VK, 10 November 2007: 5), 'divorce' (for example, VK, 24 October 2007: 11), and 'not knowing how to discipline children without beating' (PW, 17 December 2007).

These two most prominent explanatory frameworks, and their intertwining, are both classic examples of *liberal* Othering, where the Other is problematized and seen as lacking the morality of the dominant cultural majority caused by 'cultural circumstances or material deprivation' (Young, 2007: 5–7). This linking of riots, nuisance, crime, terrorism, mental illness, unemployment and school dropout with the Moroccan ethnicity, and the focus on the 'other' Moroccan culture in the search for the roots of the riots, places these social problems 'outside' the Dutch social order and constructs them as imported 'into' society. In other words, it is a 'Moroccan' problem, not a 'Dutch' problem.

Discourse of Othering. This process of Othering in societal reactions is facilitated by what Schinkel (2008) calls *multicultur realism* (a contraction of 'multiculturalism' and 'realism'), a discourse that emerged in the public discussion of the immigrant Other in the Netherlands from the 1990s onwards. In the 1980s and 1990s, multiculturalism was the dominant discourse in debates on the immigrant Other, in which political correctness was the norm and a taboo was placed on the linking of social problems to ethnicities and cultures. From the 1990s onwards, this discourse became increasingly criticized as being dysfunctional and too 'idealistic' and became more and more replaced by 'multicultur realism', consisting of a populist, chauvinistic and 'realist' style of political incorrectness, and a reversed taboo, namely a taboo on the denial of the link between social problems and ethnicity and culture (Schinkel, 2008; see also Van Swaaningen, 2005). This relatively new discourse of 'multicultur realism' has been hegemonic in the last two decades in the Netherlands, and has opened the door for the blaming of ethnic groups (distancing), the search for exogenous roots of social problems (inversion) and the explicit Othering of ethnic people, because this is no longer obstructed in the public discourse by the former ambiance of taboos and political correctness.

In societal reactions to the Slotervaart riots, this dominant discourse of 'multicultur realism', plays an important facilitating role and manifests itself in three types of claims in the public discourse on Moroccan Dutch: denial, neutralization and pampering.

First, there are claims of *denial* in which it is claimed that the problems of ‘Moroccans’ are being denied and that there has been too little naming of the Moroccan ethnicity and labelling of ‘Moroccans’. For instance, Henk Kamp, MP of the Dutch Liberal-Conservative party VVD, and Mayor Cohen both emphasize that these problems with ‘Moroccan’ youngsters should not be ‘denied’ this time (PW, 17 December 2007). Another example is to be found in letters to the editors, where the government is often accused of ‘sticking their heads in the sand’ for problems relating to ‘Moroccans’ (for example, TG, 21 October 2007: 6; TG, 4 January 2008: 6).

Second, if ‘the Moroccans problem’ is acknowledged, claims of *neutralization* are made, in which it is claimed that these problems are still being nuanced or played down too much, as when Ella Vogelaar, the Secretary of Integration, was vilified on live television by journalist Jort Kelder and author Heleen van Royen for too much nuancing and playing down of the problems of ‘Moroccan youngsters’ (PW, 13 November 2007).

Third, through claims of *pampering*, claims-makers complain that the government, state officials and politicians are being too ‘soft’ on ‘Moroccans’, for example by referring to the (former) patronizing Dutch governments (for example, TG, 19 December 2007, p. 3), or, more in line with culturism, by accusing them of ‘drinking too much tea’ with ‘Moroccans’ (for example, EV, 16 October 2007), referring to the Moroccan tea culture, instead of clamping down on these folk devils.

In conclusion

The 1960–90 era was the heyday for social movements, action groups and countercultures in the Netherlands. Their resistance during these decades often manifested itself in street protests, which sometimes escalated into ‘political’ riots. From the 1990s onwards, the readiness to take action declined and the remaining protest movements and other left activists increasingly resorted to legal resistance or were absorbed into the political system. As a consequence, the earlier political riots were replaced by ‘social’ riots lacking such clearly articulated political components, and which tended to be triggered by ‘apolitical’ and isolated incidents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Because of this lack of clearly articulated motives in such recent social riots, it is increasingly the case that any precise identification of who rioters were initially remains somewhat obscure for the law enforcement agencies. Yet, in public discourse, the pattern is for fingers to be quickly pointed at demarcated groups of folk devils, such as the ‘football hooligans’ and ‘riot tourists’ coming from ‘other’ cities as the culprits in the Graafsewijk and Ondiep riots. With this focus on simplistic demarcated exogenous groups of Others during riots, it has tended to be claimed that the underlying ‘problems of society’, which are strongly reflected in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, have not been, or at least not primarily, among the causes of the disturbances. Rather, the demarcated groups (for example, ‘football hooligans’) and their conduct (‘rioting’) are pushed forward as autonomous problems for society.

The 2007 Slotervaart riot, an exemplary case of such recent riots in the Netherlands, illustrates how a riot without a clearly articulated political component occurred in a disadvantaged neighbourhood of Amsterdam and evoked negative societal reactions that were primarily and quickly directed at the demarcated ethnic group of Moroccan Dutch

youngsters, designating them as folk devils. Within this societal reaction, the riots were linked to Moroccan ethnicity and to other social problems and fears, such as crime, nuisance and radicalization, which are usually linked to this 'migrant' group, reproducing and enforcing the so-called 'Moroccans problem' in the Netherlands. With the placing of this riot under the umbrella of 'the Moroccans problem', facilitated by the rise of 'culturism' and the dominant discourse of 'multiculturalism', this social problem and its roots are placed outside of the normal, pure and 'flawless' Dutch societal body.

These societal reactions to these recent social riots, in which clear boundaries are sought and placed between the normal Self and the deviant Other, can be seen as natural reactions or solutions of societies to increasing ontological and economic insecurity and increasing pluralism in late modernity (Young, 2007). A consequence of such societal reactions is that attention in the public discourse is too much focused on these designated autonomous and exogenous groups of Others (*distancing*) and on exogenous causes that are unrelated to the normal functioning social order (*inversion*), while the underlying 'problems of society' (such as poverty, social exclusion and class differences), which are strongly reflected in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods where these riots take place, are pushed to the periphery of attention.

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Notes

1. 'Riots' are social constructs and are therefore placed in quotation marks. For the sake of readability they do not routinely appear in quotation marks in the remainder of the article.
2. The Ondiep riots of 2007 are used as a comparison case to the first two riots to uncover the unique aspects of societal reactions to the Moroccan Dutch in particular.
3. Ondiep 2007: police shooting of Rinie Mulder; Slotervaart 2007: police shooting of Bilal B; Culemborg 2010: several disturbances during New Year's Eve.
4. For the 1998 Oosterparkwijk riots, see De Haan et al. (1998); Slotervaart 1998, see COT (1998); Graafsewijk 2000, see COT (2000); Graafsewijk 2005, see Van Dam (2011); Ondiep 2007, see Van den Brink and Bruinsma (2010). Ondiep 2007, Slotervaart 2007 and Terweijde 2010 are (also) derived from my own data collection.
5. Based on an analysis of how people referred to the 2007 events in the media discourse between 2008 and 2014 in the same sources as mentioned in the analytical approach (for example, VK, 5 April 2008, p. 2; ME, 12 May 2009: 12; EV, 13 October 2012).
6. 'Mocros' is street slang for Moroccans.

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