

# **Paradoxes of Cultural Recognition: Perspectives from Northern Europe**

*Sharam Alghasi, Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Halleh Ghorashi, eds.*

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## **Introduction**

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The contemporary transformations of European societies can be described simplistically as a movement from postwar nation-states based on industrialism and cultural homogeneity to late modern states based on informationalism, cultural heterogeneity and ideological tensions arising from the frictions engendered by the intensification of transnational connectedness. Migration, globalization, new communication technologies, international, and increasingly intercontinental tourism, work to create shared European identities and public spheres, intensify identity politics among minorities, and further the militarization of boundaries including the Mediterranean and the North-West African coast. The number of interrelated topics is almost infinite, indicating an urgent and continued need for fresh observations and analysis. *Mobility* is becoming a key issue in social theory (Urry 2000), complementing a century-old concern with *society*. People move into and out of countries on diverse grounds and in diverse ways – as tourists, refugees, students, temporary workers with or without the appropriate permits, labour migrants, family members of prior migrants, as underprivileged African boat refugees or overprivileged North European ‘climate refugees’ settling in the Mediterranean. Debates rage in European public spheres about topics ranging from headscarves (and their darker sister, niqabs) to Polish plumbers, state religion and language instruction in schools. The growth of new cultural complexity within West European societies, an issue in research and policy since the 1960s, seems to have changed

gears, leading researchers like Steven Vertovec (2005) to speak about a new kind of 'super-diversity' – less ordered and less tangible than its late-twentieth century counterpart. In Spain alone, the number of immigrants grew from 900,000 in 2000 to an almost incredible 4.3 million in 2006.

This situation, which unfolds against the backdrop of the USA-led 'war on terror,' the phenomenal growth of China as a towering industrial power and the universalisation of new information and communication technologies, is characterised by scholars, variously, as a condition of fluidity (Bauman 2000), a reflexive state of late modernity (Giddens 1990) and a risk society (Beck 1992). In this time of fluid or 'second' modernity, Bauman (2000) argues, all solids become empty and old patterns of dependency are thrown into a melting pot, leaving individuality in its extreme form, unattached and fully responsible for its actions. In such a condition of flux, turbulence and uncertainty among majorities as well as minorities, and next to the current differentiation and content of cultural diversity in the composition of the population in Western Europe, new tensions and challenges in diverse societies have for a number of years led to the rise of a number of paradoxical tendencies. For example, we see a growing claim on freedom of speech as individual right, yet the same right is explained through the collective, historical achievements of western societies. We also observe a growth in claims of justice by minority groups, in which the space for individual justice in practice becomes limited. What we shall try to argue in this book, and to show through examples from Northern Europe, is that the sense of uncertainty in late modern societies has resulted in a tension between claims of authenticity and claims of autonomy. In particular, the claim of authenticity by the majority within many western societies is described as a culturalist dominance in public discourse about migration (cf. e.g. Hedetoft and Christensen 2004, Rottenburg et al. 2006, Stolcke 1995, Werbner and Modood 1997). The assumption of the threat of Islam for Western societies, fuelled by the attack of September 11, made the position of Islamic minorities in the West a key issue in policy and public debate. Minorities – primarily Islamic minorities -- are thus marked by their alleged culture and/or religion, which are then taken to account for their relative successes or failures in adapting to their host society; culture is

also often invoked in accounts of social problems such as crime, educational failures and the oppression of women. Islam and what this religion is claimed to contain have in many societies been launched as a major element in distinguishing the non-European other from the secularized European.

While in the nineteenth- and early to mid twentieth centuries, perceptions of racial difference were important criteria in classifying and categorizing people, culture has increasingly replaced it, leading some scholars (e.g. Banton 1987) to speak of a 'new racism' based on perceptions of cultural difference rather than race (Stolcke 1995). It is the itineraries, effects of and reactions to this culturalist discourse in different fields of action that form the focus of this book. It is sometimes claimed that the best remedy to culturalism is cultural blindness. It is assumed that when culture is ignored there is more room for individual uniqueness. Yet various contributions in this book show that cultural blindness is not an answer to culturalist assumptions and practices, but that it actually reproduces the same practices. Thus, the core of this book is to show the ways that culturalism is reproduced and challenged, both in terms of discourses and practices. Next to an analysis of public debates and media, a number of empirically based chapters show how culturalism works in practice; in schools, organizations, and neighborhoods, for example. The main aim of this book is to show the historical embeddedness of discursive and practical manifestations of culturalism, primarily in two countries, Norway and the Netherlands. By including chapters from U.K. and Sweden we broaden the context of the discussions made. By this comparison we tend to show on the one hand that culturalism is not a country-specific phenomenon through which discourses and practices are defined, yet on the other hand it also becomes clear that the *forms* of reproduction of culturalism are quite country-specific.

