

# Islam in the Spotlight: The Mediatisation of Politics in an Amsterdam Neighbourhood

Justus Uitermark and Amy-Jane Gielen

*[Paper first received, July 2008; in final form, November 2009]*

## Abstract

Conflicts over the presence of migrants and Muslims in Western societies have become increasingly 'mediatised' in recent years. Interactions between governments and migrants are now subject to constant scrutiny and the media have become a prime battleground for political struggles. This paper investigates the effects of mediatisation on the relationships between the government and civil society associations in one Amsterdam neighbourhood before and after a Muslim extremist assassinated film maker Theo van Gogh in November 2004. With the help of field theory, it is shown that media representations do not just reflect local realities, but in fact are a part and outcome of struggles between actors unequally invested with discursive power. Mediatisation thus transforms the logic of politics and alters the balance of power between different actors.

Terrorist attacks in the name of Islam and wars in the name of freedom have aggravated concerns and anxieties over the integration of Muslims into Western societies. In the Netherlands, the aftermath of the attacks of 11 September 2001 coincided with a dramatic political transformation. The populist politician Pim Fortuyn revolted against the pragmatism and consensus that had characterised Dutch politics before 2002. He portrayed Islam as a totalitarian ideology that had to be fought at every level and he declared that he

would stop immigration and force minorities to adapt to Dutch cultural norms and values. Fortuyn was leading the polls when an environmental activist assassinated him in May 2002. A couple of years later, in November 2004, an Islamic radical killed film-maker Theo van Gogh because he had made a movie with the right-wing parliamentarian and apostate Muslim Ayaan Hirsi Ali on the suppression of Muslim women. In the 10 days after the murder, mosques were vandalised and an Islamic school was set on fire.

**Justus Uitermark** is in the Department of Sociology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: justusuitermark@hotmail.com.

**Amy-Jane Gielen** is in the Department of Political Sciences, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: info@agadvies.com.

These are just some of the most extreme examples of a constant stream of incidents that receive massive media attention and that are somehow associated with the presence of migrants and especially Muslims in Western societies. Exactly what is at issue here—is it a clash of civilisations, a new wave of racism, a slow Islamic take-over or an expression of collective hysteria?—is subject to struggles between actors who promote different discourses to make sense of, and act on, integration issues. In this paper, we examine integration politics in one neighbourhood in Amsterdam and we especially zoom in on the relationship between the government and minority associations. How did mediatisation reshape the rules of politics and the relations between governance actors?

To answer this question, we develop the notion of discursive power in the first part of this paper. We then move on to De Baarsjes and examine how mediatisation has transformed the relationship between government and civil society in this neighbourhood. In order to bring out, in intimate detail, the mechanisms through which mediatisation operates, we focus specifically on discursive struggles over the so-called Contract with Society. This Contract was supposed to formalise and symbolise the joint action of the neighbourhood government and three mosques to counter Islamic radicalism. However, the analysis shows how negotiations over the Contract aggravated tensions within and between the different organisations. The paper concludes with the argument that mediatisation can aggravate inequalities among governance actors and create a politics of mirages where the production of images for a remote audience becomes more important than solving local problems.

## Mediatisation and Discursive Power

The concept of discursive power is crucial to our attempts to grasp the impact of mediatisation.

By discursive power, we refer to the ability to articulate a discourse, to disseminate it and to inscribe it into practices.<sup>1</sup> To scrutinise discursive power, we fuse elements of discourse analysis and Bourdieu's field theory. In Wacquant's words, Bourdieu's life work focuses upon the "continuous struggle" of "classes and other antagonistic social collectives"

to impose the definition of the world that is most congruent with their particular interests. The sociology of knowledge or cultural forms is *eo ipso* a political sociology, that is, a sociology of symbolic power. Indeed, the whole of Bourdieu's work may be interpreted as a materialist anthropology of the specific contribution that various forms of symbolic violence make to the reproduction and transformation of structures of domination (Wacquant, 1992, pp. 14–15)

Bourdieu employs the concept of fields to denote symbolic universes that have relative autonomy. Governance actors are located in different fields with different vernaculars, vocabularies and hierarchies. Representatives from these different fields interact in what Bourdieu refers to as a field of power—that is, the public sphere that is located at the intersection of the state bureaucracy, the political field and the media (Bourdieu, 1996, 1998; Couldry, 2003; Wacquant, 2008). How conflicts play out depends in part on where they play out within the field of power. Within the state bureaucracy, civil society associations and the government interact according to well-established rules of the game. There may be tensions and frictions, but these are attenuated through the formal procedures and result in incremental rather than in drastic transformation (Dahl, 1961, p. 321).

