CALLING CITIZENS TO A MORAL WAY OF LIFE:  
A DUTCH EXAMPLE OF MORALIZED POLITICS  

MARINUS OSSEWAARDE

Abstract: This article offers a sociological analysis of the moral revisions that accompany welfare state reforms in the Netherlands. It is argued that Dutch welfare state reforms after the Cold War rely on moral discourses in particular and moral language in general to legitimize and effectuate policy measures. The Dutch reformers have been pursuing a set of strategies of moralization designed to adjust the Dutch welfare state to the new, post-Cold War situation, in which social policies are redesigned to support the operation of global markets. This article seeks to show how this “moral revision” has been taking place by consulting data sources provided by Dutch media, policy documents, council reports, advices, speeches, and newspaper interviews. This implies that special attention is paid to the rhetoric, language, tones, symbolism, metaphors and moral images used and propagated by moral revisionists, elites and media, their definitions of the prevailing moral situation and of the desired one, their formulation of desired values and norms and the ways in which moral panics are aroused. Three recent Dutch policy innovations, namely the national debate on norms and values, the Charter Responsible Citizenship and the family policy memorandum, are interpreted as political strategies to re-engineer the new morality that can sustain a reformed state.

Keywords: moral revision, political moralism, normative order, anti-social behaviour, social conformity, global capitalism.

Introduction

In Western European states in general, and in the Netherlands in particular, moral issues have dominated the political agenda since the end of the Cold War. Public debates on norms and values, concerns with self-responsibility and responsible citizenship, and anti-social behaviour have typically been triggered by a collective search for a new normative order for the Dutch nation in the global era of “victorious” capitalism (Fukuyama 1989). Such debates have made social scientists more aware of changes in political moralism and the re-engineering of norms in a changing society. In the past two decades, a variety of norms have been subject to manifest policy-driven revisions in different policy areas. Such revisions have typically been accompanied by a chain of moral panics (Hier 2008; Critcher 2009).

In the Netherlands, Dutch welfare state reforms after the Cold War have been accompanied by moral revisions. Such a change in the moral climate, it is argued, has not just simply or spontaneously evolved over time, but has instead been intentionally brought about or politically managed (Ullmann-Margalit 1990, 756). The revision of values and norms has been instituted by policy actors whose main concern is the transformation of the Dutch
welfare state, to make it fit enough to survive in the post-Cold War era of global capitalism (Schinkel 2010, 279). In this new situation, the welfare state is being re-organized to support rather than obstruct the operation of global markets, and is restyled and re-legitimated as a set of social policies that contributes to the goal of competitiveness in the more open economy of the global capitalist society (Page 2007, 103). In order to ensure that economic prosperity is promoted in the global era, and is not jeopardized by social policies, specific moral values and norms are propounded and propagated as the desired morality.

The old welfare state, as it had manifested itself during the Cold War, had been a national capitalist institution that was grounded in a particular (liberal) normative order. In 1950, Richard Titmuss noted that the experience of the Second World War had led to a greater sense of social unity in the Western European nations and to growing demands for the government to play a leading role in creating a more egalitarian society (Page 2007, 6-7). The provision of welfare was considered as a public concern for the well-being of marginalized groups. This provision was also seen as the moral duty of the post-war nation-state to aid the needy, analogous to the duty of parents to care for their children (Obler 1986, 213). Within this moral consensus, the poor, the sick and the uneducated were believed to have a legal right as national citizens to public assistance, to preserve their dignity and self-respect, without needing to show gratitude to their benefactors in some primary bond. In this moral order of a welfare state, charity was perceived as stigmatizing the poor and undermining the self-respect of those who were now entitled to receive social care from their sovereign. The provision of social rights to national citizens was, among other things, designed to control the moral problem of humiliation and social exclusion of marginalized groups.

The moral consensus during the Cold War era was shaped by war experiences and the red scare. Besides, it was feared that desperate marginalized groups, the lower classes, or the underdogs, would be prone to disrupt social order through violent protests, destroy property and commit other crimes. In fact, this fear was actually based on such events that were already taking place. The state provision of welfare entitlements peacefully and civilly silenced these forms of opposition in the national capitalist society (Obler 1986, 213; Fuller 2006, 3). In this picture, the welfare state functioned as the social organ of moral discipline that called its subjects to national cohesion, obedience and conformity to liberal values. In the post-Cold War era of global capitalism, the threat of communist resistance has evaporated and there is no longer a need to silence the weak minority that contests the legitimacy of the political moralism of the capitalist society. The new politics of moralization has proven to be quite effective since the masses are also speaking the same moral language of politicians, media and other power elites.

This article endeavours to generate insights into the Dutch strategies of moralization in the context of welfare state reform. It seeks to show how a “moral revision” has been taking place by consulting data sources provided by Dutch media, policy documents, council reports, advices, speeches, and newspaper interviews. Special attention is paid to the rhetoric, language, tones, symbolism, metaphors and moral images used and propagated by moral revisionists, elites and media, their definitions of the prevailing moral situation and of the desired one, their formulation of desired values and norms and the ways in which moral panics are aroused. Three of the most illustrative recent Dutch policy innovations are
analyzed, namely, the national debate on norms and values that was inaugurated in 2002, the Charter Responsible Citizenship that was introduced in 2009, and the new family policy memorandum titled *The Strength of the Family* that was published in 2008.