Norway and the Netherlands are chosen as the core countries because of their differences as much as because of their similarities: the Netherlands has a long colonial history and an even longer history as a 'crossroads' in Europe; Norway has been more isolated and is a relative newcomer to the European immigration experience. However, the proportion of immigrants in both countries is

relatively high (in 2006, 8% of the Norwegian population were immigrants, with nearly 25% of the population in Oslo having a minority background) and growing, and there are interesting parallels between the public debates concerning immigration in the two countries. Both countries also share predominantly Protestant populations and have functioning welfare states. In the massive body of literature on migration and minorities within Europe, there is far too little international comparison (but see e.g. Grillo 1998, Eriksen 2002). As a result, there is a risk of overestimating both similarities and differences between European countries. Yet there is no doubt that the situation in Finland, with few non-European immigrants before the 1990s, in many ways contrasts sharply with that in the UK or France. At the same time, Finland is faced with a similar issue as in, say, Spain or Germany in that the 'autochthonous' population is ageing, with an ensuing need for labour, and with the growth in immigration (from 26,000 in 1990 to 107,000 in 2003) a growing concern with cultural differences situated as an asset or a problem. Such differences and similarities are illuminated within the chapters of this book.

### **Culturalisation**

A few more words about culturalisation would be in place. In an influential article, Stolcke writes about a new form of exclusion rhetoric in the West that is based on a homogeneous, static, coherent, and rooted notion of culture. She calls this 'cultural fundamentalism' (1995: 4). This time it is not the race that needs to be protected but the assumed historically-rooted homogenous culture of the nation: "racism without race" (Idem). In *Orientalism*, Said (1979) famously spoke of a historically-constructed discourse in Europe based on an imagined fundamental ontological dissimilarity between the European perception of the West and of the Orient, dissimilarity in the favor of the West. The essence of Orientalism according to Said is then a profound distinction between the Western and Oriental self in which the former is superior and the latter inferior. The recent developments and public debates in various European countries, including the Netherlands, Norway and the U.K. prove this point (see the chapters by Dienke Hondius, Ellie Vasta and Halleh Ghorashi, Sharam here we need the name of the author who will write about Norway!). In many European

countries, there is a tendency to see migrants' culture chiefly as a source of social problems, and in recent years particularly with respect to Muslims. It is argued that the norms and values of the West and those of Muslims are different and incompatible (see e.g. Ali 2006, Bawer 2006, Storhaug 2006 for recent, influential books from the Netherlands and Norway; see Buruma 2006 for a more tempered view). This assumption has led to the construction of a state of confrontation on the face of many European communities where there is a demand for an obligatory integration of migrants into their new societies. The event of September 11th followed by events in Europe strengthened the existing cultural categorical thinking, which in turn led to an increased feeling of insecurity and fear within these societies (Gillespie 2006). This growing sense of fear of the culture of migrants and the urgent need for their assimilation has resulted in an increasing gap between migrants -- even those born in the new society -- and the rest of the society. This growing gap, combined with a lack of cultural recognition of migrants, is considered in the UNDP report of 2004 as one of the major challenges that new multicultural societies are facing (see also Ghorashi 2007).