However, when politics mediatises, the rules of the game in the field of power change in at least two ways. First, mediatisation changes the *logic* of governance. It introduces new stakes for governance actors as their actions are, or

might be, perceived through a media gaze that casts the actors in a dramatised—heroic or heinous—role (Jasper, 1997). Maarten Hajer writes that

The media's wish for decor, for plots, for cliffhangers, or for framing policy in terms of conflicts, changes the conditions under which politics is made, and affects how politics is conducted (Hajer, 2009, p. 4).

Actors anticipate and respond to their representation in the media and they may even, as in the case to be discussed here, reconfigure their networks and practices in order to perform well in the media (Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008). Secondly, mediatisation changes the *composition* of interests involved as it pulls distant audiences into local politics. This means that governance actors are forced no longer to consider exclusively their local constituents or supporters, but also remote audiences that might have different interests and concerns. For instance, as this case study shows, Islamic associations in a neighbourhood like De Baarsjes are likely to be deeply concerned about the stigmatisation of Muslims, while large parts of the predominantly native media audiences are more likely to feel anxious about the presence and radicalisation of Muslims.

Through these two mechanisms—a different logic and a change in composition of interests—mediatisation alters the rules of the game and thus reconfigures power relations. It is no longer simply about who gets what, but also about the production of discourses and symbols for remote audiences. This does not imply that politics becomes 'merely symbolic' if that phrase is taken to mean that politics becomes superficial. To the contrary, it is very much corporeal and material. It is corporeal because the struggle for discursive power values and devalues embodied identities. Actors who operate in the spotlight care deeply about how they are portrayed. Discursive subordination can

breed frustration, anxiety and anger. Politics in the media moreover has a strong material component. Interventions in political processes, performances in the media or the organisation of civic initiatives require skills, connections and resources. Appreciating the material component of integration politics is especially important in the context of integration politics because class and ethnicity tend to coincide. Many migrants are locked into the lowest segments of the labour market, the educational system and the housing market (Bolt *et al.*, 2008; Snel *et al.*, 2007). All three of the mosque associations that we study have predominantly lower-class constituents, but it is significant that the Turkish mosque had predominantly middle-class representatives, while the Moroccan and Pakistani mosques had exclusively lower-class representatives. All three mosques, in turn, had much less resources than the government, which has professionals to liaise with the press, to prepare meetings and to write up agreements.

Discursive power is not a fixed property of individuals, but an emergent property of situationally differentiated relations. First, discursive power is situationally differentiated in the sense that actors with power in one setting do not necessarily have power in another setting. Actors with large stocks of cultural and economic capital can use these resources, but there are some settings where they cannot easily convert their resources into discursive power. For instance, the case study shows that administrators had ready access to the media and took the initiatives during the negotiations over the Contract but were much weaker when they tried to convince mosque constituents. Conversely, a representative of a Moroccan mosque association whose Dutch is poor and whose identity (as Muslim and Moroccan) is stigmatised is unlikely to have much power to promote his notions and ideas in the media, but he may be very influential within his own association. Secondly, discursive power is a relational achievement because

it requires the co-operation of other actors to disseminate their discourse and to incribe it into institutions. It follows that discursive power is not necessarily zero-sum. When actors share the same ideas and notions, they can jointly promote them and provide each other with mutual confirmation. In contrast, actors can deplete each other's discursive power if they criticise and stigmatise one another. Because of the complexities of discursive power—its dynamism, differentiation and relationality—it is not possible to say in advance exactly how mediatisation affects power relations. The intensity, nature and effects of mediatisation are mediated by local actors who each attempt to steer the process in a direction most congruent with their particular views and dispositions, but the outcome of the process is not under the monopolistic control of any of the actors involved.