**Moral Revisions and Social Policy**

In the sociology of morality, moral norms and values are understood as perceptible “social facts” that sustain a particular social structure of a particular society. Some moral norms may be considered, by the social actors, as absolute or as dictated by a natural law. Hence, religious or moral interdicts like “do not commit murder and adultery” or “take care of the widow” can be understood as flowing from a natural, universal law. These norms are meant to protect what are perceived as universal moral values, like reason, freedom, justice or human dignity. These absolute norms and values, valid independently of individual preferences and of particular social structures, form a kind of stable foundation or framework of “first principles” that makes living morally together possible. Such a set of values and norms may not even be consciously perceived or experienced by social actors since they usually form a kind of “second nature”. In other words, they prescribe the fundamental rights and obligations people have in regard to each other, even prior to or outside of political bonds (Taylor 2004, 4). Hence, such norms and values—or cultural heritage—are typically explicitly formulated in the constitutions of European states or in the treaties of the European Union, and, correspondingly, are generally not the objectives of policy reforms. However, this does not mean that these absolute values and norms are immune to revolutions, wars, populism, despotism or simple indifference.

The focus here is not on such absolute morality but on the norms and values that seem to vary according to political climates, changes in political elites, ideologies, changes in labour market structures, technological developments, and so forth. In *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias (1982), for instance, describes how the development of sovereign states in Western Europe went hand in hand with changes in table manners and speech habits as well as self-disciplining. Passions and emotions, especially in public, became increasingly seen as barbarian and even as disruptive to the social order. Elias shows how the elite’s politics of moralization and corresponding transformation of consciousness of norms and values cannot be detached from the social process of sovereign state formation. Emile Durkheim defines the moral change he observes in modernizing (individualizing, industrializing, secularizing, bureaucratizing) society as a transformation from mechanical to organic solidarity. The social processes of structural differentiation of local communities into contractual associations, as such, were not intentionally brought about. However, the active intervention of the government became necessary when community norms of ancient feudal, craft guild or rural relations no longer functioned to regulate moral conduct. The government was the only institution that still had the power to prevent individuals from collapsing into immoral or amoral conduct (egoism and anomie) by instituting and enforcing new moral norms (Shilling and Mellor 1998).

In modernizing society, for Durkheim, the government was the central organ of moral discipline (Ruonavaara 1997). “The Fundamental Duty of the State”, he (1992, 69) stresses, “is to persevere in calling the individual to a moral way of life.” In Durkheim’s state-centric
sociology of morality, the government, as representative of the sovereign (king or people), is the main author that shapes determines the morality of modernizing society, particularly in the absence of alternative authoritative institutions (like the family, guild and church) that in pre-modern society, in what Auguste Comte (1974, 219) has labelled as Christian Europe, had this social function. For instance, sovereign state intervention in all spheres of social life is hardly resisted when churches become increasingly powerless or fail to call the faithful to a Christian, moral or charitable way of life or when fellow-citizens can no longer count on each other’s charity for the fulfilment of their needs.

In Western Europe, sovereign states in general and welfare states in particular typically developed in contexts of modernization, when the Church could no longer cater for the welfare of its poor. In Christian Europe, welfare was viewed as a religiously motivated, and experienced, charity. The destitute men and women of Christian Europe symbolized Christ’s poverty and, considered from Durkheim’s functionalist sociological perspective, enabled and encouraged the Christian virtues. Voluntary poverty, or giving up one’s own welfare for the sake of the soul, was a most important Christian virtue (Zijderveld 1999, 17-18).

In modernizing society, however, religious charity, the gratuitous provision of welfare to the other person out of love or faith, is replaced by the legal entitlement to benefits for all (rich and poor) citizens alike. Charity becomes legal and hence secularized, as Alexis de Tocqueville observed in his *Memoir on Pauperism* (c.f. Ossewaarde 2004), in the sense that “charity” becomes a social right provided by the welfare state. The new moral order of the capitalist industrial society that the welfare state attempts to organize is such that religious charity is frowned upon and rejected as old-fashioned, in-egalitarian, degrading dependence and humiliation (Zijderveld 1999, 114). In the new moral order, the marginalized are socially equal to others in terms of their social citizenship. They have a legal right to state assistance (Obler 1986). In other words, the moral order of the welfare state, in the modernizing context, is defined and legitimized by equal social rights.

During the Cold War era, the moral order of the welfare state, in which social equality, emancipation from communities, national solidarity and distributive justice were the prominent values, was relatively stable in Western Europe. Welfare functioned both to rebuild national institutions after WWII and to silence communist opposition of marginalized groups to the capitalist nation-state. With the decline of the communist threat of violent protests or the final victory of capitalism (Fukuyama 1989), however, the welfare state faced a kind of political crisis, including a legitimacy crisis. The post-Cold War context of global crises, EMU membership, budgetary restraints, and the EU’s Lisbon Strategy necessitated a new set of norms (Page 2007, 123). The old West European welfare state norms of social citizenship and corresponding benefit entitlements could not be reconciled with the new global capitalist institutions and processes. The morality of self-responsibility came to replace the old liberal morality of solidarity. Citizens are now rendered accountable for their own conduct, independently of their social position in global capitalist society (Coekelbergh 2006, 246; Ossewaarde 2007). The post Cold War politics of moralization consists in persuading citizens to become “responsible citizens”. Hence, they are assigned roles in the control of global social problems, including crime watch, neighbourhood development, migration, environmental conservation and poverty alleviation. In this way, it is expected that citizens carry a certain degree of responsibility for their own safety and welfare instead of being
completely dependent on their sovereign. It becomes a virtue to save for one’s old days and to apply the latest technology to securing one’s home against burglary.