The dominant discourse in most European countries with regard to new migrants has become increasingly culturalist, in which a migrant's culture is considered to deviate from the European norm. This is founded on a static and essentialist approach to culture, in which cultural content is considered the determining factor for all actions of individuals. Such an approach leaves little space for variation within 'groups'. Recent changes and developments, particularly in the time after 11 September 2001, have led to an increase in the impact of religion in perceptions of the culture of others. This is obviously more visible in the case of Islamic countries, and not least Muslim members of various European communities. Yet this culturalist approach has been shaped in different ways based on diverse historical developments within various European countries. In the Netherlands, for example, the root of culturalism is located within the history of *pillarization*. The construction of pillars -- 'own worlds' -- along lines of religious denomination and political ideology after the Second World War has been the dominant framework for thinking about

differences in the Netherlands, initially based on the tension between Protestants and Catholics. The dichotomy between *us* and *them*, with its emphasis on group boundaries, has, partly due to this established cultural and institutional template, latently shaped the ways in which new migrants have been approached in the Netherlands. The consequences of this history of pillarization for migrants are most evident for those from Islamic countries: they have been mentally fitted into a new pillar: the Islamic pillar (Ghorashi 2006, Koopmans 2003).

This has caused new migrants from Islamic countries to find themselves in a confusing area of tension. The historical habit of thinking in terms of pillars was translated into the migrants' conditions and left – even encouraged – space for these migrants to preserve their cultures. Paradoxically, this happened in an increasingly de-pillarized Netherlands – which started in the 1960s -- in which individual autonomy was seen as prevailing and protected. Thinking in terms of pillars has had a much wider effect than on Islamic migrants alone. To a certain extent, it has demarcated thinking about cultural differences and ethnic boundaries. This has led to the creation of cultural contrasts that make it virtually impossible to consider the individual migrant as separate from his or her cultural or ethnic category.

The case of Norway, on the other hand, indicates a different process regarding the formation of the culturalist approach in recent years. Expanding and preserving the welfare system has historically, roughly since the First World War, been a central political concern. Accordingly, the institutionalised desire is to provide some socioeconomic likeness for all citizens regardless of ethnic and religious background (Brochmann 2003, Eriksen 2006, Gullestad 2001). At the same time, it has also been argued that Norwegian minorities have emerged as a new underclass (Wikan 1995). Minorities, on average, have less access to socio-material goods as well as enjoy a more limited, or less successful, participation in various sectors in the society, than average Norwegians. This state is often explained by minorities' lack of ability or desire to be integrated into Norwegian society. A hegemonic discourse in today's Norwegian society describes the



multicultural Norwegian society as a society where the cultural quality of the migrant stands as explanatory factor for any conflicts involving relationships between immigrants and the host population (Alghasi 1999, Eriksen 2006, Gullestad 2002). This brief contrast between Norway and the Netherlands – other countries might have served as well – indicates that similar issues are likely to be dealt with somewhat differently in the two countries because of the significant historical differences.

### **Welfare state, immigration, and immigrants**

The phenomenon of immigration is not new, but the notion, as it is understood in today's Europe, is a rather recent concept. In a historical process the idea of who an immigrant is and where they are positioned in relation to the European self has been subject to major transformations (Glick Schiller 2003, Friedman 2004). One hundred and fifty years back in time, one could emigrate from one place to another and be considered a fully recognized member of the new society. However, with the developments of nation-states based on nationalist ideology, new perceptions on the identities and positions of the “newcomers” have emerged; the status of citizenship, or how one becomes a member of the society has been linked to the idea of a sovereign territory the citizens were once a part of, accompanied later with being part of a nation with common past, culture, and values.

According to Glick Schiller (2003), the project of nation-state reached a new level of development with the emergence of welfare states in which the state had the task of integrating individuals in a society within a sovereign territory around a common past, shared culture, and mutual solidarity towards the society. In a welfare state, the citizenship is mirrored in the national legal system, the sovereign in the political system, the nation in the cultural system, and the solidarity group in the social system. These systems are involved in reproduction of a hegemonic view in which individuals or groups are aimed to become integrated into the societies. The process of nation-building is then suggested to be the state's attempts to create an isomorphism between individuals and the nation-state.

Immigrants seem to challenge this isomorphism within a number of arenas in today's nation-states. In the field of politics, the increasing number of migrants may stand as a threat to states' sovereignty, and has been an important issue in political debates. This possible threat is also felt in terms of the cultural positioning of the European self towards the newcomer, a positioning in which the European self is differentiated from the newcomer's culture and way of being. As a possible threat in the socio-cultural and political context, the newcomers and their participation in various arenas within these societies are particularly under attention and focus; in education, in media representation, in the labour market, in relation to state bureaucracy and so on, there is an overwhelming tendency to regulate and form the coexistence of those originally who belong to *here*, and those who have battled their ways into the Western world. These arenas are given particular attention in this book.