## Questions and Methods

With this conceptual framework, we can formulate specific, empirical questions on how mediatisation reshapes the relationships between the government and civil society associations. Since the nature of our inquiry is exploratory, we pose rather open questions and do not specify hypotheses.

The first question to ask is how politics in De Baarsjes became mediatised. At what time and under what conditions became the media an intrinsic part of governance relations? To answer this question, we reconstruct the recent history of the neighbourhood and show how a series of global, national as well as local incidents and events forced the government and some civil society associations to anticipate and respond to media coverage.

The second question we seek to answer is: how did different actors respond to mediatisation, and why? We focus specifically on the Contract with Society. We interviewed 20 representatives of civil society associations, active neighbourhood residents, politicians

and civil servants who were all deeply involved in the neighbourhood's integration politics.<sup>2</sup> The interviews were conducted in 2006 but we did incidental follow-up interviews in 2007, 2008 and 2009. In addition, as part of a larger research project of Amsterdam's integration politics, we spoke with many respondents who are not based in the neighbourhood yet partake in the fields in which the neighbourhood actors are embedded. We asked all respondents to discuss their organisations, their own involvement with the organisation, their views on integration politics in the Netherlands and their views on the Contract. In other words, we asked them to situate the Contract and themselves within their respective fields. Complemented with analysis of newspaper articles, video footage and occasional observation of public meetings, these interviews provide a glimpse into the factors that explain why actors acted the way they did.

The third question is: what were the power relations between different actors in the neighbourhood and how did these evolve? We provide a rough sketch of governance relations prior to the assassination of Theo van Gogh, but we focus especially on the formation and transformation during the negotiations over the Contract. In interviews, we asked respondents to indicate how they felt about different meetings—Were they enthusiastic about the outcome? Did they talk with energy and confidence? Or were they angry or frustrated?—and looked for the factors that might explain fluctuations in their feelings. Apart from the interviews, we benefited strongly from the minutes that were taken during the negotiations between the government and various civil society associations. Even though the minutes were written up by government officials and are not entirely *ad verbatim*, in combination with the interviews these data allow us to reconstruct the negotiations in considerable detail. Through the minutes and the interviews,

we were able to see how and when actors articulated a discourse and they succeeded or failed to secure the co-operation of other actors. What we need to explain, then, is why some actors could determine the agenda, felt energised and staged media performances, while others had to follow, felt frustrated and were the object rather than the subject of media coverage.

### **Research Context: De Baarsjes**

In the 1990s, the city of Amsterdam decentralised some of its administrative tasks to newly established neighbourhood districts. Each of the 14 districts has its own elected government and governmental apparatus. Since important decisions about education, housing or the labour market are taken by the municipality and national government, the neighbourhood government is mainly responsible for the implementation of policies and the management of relations between government agencies and the population. With 35 000 residents, De Baarsjes is the smallest neighbourhood district of Amsterdam but besides that it is a rather ordinary neighbourhood. Constructed as part of an extension plan in the 1920s and 1930s, the district is both geographically and socially located between the prosperous historical core of Amsterdam and the relatively deprived garden city neighbourhoods on the edge of the city. About half of the population belongs to an ethnic minority according to standard national definitions (i.e. they were born abroad or at least one of their parents was), which is roughly equal to Amsterdam's average. Moroccans and Turks constitute around 10 per cent of the population, which is again close to the Amsterdam average. The share of households with a low income (less than 1000 euros per month) is slightly higher in De Baarsjes than in Amsterdam as a whole: 32.2 per cent versus 26.3 per cent (all data from Stadsdeel de Baarsjes, 2004).