Sociologists of morality have observed that the moralized politics of welfare state reform, and the current welfare state’s calling of the individual to a self-responsible way of life invades and transforms communities, including nationhood, neighbourhood, and the family. Strategies of moralization threaten to become effective means for suppressing value conflicts and for socially excluding those who do not fit in the new moral picture. It has been noted by Andrew Millie (2008) that the moral judgement “anti-social behaviour” can be applied to almost any kind of conduct that is considered to be “morally undesirable” according to the new social policy objectives. Sociologists have repeatedly stressed how elites make extensive use of mass media to create moral panics, which further legitimize the introduction of measures to control the causes of the panics, the “anti-social behaviour” expressed by the immoral agent. In the new welfare state, self-responsibility has become the key moral virtue, while anti-social behaviour has become equivalent to immoral conduct. Several scholars have pointed out that it is typically underdogs that are identified as anti-social or morally irresponsible (Silverstein 2005; Sampson 2009). In the remainder of this paper, three Dutch policy innovations are reconstructed in an attempt to illustrate the workings of the moralized politics and how the moral revisions result in the invasion and transformation of community life in the Dutch nation, neighbourhood and family.

The Dutch Debate on Norms and Values

The Dutch norms and values debate was, at least formally, inaugurated in 2002 by the Fortuynist Minister of Economic Affairs Herman Heinsbroek. The political context of the debate was the transformation of the Dutch welfare state, namely the reform of the social policy of multiculturalism of the old welfare state. The multiculturalist policy of the old welfare state was designed to sustain the culture of minority guest workers who were expected to return to their home country after a while. During the 1990s, when guest workers got the possibility to stay in, that is, to immigrate to the Netherlands, the need to integrate people who had been living outside main Dutch society made itself be felt. Multiculturalist policies became integration policies. The realisation, articulated by elite public spokespersons in the Dutch media, that many migrants, who were now no longer labelled as guests but as allochtonous subjects, did not share the same Dutch norms and values, led to waves of moral panics. Such panics flowed from the anxiety that the Dutch social consensus, perceived to be a moral consensus, would tumble down because of outsiders. Such fear became translated into slogans like the Dutch “multicultural illusion” and the “multicultural drama” in the late 1990s (Schinkel 2008), thereby criticising the multiculturalist social policies for having discouraged commitment to the Dutch identity. Migrants were now expected to express their loyalty to, and responsibility for, the new moral order that was in the making (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007, 11). In other words, the new integration policies involved the

---

1 Herman Heinsbroek was Minister of Economic Affairs from 22 July 2002 until 16 October 2002—the moment when the coalition of the Christian Democratic Party, Liberal Party and Fortuynist Party collapsed.
autochthonous as moral judges, and hence not only demanded stronger loyalties to Dutch nationhood, but also legitimized the new moral order in which entitlements, including cultural rights, were fading away.

Since the late 1990s, Pim Fortuyn, first as a popular publicist and then as a rising politician who eventually founded the Fortuynist party in 2002, had made the Dutch population anxiously aware of the failures of the old, cultural rights-centred, social policy. He pointed out the “senseless” violence, incivility, islamization of Dutch culture, the disproportionate number of migrants in Dutch prisons, and, most importantly, the failures of the Dutch government, headed during the 1990s by then Labour’s Prime Minister Wim Kok, to respond adequately to such moral challenges (Pels 2003). Through Fortuyn’s prominent presence in public debates, as the spokesperson of the new, self-responsibility-centred social policy, a powerful mediatized awareness of anti-social behaviour was created. The general perception that anti-social or irresponsible behaviour had been steadily growing in Dutch society was confirmed by two dramatic events: first, the assassination of Fortuyn before the 2002 elections by a Dutch green extremist; then the assassination of Islam critical filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004, by an Islamist extremist from Moroccan descent (Schinkel 2008). Fortuynism rose in response to such events, as a promise to protect the normative foundations of the Dutch nation that was felt to be under siege by badly integrated and socially excluded immigrants (Foner 2008).

Fortuyn shook up the Dutch nation in a provocative manner. He portrayed a nation under siege from within (its own government, its old welfare state bureaucracies) and from without (immigrants) in a most sensational way. He named the Dutch “moral diseases” that threatened to destroy the normative foundations of Dutch nationhood (Spruyt 2007). In 2002, the newly elected Christian Democrats’ Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende strongly stimulated the norms and values debate to confront the moral challenges that Fortuyn had discerned, and which had aroused public anxieties in such unprecedented ways. For the Prime Minister, the norms and values debate was an instrument to re-unite an anxious nation in a new, responsibility-centred Dutch state, to seek and find a national normative ground in the global era that raised challenges to nationhood.2

Balkenende, a former Professor of Christian Social Thought on Society and Economy at the Free University of Amsterdam, used, in his role as the new Prime Minister, powerful symbols and historical resources to portray an essential Dutch moral identity. For instance, he repeatedly glorified the “Dutch East India Company mentality”, which, in his view, exemplified the “real Dutch character” in global entrepreneurialism, innovativeness, optimism and prospering.3 These East India Company values, rather than the ethos of the old welfare state, seemed of particular importance for national flourishing in the era of global

---

2 In a 2006 notice of the Christian Democrats called “Bij Vier Jaar Waarden en Normen” (Norms and Values at Four Years), the Prime Minister says that he is satisfied about the increasing consciousness about norms and values in the Dutch nation.