### **The scope of this book**

The first challenge of this book is to show the contextual and situated aspect of culturalist practices in various places and countries, with a special focus on Norway and the Netherlands. Such a comparison is an invitation for rethinking culture, and by that, for challenging the culturalist approach. An Iranian-Norwegian for instance, despite similarities with a Dutch-Iranian, possesses different qualities as well, because this individual is situated in a dialectical relationship to the societies and other members of the societies of which he or she is a part. This relational quality in understanding how culture in fact functions enables us to move beyond a categorical thinking in which "minorities" are perceived, placed and treated as "the others", while a "we" is represented as the normal, the natural, and the rational who has the right to tame the wild horse of culture. In taking a relational stand and opposing this culturalist thinking, then, we consider the very diverse quality of the migrant, seen in relation to the societies and fields of which they are a part. This takes us further to a notion of resistance that is reflected not only by the migrant's positioning and strategies within a given society, but also by the positioning and strategies of the native. One major positioning is the trans-national position which enables migrants to stand against hegemonic categorisations in search of new identities that are self-

defined, and that are inspired by individual experiences in relation to structural forces. This strategy acknowledges that today's multicultural Europe is in great need of shaping a democratic culture where the search for the *new* is the obvious right of all members of the society. Thus, this book attempts to move beyond borders and brings the trans-national into the centre of focus. Furthermore, by comparing experiences and insights we hope to bring a transnational dimension to the challenge of understanding diversity. A trans-national perspective can help us to reflect upon practices that are both taken for granted and allow us to peer inward with regard to diversity and the migrant's condition. We believe that such a comparison can inform us of the contextual differences with regard to the ways that these practices are shaped and reshaped.

### **Beyond categorical thinking**

The main criticism of the culturalist approach does not concern the idea of categorization, in and of itself. It is impossible to conceive of life without categories, including social classifications. The criticism concerns cultural categories being reified and turned into absolute contrasts. Within the social sciences, this type of conception of culture has been criticized since the late 1960s, when Barth (1969) argued that ethnic boundaries were not created and preserved because of differences in cultural content, but that these boundaries were constructed in order to pursue a political or otherwise instrumental goal. To be sure, cultural characteristics are thrown into sharp relief precisely when they can be used to mark a difference between *us* and *them*. Following Barth (1969), we work under the assumption that ethnic boundaries between groups should chiefly be considered constructions that are situational, contextual, and changeable, rather than entities that are inherent reflections of the essence of different cultures.

This non-essentialist approach to identity provides a more nuanced method for analysing individual actions with regard to the individual's own culture. The ways in which individuals perceive their culture and give meaning to it are diverse and variable. People are capable of criticizing their cultural habitus and of opening themselves up to innovation and supplementation with new cultural

elements. This often leads to diverse forms of connections. What is needed, however, for such reflection and innovation to be permitted is a feeling of security. The general precondition for reflection, therefore, is a safe space. When people feel threatened and coerced, they generally respond reactively. This considerably narrows the space for making connections, for it causes people to cut themselves off from rather than open themselves up to potential new contacts and combinations. For people to open themselves up to new ideas and connections, they need to feel recognized for who they are: social recognition is of paramount importance for human development (Taylor 1992).

However, the question of social recognition for cultural difference or cultural recognition as an individual struggle is clearly related to structural hurdles such as the structural empowerment various ethnic categories find themselves within. Ethnic Dutch, when compared with ethnic Iranians, for instance, may have no difficulties travelling and settling in Norwegian society, precisely because the processes of identification, positioning and perceiving ethnic Dutch within Norway is different than, for instance, the processes of identifying, positioning and perceiving ethnic Iranians. In spite seeming similarity as ethnic immigrants, the Dutch and the Iranian possess different portions of capital – in Bourdieu's sense of the term – as they enter the new society. The Iranian carries negative capital the moment he or she enters Norwegian society. The struggle here, therefore, is not an individual struggle, but a struggle to break with the very idea of Iranianness existing in the Norwegian society. The construction of the new among these migrants not only requires a constant confrontation with cultural recognition, but at the same time must challenge the culturalist repertoires chaining these migrants to the past and to an essentialist notion of the present.