There are five churches, three mosques and one synagogue. Connections between these associations and between different groups in the neighbourhoods have been fostered in part by the local welfare organisation that in the past employed 14 community workers but that has moved away from community organising since welfare was outsourced to private companies in 2003. As most urban neighbourhoods, De Baarsjes sometimes received media attention because of criminal incidents or local events. After 9/11, however, the media came to play a more important role in the governance of the neighbourhood, especially where relationships with Muslim migrants were concerned. Let us examine this process of mediatisation before moving on to a case study of the Contract.

### **The “Trick is to Use the Media”**

The mediatisation of governance relations in De Baarsjes was effected through one long conflict and punctuated by a series of incidents. The conflict was between the Turkish mosque and the neighbourhood government. The mosque—Aya Sofia—is part of the transnational Turkish-Islamic organisation Milli Gorus. The conflict revolved around Milli Gorus' plans to build the largest mosque in Amsterdam, the Western Mosque. These plans led to a conflict with neighbourhood residents who protested against the size of the building, the height of the minarets and the alleged misfit between the design of the mosque and the surrounding urban environment. The organisation could initially not obtain permits for building the mosque, so it had to engage in a juridical and political battle against the government (see Lindo, 1999). However, in the course of the 1990s, something seemed to change within Milli Gorus. Mehmet Sahin, the director of the company that was to construct the new mosque, declared that the Western Mosque would not function as a bastion of Turkish

conservatism, but as a vehicle for integration. Sahin, himself a successful business man, convinced Levant Yilmaz to give up his job as a manager at the ABN AMRO bank to become director of Milli Gorus. Yilmaz and Sahin started a top-down process of liberal reform and created more space for young and liberal Muslims within the organisation (for example, van Westerloo, 2004; van Heelsum *et al.*, 2004, p. 10). Yilmaz argued in the media and in public meetings that Muslims have a duty, both as citizens and as Muslims, to integrate into Dutch society. In response to these developments, Labour politicians in both the neighbourhood and the city government made Milli Gorus into a showcase example of successful integration. Levant Yilmaz, himself a member of the Labour Party, became a media personality and he was widely praised for his efforts to move Milli Gorus away from Turkish nationalism and religious conservatism.

### **A Disturbance of Multicultural Peace**

Other initiatives also flourished during this period. One important example is the dialogue group that was established almost directly after 11 September 2001. Community workers had originally brought the group together and organised a number of events—especially dialogues—in order to buffer the impact of the attacks on the neighbourhood. Some of the ties that were fostered in this period proved crucial in buffering the impact of an event that occurred within the neighbourhood itself. That event took place on 4 May 2003 at 20.00 hours when the casualties of the Second World War were commemorated with the traditional two minutes of silence. The commemoration took place close to the Aya Sofia mosque. Partly due to the efforts of the dialogue group, the ceremony had become an event in which about 40 people from different backgrounds participated. Yet the multicultural peace was brutally disturbed when a group of

Moroccan adolescents shouted “Jews need to be killed” (“*joden moeten we doden*”) during the moments of silence. Although such expressions of anti-Semitism and general disrespect during Second World War commemorations are not entirely unique, this case received massive media attention. Active participants in civil society were deeply concerned about the consequences for the reputation of the neighbourhood and they agreed to organise the event in 2004 in such a way that it would convey a positive image of the neighbourhood. Members of the group discovered that Moroccan soldiers had died in the Second World War and they used this piece of information to give the youngsters a place in the ceremony. Some would read out the names of the Moroccan soldiers who had died; others supervised the event. The local mosques were involved too: representatives of all three mosques placed flowers along with other officials and organisations. The neighbourhood volunteers, who had initially come together after 9/11 to cushion the local impact of international events, now structured a local event in order to make a positive appearance in the national media. And they succeeded: weeks before 4 May, Moroccan youths and administrators gave press interviews and made television appearances to demonstrate their joint commitment to the commemorations.