3 Besides rhetoric persuasions in keynote speeches, national websites, such as http://www.zestiennioenmensen.nl (which refers to the size of the Dutch population, sixteen million people), were organized to make the normative structure of the nation manifest in values like volunteering, self-care and entrepreneurship.
capitalism. Hence, he tried to persuade the Dutch population to respect and uphold the Dutch Calvinist customs of hard work, self-responsibility and entrepreneurship. Balkenende, however, not only manifested his commitment to Calvinist values, but he explicitly presented himself as a communitarian; and did not find any contradiction between Calvinist and communitarian values. The Dutch PM invited the communitarian sociologist Amitai Etzioni during the 2004 symposium “Europe, a beautiful idea”, and he tried to extend the Dutch norms and values debate to the EU, during the Dutch EU presidency.4

Fortuyn’s ideas and observations, particularly his portrait of the Muslim immigrants as anti-social agents, that is, as irresponsible citizens who parasitically misuse their welfare state entitlements and do not fulfil their duties, which include work, towards the Dutch state, became most popular in the coalitional People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy. This party’s spokespersons, in particular Hirsi Ali, Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders, managed to dominate the norms and values debate by focussing on the normative integration of immigrants in the Dutch nation and by stigmatizing those who failed to carry their self-responsibility, that is, failed to show their commitment to Dutch culture. In other words, in the period 2002-2006, Fortuyn’s warning about the islamization of Dutch culture became the highlight of parliamentary and media discussions in which the so-called “Muslim anthropology” and the “Muslim family structure” were rejected.

In the norms and values debate, the relationship between political elites, media and parliament was a very intimate one, with MPs and ministers making highly controversial films to convey their messages to the masses. MP Hirsi Ali wrote the script of the controversial film Submission that was directed by her friend Theo van Gogh in 2004. In eleven minutes, Hirsi Ali provocatively pictured what she defined as the immoral and criminal gender relationships (including rape) in traditional Muslim families and how such relationships undermined what she labelled as the liberal foundations of Dutch society. In 2006, Hirsi Ali published her book The Caged Virgin, in which she furiously raged at a variety of moral crimes committed against women in Muslim families, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, denial of education, and sexual abuse by family members (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007, 3).

Integration Minister Rita Verdonk was responsible for the making of the so-called “naturalising film” (inburgeringsfilm). Through this integration policy instrument, the Ministry expressed its particular interpretation of the Dutch moral identity to potential newcomers, in the form of provocative images of kissing homosexuals and semi-nudity.5 The film appeared to have been inspired by a 2001 event, when, in the Netherlands, a migrant imam had publicly condemned homosexuality and had equated gays with pigs (Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007, 19). The film makes a moral statement that there is no place for such illiberal views in the Dutch moral order; and that a pre-condition for social inclusion is to embrace the Dutch liberal views with regard to sexualities, families and gender relationships. Judith Butler (2008, 3-4) has identified Verdonk’s policy as “sexual politics”, which articulates

---

4 The symposium “Europe, a beautiful idea,” was held on 7 September 2004 in the Hague. See also http://www.nexus-instituut.nl/pages.php/conferentie.html.

5 The film was labelled and banned in countries like Morocco, Bangladesh and Pakistan as pornographic material.
sexual freedom in a set of controversial images to communicate liberal moral norms of gay
and lesbian sexuality that immigrants would need to adapt to enter the Dutch polity.

Geert Wilders, who broke away from the Liberal Party in 2004 because he fundamentally
disagreed with the party position that Turkey could potentially become a member of the EU,
to found his own anti-Islam party (called the Party for Freedom and Progress), made his
own anti-Koran film, Fitna, in 2008. In Fitna, Islam, with its Sharia customs, is depicted as
a global threat and deviant morality of violence, crime and intolerance. Wilders encouraged
and maintained the moral panic of “islamization” and “multicultural drama” with his
provocative slogan of the “tsunami of islamization”, which, for him, signified a new invasion
of Asiatic hordes. In his film, and in his party pamphlet, Wilders makes it clear that, as far
as his new party is concerned, Islamic cultures cannot be reconciled with the Dutch moral
identity; and hence Muslim immigrants can only be socially included if they do not express
their religion publicly. Moreover, he deliberately framed the integration problem as a welfare
state issue, introducing, in his 2010 election campaign, the slogan that “Henk and Ingrid
[common Dutch names] pay for Ahmed and Fatima.”