### **Shaping a democratic culture**

Cultural recognition is part and parcel of a democratic culture. Democracy goes far beyond people's liberty to go to the polls. In contrast to what is often maintained, democracy is not just about majority participation, but it is particularly about providing an active space for the minority. This is precisely what constitutes the difference between a constitutional democracy and a so-

called populist democracy: in the latter, the voice of the majority is given relatively free reign, but the voice of the minority is not secured. Democracy without the freedom for minority opposition is not, however, a democracy.

Following Lefort (1992), IJsseling argues that democracy is not primarily about similarity, but rather about a recognition of difference or being different (IJsseling 1999). This important aspect of democracy requires a democratic culture that creates space for being different. And yet it is precisely this aspect of democracy that is often in danger of being overlooked by predominating economic interests. This is why Giddens (1999) advocates a 'democratization of democracy', in which greater attention is paid to the democratic *process*. According to de Tocqueville, democracy is not only a form of government, but also a way of life. This implies a change in social relations. Proponents of 'deliberative' democracy underscore the public forum, in which citizens are empowered to take part in a free and open dialogue and to translate their personal preferences into more public objectives.

Critics of this approach feel that democracy is reduced to being a dialogue and that it fails to take into account power relations and their impact on people's access to the major public platforms. Democracy is more than simply a dialogue: it comprises a culture, an outlook, and a way of life. A democratic outlook implies that one accept from the very start that another person may be different. A democratic structure does not amount to much without a democratic culture, and a democratic culture is only feasible if it takes not the *I* but the *other* as its starting-point.

The great challenge here is maintaining this relational aspect within our highly individualized societies in this era of late modernity. Within the context of extreme fixation on individual rights and spaces of this era it is almost unimaginable to claim the other as starting point of the connection. Bauman (2000) describes the condition of this second modernity or 'risk society' as one in which there are no goals; no satisfaction of arrival. The result of this process is that the individual becomes the worst enemy of the citizen. Within this

framework, the citizen is understood to be the one whose well-being is connected to the city while the individual is only after self-satisfaction. Inspired by Bauman's line of thinking we agree that extreme individualization could lead to a slow disintegration of citizenship. The consequence is that 'public' becomes colonized by the 'private.' The greatest challenge of this second modernity is to learn collectively how to tackle public issues without reducing them solely to private needs.

Making democratic culture more inclusive towards diversity is one of the features of pursuing collectivity. One of the basic preconditions for this democratic culture is tolerance. Yet, tolerance in terms of *allowing space* for otherness has proven in the past decades to promote a sense of detachment that does not tackle collective issues through difference. This is precisely what de Tocqueville warned us about: "setting people free makes them indifferent" (Bauman 2000: 36). The result of this kind of tolerance is paradoxical in its strengthening of societal individualization and in its tendency to essentialize difference on a group basis. What is then lacking in this idea of tolerance is any collective notion of citizenship. In other words, the creation of space through tolerance naively fails to address the tensions that comes with engaging the difference. We argue that for all individuals to become engaged citizens, we must to take an additional step: not only *allowing space* but also *making space*. This is about the will to meet the other, which, beyond a convincing plea, requires the ability to make space or to step aside. This step to the side is an important and inevitable move in creating a common shared space between cultures, in which we can admit, meet, and connect with the other. The next step in a democratic outlook would then be to guard this newly created space, that is, to be prepared to make an effort to defend another person's liberty and space. Adopting these steps brings the individual closer to the citizen. Within this more flexible and fluid framework an often-raised issue in Western Europe nowadays, the principle of the freedom of speech, ceases to be restricted to the notion of what an individual wants or needs to say, but rather, adds to the focus a concern with how one's expression relates to others. This does not mean that the societal tensions are mitigated but that the approach to these tensions is different. The

way that the citizens relate to these tensions is not solely based on individually motivated actions or reactions, but is informed by a relational responsibility of the citizen to the public. This is the only way that the public can be freed from the colonization of the private, returning to Bauman's statement.