### **“The Trick is to Use the Media”**

While initially only community workers and the welfare department had been concerned with relationships between different ethnic groups in the neighbourhood, the government became more interested as the local events attracted media attention. When the neighbourhood government saw that the initiatives were gathering momentum, it offered support in the form of subsidies and facilities. This support was part of a larger strategy to present the civil society initiatives to the outside world through the media. The

chairman of the neighbourhood government, Jaap Van Gils, interprets his strategy towards the media as follows

If there is one thing that I have come to appreciate in the last five, six years, it is the role of communication ... and this has implications for your governance style. Other tasks like enforcement, service provision ... are important but they don't help you to win the war. ... When society is very tense, you will have to define a new role for the government and this, I would say, should be that a government orients itself towards the outside. That is the process we have gone through in the last five years (Van Gils, interview, 28 March 2006).

The chief of public relations, Saskia Wieringa, played a crucial role in this process. The daily board had started to appreciate the positive media representations and Saskia Wieringa's energetic advocacy of a more proactive media policy led to the crystallisation of an approach that would be further developed with great fervour between 2002 and 2006. This approach could be described as *real-time politics*: politicians engage with citizens in difficult and exciting situations under the direct scrutiny of the news media. Van Gils grasps the essence of this approach

You can think, 'It's just a neighbourhood.' ... [But] there are phenomena on all kinds of levels: the family, the street, education, health, the city, the world—and that all comes together in this one neighbourhood. So if you want to be player in that game, you have to use the media. I think that the government should use the media. The media also like to be used, because there is a wonderful possibility for team work. The media wants a story and we have a story. We give the story. But it is not finished, there are many risks (Van Gils, interview, 28 March 2006; emphasis added).

Wieringa refers to these risks as “cliff-hangers” and she knows that this is what

most journalists are interested in. She not only embodies a mediated view of politics but has strong connections to journalists whom she regularly serves with scoops and inroads into politics. One example was a soccer match between a Moroccan and a Jewish team that was organised by one particularly active member of the dialogue group, the Jewish homosexual Job Goudsmit. Goudsmit never even seems to think about any other possibility than to do the very thing that Van Gils made into his official policy: go out there, confront people and organise positive energy. He wholeheartedly supports and participates in real-time politics

The media can make you or break you. ... The trick is to use the media in such a way that you can communicate to the outside what you're doing. Saskia Wieringa and her whole network [of journalists, authors] functioned very well in this respect. ... She has this whole network and I literally just received it [through e-mail] (Goudsmit, interview, 16 May 2006).

The interest of the media in the neighbourhood initiatives had an immense energising effect in this period. Civil society organisations established or intensified cooperation and channelled their efforts into new initiatives, like the dialogue group, the World War commemorations, and Moroccan–Jewish soccer. There was a synergy between government and civil society at this stage; a feeling of neighbourhood pride that was boosted by largely self-generated and consciously channelled media attention. There were of course frictions among actors, but the collective commitment towards the improvement of the neighbourhood's social life and media reputation allowed a joint strategy. There were large inequalities in discursive power, but these were attenuated through the efforts of both the government and resourceful civil society

associations to help stigmatised groups to represent themselves and the neighbourhood. Moroccan youths, mosques and other civil society associations were incorporated into networks that had positive-sum power relations. However, these networks would break apart when the government exclusively focused on the mosque associations and tried to exploit rather than attenuate power inequalities.

### **After the Assassination: A Discursive Take-over by Administrators**

On 2 November 2004, an Islamic radical killed Theo van Gogh. The assassination sent shock waves through the Netherlands. Almost immediately, there was a debate whether the Netherlands was now “at war”, as deputy prime-minister Gerrit Zalm had stated. Opinion surveys showed that the support for Geert Wilders, who had just established a virulently anti-Islamic party, soared after the assassination. While right-wing politicians (like Wilders and Zalm) claimed that the assassination was definite proof that strategies of tolerance and accommodation had failed, social democrats claimed that the assassination increased the urgency to work together to curb the threat of polarisation (Hajer and Uitermark, 2008).

The daily board of De Baarsjes met immediately after the assassination to discuss what its approach to the ensuing crisis would be. The administrators reached an understanding about the course of action in an almost instant reflex. They had cultivated their dispositions to play the game of mediatised politics in recent years and the shock of the assassination only stimulated them to radicalise the approach that we have referred to as real-time politics. The vehicle this time was the ‘Contract with Society’, a symbolic contract with which the three local mosques were to commit themselves to prevent radicalisation among Muslim youth and to defend the freedom of speech.