The norms and values debate strongly resembled a theatre podium for a select few actors
who appeared successful in the strategic use of rhetoric and symbols to catch the imagination
of a Dutch population that, in the process of welfare state reform and the loss of some former
entitlements, had become already highly vulnerable to moral panics. The media has shown
itself to be a most willing instrument in this spectacle. The most frivolous provocations were
widely heard and attracted popular attention and support. Dutch history, so often referred
to by various spokespersons as the source for a contemporary moral foundation of Dutch
nationhood, was diversely and strategically reconstructed to suit moral regulatory purposes.
Some spokespersons, like Wilders, pleaded for a revitalized kind of an essentially Judaeo-
Christian and humanist Dutch nation; while others, like Balkenende, pointed out the timeless
Dutch entrepreneurial spirit and the Dutch Golden Age of the seventeenth century. In any
case, the Dutch debate on norms and values, now in its eighth year, has revealed the impact
of Fortuynist populism in the process of welfare-state reform. More importantly, it has
legitimized new techniques of moral regulation, which appeared useful in governing the shift
from the old, welfare rights-centred, multiculturalist policies to the new, self-responsibilities
and social conformism-centred, integration policies.

The Responsible Citizenship Charter

The “Responsible Citizenship Charter” was introduced in 2009 while the one-sided
debate on norms and values was still raging. This new policy instrument, which is effectuated
through a website (http://www.handvestburgerschap.nl), brochure, roundtable discussions,
elite interviews and a 2010 calendar, proposes or rather, states a “value catalogue”. The values
that belong to the new moral order and are deemed to realise consensus are promulgated.
The four core values that are listed in the catalogue are respect, mutual engagement, future-
orientation, and active commitment to Dutch society. The deliberate purpose of the Charter is to propagate and create a new type of citizenship. It is explicitly stated that citizenship is not only a political or legal identity (holding legal rights as a member of a political community), but that it also a moral identity entailing moral duties and responsibilities.

Social or moral behaviour is expressed by the responsible citizen who pays attention to others, helps the weak and does voluntary work, being open to others, being future-oriented, having respect for the environment, and keeping neighbourhoods clean. The 2010 responsible citizenship calendar mentions fifty-three manifestations of what is believed to be moral and anti-social behaviour. It includes slogans, examples of responsibility and anti-social behaviour, and pictures of happy-looking citizens who live a moral life. The calendar is estimated as a useful means of inculcation (education), through reminding the Dutch citizens of the new norms on a daily basis. The norms that are listed and illustrated by photos include being socially active after retirement, doing voluntary work, consuming responsibly, scouting, more women in top positions, and learning the Dutch language.

The initiator of the Charter, the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Guusje ter Horst, explained the key idea behind this new policy instrument in her 2008 Volkskrant interview. In this interview, the Minister stressed that the old welfare state had been rights-centred, with citizens being identified as entitlement claimants. Such rights-centeredness maximized government responsibilities and minimized the duties and responsibilities of the citizen. In the new, global capitalist social order, all actors, including citizens, are now called to bear responsibility for the quality of social life and that of their direct living environments. The Minister made use of the interview to mention the new moral norms of responsible citizenship. She emphasized, for instance, that, in the case of calamity, citizens should help themselves for at least the first three days, and not passively wait or rely on the government to take care of them.7

In the interview, the Minister made it clear that the Charter was going to be introduced in 2009 as the government’s pedagogical instrument that belonged to what she called a “decency offensive”.8 The Charter, indeed, was designed to morally educate the Dutch population in responsible citizenship. The decency offensive was believed to be needed to tackle public issues of civic apathy, verbal abuse, waves of violence directed against civil servants (police officers, firemen, ambulance personnel, aid workers, etc.), authority crisis, ill will and lack of respect. These moral problems are explicitly and vividly mentioned by the Minister in her interview and are also repeatedly recalled in the policy documentations, the brochure and the 2010 calendar of the Charter. The Minister explains the rationale of the Charter in the following words:

I want to stimulate people to actively participate. Voting. Not standing at the sidelines and shouting, or anonymously and cowardly swear on the internet. No, feeling yourself responsible, becoming a member of a civil society association or a political party.9

---

This quote reveals that, for the Minister, the new moral consensus requires people who socially conform to the new norms, through active participation and membership. Responsible citizens are explicitly called to become members of associations and to condemn anti-social behaviour and the use of deviant or aggressive language. Moreover, the Minister has called citizens to a moral way of life in the new order by persuading them to photograph, with their mobile telephones, anti-social behaviour or manifest aggressive and abusive conduct.10

In her interview, the Minister explicitly promotes specific values like respect, decency and commitment to local neighbourhoods, which are also the criteria for distinguishing between moral and responsible behaviour on the one hand, and immoral and anti-social behaviour on the other hand. She explains:

When you ask commitment from people, you will get it. We cannot enforce this nationally. It must be on the local level. What was meant to be a green oasis in the city, has often become a dirty place of garbage, dung and tramps. Give residents money so that they can reconstruct their own park. Then they will deal with everyone who kicks up a row.11

In the above quote, responsible behaviour is expected to result in a “green oasis”, while the meaning of anti-social behaviour is symbolized by the ghetto image of the “dirty place of garbage, dung and tramps.” The Minister portrays the marginalized, symbolized in her terms of dirty neighbourhoods and tramps, as the signs of physical and social disorders. The green oasis, on the other hand, is believed to be the outcome or reward of responsible citizenship, here defined as residents who actively carry responsibility for enforcing urban discipline and for keeping their neighbourhood clean and orderly. Ter Horst introduces the budget as a policy innovation that gives responsible residents the financial aid to construct, cultivate and maintain their own green oasis, and, thereby, experience the park, or other public spaces, as their own. Then, residents will responsibly watch over it and “keep it clean”—both physically, socially and morally.