Yet in the practice of everyday life we are far from making space, let alone guarding space in our daily practices. Through the dominance of the culturalist discourse, the emphasis on the frightening and endangering elements of cultural difference has been so overemphasized that there is little space for cultural recognition or for a departure from commonality. Instead of solving problems, this focus on culture has contributed to a growing gap in different European societies between the European self and the migrant other. It follows that if culture is presumed to be a problem, predicated on the idea of cultural contrasts, migrants may as a result regroup within their ethnic boundaries to defend their culture. Feelings of social insecurity and a lack of recognition tend to encourage radicalization both for majorities and minorities. When people feel threatened, they will go to extremes to defend their boundaries. The growing threat of extreme Islamic and extreme right-wing groups is a case in point here.

The approach shared by the contributors to this book endeavours to expand the space for acknowledgement and recognition of existing cultural differences, while simultaneously identifying the perils and shortcomings of essentialist categorisation. Achieving this end requires finding a fine analytical balance between seemingly Manichean opposites – group and individual, the universal and the particular, cohesion and individualism, *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* – which may, on closer examination, turn out to be complementary rather than contrary.

We now move to the individual chapters, which have been organised around three sections. The first section 'Uneasy Categories,' focuses on the discursive level. The second section, 'Cultural Categories in Practice,' shows how cultural categories are reproduced in practice within various fields of interaction -- for example, within organizations and schools. The third section, 'Migrant's

Positioning and Public Space,' describes the ways that migrants are represented and position themselves within society.

### **Uneasy Categories**

In her chapter, Vasta draws on examples from the Netherlands and England, and thematises the transformation of a European discourse, suggesting the ways in which many countries have retreated from multiculturalism. A predominant discourse in today's Europe indicates that multicultural approaches to immigrant inclusion into society have failed and that a large part of the problem lies with immigrants themselves. As a result, policies and programmes are heavily influenced by an assimilationist philosophy, rather than concentrating on making diversity work. Vasta argues for models of immigrant inclusion that incorporate policies ensuring equality of access and outcomes and that include cultural recognition.

Hondius speaks of the existence of a "silent agreement" in Western European societies regarding the importance of race. In this case a visible difference such as skin color is claimed to be unimportant and irrelevant. However, by referring to historical and present examples she illustrates the importance of race in the construction of identity and social relations, particularly in the Netherlands. She argues for a need to acknowledge that racism exists. In acknowledging that racism exists not only elsewhere and a long time ago, but also here and today, and by recognizing black and white people's common, parallel, unequal and complex histories, she suggests that we may help to create space for new interaction concerning this uneasy subject.

Ghorashi's chapter focuses on the contextual differences between the Netherlands and the United States and the impact of these differences on the lives of Iranians in both countries. The main attention of this comparative research has been on the processes through which national identity is constructed in relation to migration and how these processes have influenced the space for cultural difference within each country. This space is shown to be



essential for the ways that migrants (in this case Iranians) position themselves in the two countries.

### **Cultural Categories in Practice**

Siebers' chapter deals with cultural and ethnic diversity in relation to the labour market and work organizations. According to Siebers, most Western societies experience serious ethnic inequalities within their labour markets, which cannot be attributed solely to the unequal accumulation of human capital credentials such as education, work experiences, or training of minority and majority members. Apparently, other processes of exclusion and discrimination are operational that harm the interests of minority members. He demonstrates that discrimination cannot be defined or established without taking into account dominant standards for good work and good performance. An analysis of the work and organization context is vital to understand the exclusion processes minority members have to face and to establish whether discrimination is the case.

Pihl's chapter deals with intercultural practices in the Norwegian educational system and the ways in which concepts and practices are developed within an intercultural context in Norway. She shows how professionals categorize normality, deviance and disability in within the Norwegian intercultural context. According to Pihl, the Norwegian education system is based on a single, ethno-national Norwegian, Christian culture, and marginalizes its immigrant pupils. In doing so, she addresses alternative strategies for development of democracies and education in an era of globalization and migration.

Runfors' piece is a presentation of how visions of equality, equal treatment and blindness to difference related to background are put into practice in two multi ethnic schools within the outskirts of Stockholm. The analysis makes visible some undesired outcomes of these practices, namely the grading of pupils according to backgrounds. As we have suggested, it is hardly possible to avoid classification since categories are one of the basic tools with which humans create order. To be sure, classification is the basis of human social organisation.

The questions of *which* categories we use and *how* we use them are, however, worth reflecting on. An examination of the process we use to categorise helps reveal how ambitions to practice cultural blindness can paradoxically result in a type of culturalism where inequalities are regarded as a result of cultural backgrounds, rather than as the effects of the direct and indirect interaction between societal groups. This was not an explicit or conscious culturalism [?]

van der Haar demonstrates how culture and a cultural perception of the other are at work within the practices of social workers in the Netherlands. She employs this analysis in order to illustrate how cultural perception of others may be decisive in constructions of relations and practices. From that perspective, she argues that a currently dominant discourse from society at large that problematizes the culture of migrants also frames the ways social workers relate to their 'allochtonous' clients.

### **Migrant's Positioning and Public Space**

In this section of the book, both Eide/Simonsen and Alghasi present the way images of migrants in particular Islamic communities have been represented in the Norwegian media. Eide/Simonsen's chapter focuses on the increasing and changing patterns of representation of 'new' migrants within Norwegian media. She observes a change of representation in the last decade from rather unequivocal coverage to increasing emphasis on difference in a negative sense (Islamic migrants as victims of their culture or aggressors because of their culture). Migrants have within this particular discourse become 'fallen angels'. Within this context, exclusionary essentialist constructs of migrants as ultimate others are produced, as opposed to the norms associated with Norwegian-ness (and the inevitable link to both nature and culture). The chapter also explicitly suggests as one of the conditions for a multiethnic public sphere the right to be understood as a universal citizen.

Alghasi's chapter shows a similar pattern of representation of Islamic migrants in the Norwegian media, yet the focus of the chapter is different. He presents the challenge of TV debate programs in producing culturalist and populist

representations of reality while attempting to narrate multi-ethnic societal issues. While these programs claim to take an objective and critical stand against power by the media, this chapter shows that these programs are, in fact, influenced by economic forces, and contribute paradoxically to a reductive construction of reality by reproducing a dominant and powerful discourse of cultural otherness.

Lettinga's chapter follows the same line of argument concerning the representation of migrants but examines this process within the context of public debates outside the media sphere. In her chapter she shows how the populist representation of Islamic migrants as absolute others and as a threat to the Dutch society has increasingly hijacked the Dutch public debate, and has moved it toward a more culturalist direction. In this process Dutch society has been constructed as the norm of civilization and universal equality while women from Islamic countries who wear Islamic clothing are considered as unemancipated and oppressed. After analyzing public debates and parliamentary discussions in the Netherlands on the use of headscarves, Lettinga presents the core paradox of a recognition of religious difference embedded within Dutch history and the current discomfort toward the religious choices of Islamic migrants in the country.

The chapters of Brouwer/Den Uyl and Vestel both focus on how young migrants are positioned within their local settings and the ways that these migrant youngsters negotiate their multiple identities in relation to these settings. Both chapters show how neighbourhoods that are represented within a dominant discourse as 'problematic' are considered by these young migrants as a place of belonging. The chapters also demonstrate how the represented identities of migrant youth as 'coherent and static' are, rather, experienced more fluidly within multiple settings.

The chapter of Brouwer and Den Uyl focuses more specifically on the ways in which living in a super-diverse neighbourhood allows the young girls of their study the means to become culturally more competent to deal with the presence

of diverse identities within Dutch society. These girls are easily able to use their inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic connections interchangeably and, in fact, invite others to join their neighbourhood so that they also can experience the way that mix of identities works in practice. This chapter concludes that the flexible and open presentation employed by these girls could serve as an inspiration for a larger sense of 'we' within the Dutch society.

Vestel's chapter provides a strong model for how hybridity works in practice. The focus of the chapter is on the generative articulation of 'new' and shared spaces of identity, where the participants (the youngsters living in a 'problematic' neighbourhood in Norway) simultaneously seek to move beyond the cultural orientations of their parents as well as the hegemony of 'the Norwegian'. This chapter shows how loyalty to a place leads to trans-ethnic connections and friendships. But it also demonstrates how the construction of otherness within the dominant society interplays with the shifting and hybrid manners through which these youngsters position themselves; this process involves tensions both on the level of experiences and reflections.

It is our hope that this book, seen in its entirety, showcases the need for a thorough, comparatively- and historically-framed understanding of domestic histories and circumstances for an understanding of majority/minority relationships; and we also hope that this foray into comparative research will encourage others to do the same, using research from other countries.

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