The Minister presents the government as the role model for responsible citizenship. The government, in her view, is expected to take the lead in the reconstruction of decency, both in the decent exercise of legislative power and executive power. Parliamentary morals, particularly the use or abuse of language, have been subject to debate. Suggestions have been made to reintroduce the term “dear representative” (instead of using a person’s name) to address MPs. It has been perceived that the dignity of the parliament has been undermined in the past decade and that anti-social behaviour has spread through verbal abuse, hate speech, vulgarization and hysterical debates in the parliament. MPs who fail to fulfil their role models and instead use vulgar language are perceived as anti-social, which may invite and encourage further irresponsible behaviour.12 The Responsible Citizenship Charter, therefore, also seeks to turn MPs into inspirational role models for responsible Dutch citizens, who are, like their MPs, persuaded to actively manifest decency in the public domain.

12 It must be noted that former MP Hirsi Ali and particularly current MP Geert Wilders have received a large number of death threats.
The executive power too is presented as a role model in the Charter. The specific norms for Dutch executive power are laid down and evaluated according to the World Bank “good governance” criteria of the integrity and accountability of civil servants. A new Dutch code of good governance has been introduced in 2009, disseminated through a brochure, in a deliberate attempt to win the trust of citizens and to morally regulate the civil service’s interactions with citizens, including service orientation or client-friendliness. In the years preceding the introduction of the new code, the Dutch government had designed new integrity norms (for instance, civil servants ought not to accept gifts worth more than 50 euro and are accountable to their managers for received gifts) and it had reintroduced the oath of office. Integrity policy tried to institutionalize the so-called “balkenende norm”, to persuade public managers that they ought not to earn a higher salary than the Prime Minister, which was 158,000 euro per annum in 2005 and 180,000 euro in 2010.

In sum, the political and administrative role models of responsible citizenship that are presented in the Charter function to provide the personified images of the desired loyalty towards the national and neighbourhood community. In the Charter, citizenship is no longer organized around a notion of legal rights and no longer signifies the active exercise of legal entitlements. Citizenship is no longer bound to the Dutch welfare state. In the Charter, citizenship is organized around a notion of self-responsibility and the active exercise of moral duties in the local neighbourhood. Citizenship becomes primarily bound to the neighbourhood community, in which responsible residents, whose conduct is inspired by catalogued community values like mutual engagement and active commitment, conform to the new normative expectations that the Charter communicates.

**The Strength of the Family**

While the Responsible Citizenship Charter aimed at changing the attitudes of Dutch citizens towards their government, their neighbourhoods, and their nation (particularly the Dutch language community) by appealing to their moral sense, the memorandum *The Strength of the Family*, introduced in November 2008 by the Minister for Youth and Families, stressed that the Dutch government saw the need to invest in social cohesion within families. The special Ministry for Youth and Families, headed by Christian Union leader André Rouvoet was set up after the 2006 elections. The family was seen as the most important institution (community) to cultivate children, the future citizens, so that they may internalize the four core values of the catalogue. In the memorandum, the government announced that its policy programme Youth and Family had been designed to enable citizens to spend more time with their families.

The possibility of flexible working hours was deemed to be an effective measure to enable more family time. *The Strength of the Family* explicitly identified post-industrial...
work as employee-friendly, making it easier to combine work with family life. Hence, the memorandum did not recognize any conflict between an active labour market participation of both parents and a harmonious family life. In fact, according to the document, post-industrial work strengthened the family. The extra investment in families included budgets to enable children to participate in associations and thereby acquire the social skills needed to participate in Dutch society. The upbringing of children was to be re-organized through a so-called modernization of pedagogical services for children and families. In the memorandum, the “strengthening of upbringing” involved the establishment of information centres, such as the international Children’s Rights Centre, the Centre for Youth and Family, in each municipality. The government also expressed its intention of further developing the national Dutch Youth Institute. The document stressed that the overarching purpose of these initiatives was to shape “a good and healthy pedagogical climate” (Ministerie van Jeugd en Gezin 2008, 14).

A good and healthy pedagogical climate, the memorandum stated, was one in which “children are brought up to mature citizens who carry responsibility for themselves, their family, and their social environment” (Ministerie van Jeugd en Gezin 2008, 14). Although such a description may seem unproblematic, it does leave the question of what “mature citizens” or “responsibility” mean unanswered. The mature citizen, here, is the responsible citizen whom we also encountered in the Charter Responsible Citizenship, whereby responsibility is understood in terms of self-reliance, as not depending on welfare assistance. The strength of the family is its ability to socialize children according to the particular morality that suits the prevailing economic, cultural and political contexts of the global capitalist era.

In The Strength of the Family, it was assumed that, in what are labelled as “strong families”, children are turned into responsible citizens, while in what the authors claim to be “problem families,” they are turned into anti-social subjects. The policy image of the problem family—considered to be a disorderly family—is loaded with public anxieties about youth gangs, loverboys, sexual immorality, excessive alcohol drinking, debts, behavioural disorders, anomie and extremism of youngsters, child abuse and domestic violence. These moral issues have attracted a lot of media and parliamentary attention and helped to legitimize the content of the memorandum and announced policies. In other words, the moral panics aroused by a perceived increasing immorality of the Dutch youth functioned to legitimize state intervention in the intimacy of the family sphere.

The media played a prominent role in triggering and fuelling the moral panics. The Dutch TV documentary Sex Sells, in particular, showed interviews with youngsters who declared that sex was essentially a commodity for them and told their interviewer that it was normal for them to have sex at 11, 12 or 13 years of age. In an immediate reaction to this documentary, broadcasted a week after the introduction of the memorandum, Minister Rouvoet referred to the “dissolute sexual morality of youth” and pointed out that “an entire generation tends to grow up with “cut up ideas”.” Similarly, in a speech on child abuse in 2009, the Minister pointed at the “shocking statistics” that revealed that, in a city like

---

14 “Seksmoraal van jeugd is abnormaal,” Algemeen Dagblad, 10 november 2008.
Rotterdam, 20% of teenage girls were victims of domestic violence; that, annually more than 100,000 Dutch children were being abused in their own families; and that, 50 children died every year in the Netherlands as a result of abuse. In sum, he confirmed that the safe haven was undermined by irresponsible parents who manifested sexually deviant and anomic behaviour.

In the memorandum, such anti-social behaviour or violation of moral norms was directly related to the social order, in particular, to social position. It was notably observed that the moral deviance of the problem family was primarily a lower class phenomenon. The document stated that statistics showed that child abuse was seven times more likely to happen in families with very poorly educated parents, five times more likely in families in which parents were unemployed, and 3.5 times more likely in migrant families if the level of education was low. Literally, it is said that “especially a low income, a low education of the parents, a non-Western cultural background and single parenthood play a role” in family weakness and corresponding poor pedagogy (Ministerie van Jeugd en Gezin 2008, 35).

In The Strength of the Family, good parenthood is defined as the fulfilment of the parental responsibility of bringing up children to become responsible citizens in the new moral order under construction. The strengthening or supporting of the family is primarily understood as equipping parents with pedagogical information, that is, professional advice about raising their own children. Through such empowerment and equipment, the new moral norms of upbringing children are at the same time propagated. In other words, particular norms and values are promulgated by government officials and families are expected to appropriate them, live according to them and raise their offspring according to them. The prevailing assumption is that families have lost touch with morality, as the statistics of divorce, domestic violence and sexual promiscuity would seem to confirm. In this perspective, families are nearly perceived as willing executives of the government, who can receive some form of support if necessary.

Although the document stresses that the upbringing of children is primarily a parental responsibility, children are defined as legal entities, as human rights holders who have the right to be protected against child abuse. In his speech “We need to open our eyes”, Rouvoet proposed to foster a governance network or “partnership of well-trained and alert professionals, like doctors, emergency workers, teachers, midwives, as well as staff at crèches and sports clubs. They can all identify child abuse early on and help stop it.” Such actors were called to intervene in family affairs when children’s rights were violated in irresponsible acts of child abuse. Also, governance actors were called to intervene in family affairs when they perceived, with their eyes opened, that parents failed to carry their responsibility for educating the self-responsible citizens of the future.


Concluding Remarks

In the Netherlands, the transformation of the welfare state in the post-Cold War era of global capitalism has been accompanied by a new political moralism. In the past decade of welfare state reform, strategies of moralization have aimed at maximizing self-responsibility and, as the Dutch Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations so forcefully articulates, at lowering expectations concerning welfare state assistance and the state organization of distributive justice. A new hierarchy of moral values has been catalogued. New images of the immoral agent, typically applicable to (Muslim) migrants, beggars and unruly youth, have been created and articulated in terms of irresponsibility, anti-sociality and dirt. Through policy instruments like the Dutch norms and values debate, the Responsible Citizenship Charter and The Strength of the Family, citizens, neighbourhood residents, parents and children are called to adopt a particular lifestyle that has received the stamp of moral righteousness. In this sense, the norms and values debate was no debate properly understood at all since there was no public morality to be sought. The question of whether a fruitful debate is at all possible given the circumstances is for the present purpose not relevant. It is sufficient to stress that the debate was used to promulgate a ready-made morality that served the purpose of enterprise and global capitalism.

The perceived irresponsibility and anti-sociality of troublesome persons and groups has become a major policy target of Dutch regulation and has received wide media coverage, further reinforcing the public anxiety (and phobias). This perception of crises and imminent moral chaos, thoroughly institutionalized in texts, speeches, media images, films, slogans, metaphors, and so forth, has legitimized a politics of moralization in various social policy areas—integration policy, neighbourhood policy, family policy, and so forth—of the Dutch state in the past ten years. The above analysis illustrates that the distinction between good and bad communities, such as families (good and evil defined in strength and weakness respectively) and neighbourhoods (good and evil in metaphors of the green oasis and dirt respectively), is determined by moralizing policy agents. The welfare state reformers have rhetorically persuaded the citizenry, through an extensive use of media, to internalize a ready-made set of moral norms and catalogued values and also to cooperate in their enforcement in the public space, neighbourhoods and their own families. In other words, the language of a particular morality or a particular morality tout court has been used to realise political ends, including the transformation of the welfare state.

The welfare state reforms of the past decade, in particular the new social legislations that have implied less legal entitlements and more self-responsibilities, have met little resistance and have been widely accepted by all political parties, including the Social Democrats, and public opinion. 17 Jürgen Habermas perceives such a lack of resistance as being due to the increased indifference towards issues of distributive justice and the trend towards the
breakdown in organic solidarity, which, in his view, is typical for global capitalist society. According to Habermas, resistance to the new political moralism, which he witnesses all over Western Europe, can evolve out of a social movement in civil society, but such protest is not likely to emerge under global capitalist conditions. “Nothing will change in the parameters of public discussion and in the decisions of the politically empowered actors without the emergence of a social movement which fosters a complete shift in political mentality”, says Habermas. “The tendencies towards a breakdown in solidarity in everyday life do not exactly render such a mobilization within western civil societies probable” (Habermas 2010, 74).

Policy makers, belonging to different parties from right to left, could reach a post-Cold War consensus regarding the reform of the Dutch welfare state only because their party ideologies had been conquered by the new morality and perception of the new economic-political context. The old welfare state norms (multiculturalism, redistribution, and so forth) had been so heavily criticized and the new norms (integration, self-responsibility, etc.) had been so widely welcomed in the media that any divergent view would seem ridiculous and outdated. The elites who revolted most radically against the old norms have also been the most popular and media-imaged ones. Fortuyn, who was voted as the greatest Dutchman ever in a Dutch TV program in 2004, is a key political figure who, in his struggle against the old welfare state establishment, managed more than anyone else to mobilize public opinion against the old multiculturalist policies. Populist politicians like Hirsi Ali, Verdonk and Wilders, who have attracted worldwide public attention, were able to break out of the Liberal Party, because they could appeal to Fortuyn’s critique of the liberal value of religious tolerance and his label of Islamic culture as “retarded.” Wilders recalled this label and emphasized that Islam was first of all a political ideology, in his recent Berlin speech (2 October 2010). And he explicitly drew a parallel between Islam and communism, claiming that Islam is today’s red scare, thereby making the argument that the reformed welfare state is to be re-organized to keep Islam in check, just as the old welfare state had functioned to keep communism in check.

Politicians like Fortuyn, Hirsi Ali and Wilders have received global media attention and they have been regularly invited speakers. Wilders in particular has been highly successful in making the news around the world. He has been on tour in various countries to show his Fitna. His film has been an EU issue in 2008, when the foreign ministers of the member states collectively rejected the film. In the US, a newly established activist network called American Freedom Alliance has awarded him its prize for courageously promoting, defending and upholding Western values and ideals. In 2010, a Dutch Euro-MP, a member of the Freedom Party, nominated him for the Sakharov prize for Freedom of Thought. In other

---

18 In fact, instead of the mobilization of protest against the populist revisions within western civil societies, uncivil forms of resistance within global capitalist society has been triggered. Fortuyn and opinion maker Van Gogh have been assassinated. Hirsi Ali received her first police protection in 2002 and was repeatedly forced into hiding. Wilders receives some 300 death threats per year, many of them delivered from global Islamist terrorist groupings.

19 One aspect of the moral re-engineering for reform purposes was that the moral value of distributive justice, which had inspired much of the old social policies, was to be wiped out of the collective consciousness.
words, the influence of Wilders’ moralized, if not sacralized, politics has not been limited to the Netherlands, but has had worldwide reception. In the same year, Wilders established the International Freedom Alliance as a global network of individuals united against Islamic culture.

The significance of the Dutch moralized politics does not limit itself to the Netherlands only. Although the Netherlands may be unique, to some extent, in having delivered 21st century global capitalist populists like Fortuyn, Verdonk, Hirsi Ali and Wilders, who publicly voice their opinions regarding immigrants and obstinately hold on to their ideas regarding integration, the moralized politics as analyzed above is not specifically Dutch. In Germany, for instance, Wilders’ friend Rene Stadtkewitz founded his own anti-Islam party in 2010. Political elites from different parties like Thilo Sarrazin (SPD), Horst Seehofer (CSU) and Angela Merkel (CDU) have, in 2010, finally broken the German taboos and the rules of political correctness. They have criticized migrants for “under-performing”, “cultural backwardness”, and “parasitism”; and they have used the populist slogans of “multiculturalism is dead” and “multiculturalism has utterly failed.”

In the present context of moral revisions for the sake of economic and political purposes, “freedom” used by so many voices, to exclude and aggrieve, seems to have become rather deformed and unrecognizable in Western Europe. The political apathy, high vulnerability of citizens to populist rhetoric and farcical debates are worrying signs of a huge “democratic deficit” in global capitalist societies. The intimate cooperation between popular figures and the media only aggravates the situation. The bit of reason (intellect) that is left runs the risk of being stupefied by xenophobia, moral panics and ideologies, which seem to revive in the global age of undermined national boundaries and cultural confrontations. An arbitrarily fixed moral order that is potentially global capitalist in scope paralyzes and annihilates the need to understand moral (dis)order and the substance of morality itself. The responsibly indoctrinated citizen, confronted with challenges of cultural and moral diversity, does not need to ask the painful moral question of whether what he or she is doing is just or good. The moral revisions do not involve and allow an exploration of possible moral orders and leave no room for doubt and self-correction. In this way, value conflicts, moral complexities and ambivalences are avoided and simplified in catalogues.

References


354


University of Twente,
School of Management and Governance,
Hallenweg 17,
7522 NH Enschede
The Netherlands
Tel.: +31 (0)53 489 3215
E-mail: m.r.rossewaarde@utwente.nl