The Contract only concerned the mosques in De Baarsjes but the administrators immediately conceived of the Contract intervention as an intervention in national integration politics. Alderman Pieter Groen remarks

There was no direct cause to think that something was going on in the mosques. But a lot of people in The Netherlands had the idea that the next bomber (*bommenlegger*) was being recruited in the mosque (Groen, interview, 3 May 2006).

The administrators considered it self-evident that local interventions should be designed in such a way they can be communicated to national media audiences. The administration had cultivated a sort of self-reflexivity that evaluated possible political moves against the yardstick of the quality of their anticipated representation in the media. Saskia Wieringa then devised the strategy to reach those audiences. Some governments and agencies were sending out invitations for dialogues or statements, but Wieringa felt that the notion of a ‘Contract’ could have a stronger impact

It has to bite in your brain, otherwise it will not stick—those are the terms in which communication people think. Make something visible, put it on a stage, and then it will be remembered. And for that to happen it always has to bite a little. ‘Intention to ...’, ‘agreement ...’, no that’s all nothing. It has to say ‘Boom!’. And when it says boom, the other says “ouch” (quoted in Onderwijzer, 2006, p. 27).

According to Wieringa, finished stories are not interesting for journalists; the media are after “cliff-hangers” and thus have to be involved when the outcome of a process is uncertain.

This is then the drive of mediatised politics: to show in real-time the thrills of integration politics. This strategy paid off for the administrators. Several high-profile television shows, magazines and newspapers devoted attention



**Table 1.** Time line of events since 2 November 2004

---

2 November 2004	van Gogh is assassinated
31 January 2005	Negotiations about the MMD
28 February 2005	First draft of protocol discussed with Aya Sofia
March 2005	Next round of negotiations; same participants but now also with invited press
April 2005	Ghousia joins the negotiations
23 June 2005	Next round; Nour is also invited and comes “to show respect” but does not enter into negotiations
28 August 2005	The last revisions are made and Aya Sofia declares it is definitely willing to sign
2 September 2005	Basak and Van Gils visit Ghousia to convince representatives and attendants to sign
4 September 2005	Ghousia calls Saskia Wieringa: they will not sign
5 September 2005	Press ceremony with Prime Minister Balkenende. Aya Sofia and Ghousia present, only Aya Sofia signed

---

to the Contract. Administrators were given ample space to explain that the Contract, for them, illustrated a new approach towards governance that was characterised by direct interactions with civil society associations, a focus on obligations and an awareness that co-operation is necessary to counter polarisation and radicalisation. These interventions have value for governance actors; they feel emboldened and energised when they can show to the nation how they engage with integration issues. The interventions also boosted the position of the Baarsjes administrators within the administrative field. They received many invitations from politicians and civil servants to explain “the success” or “uniqueness” of their approach which occupied a specific strategic niche; somewhere in between the ‘softness’ associated with the political left and the ‘toughness’ associated with the political right.

It is, in short, not surprising that these administrators look back on the process with considerable satisfaction. Yet how did actors in civil society respond to government-promoted mediatisation? The answer is that representatives of Aya Sofia (the Turkish mosque) responded enthusiastically, that representatives of Noor-ul-Haram (the Pakistani mosque) co-operated reluctantly and partially, and that Al Fath (the Moroccan mosque) dropped out of

the process after it had refused to sign the Contract. Let us look try to explain these divergent responses.

#### **Aya Sofia (the Turkish Mosque)**

Jaap Van Gils announced the plan for the Contract on 5 November, exactly three days after the assassination, at a Milli Gorus’ *iftar*, the Islamic ceremony to mark the end of a day of fasting during Ramadan. The connections between the neighbourhood government and Milli Gorus facilitated a smooth initiation of the negotiations. The idea of Contract immediately appealed to the Milli Gorus representatives. Their enthusiasm can be explained if we situate the local integration politics of De Baarsjes within the transnational relations in which the representatives were embedded. Because the spotlight was on the Aya Sofia and its progressive leaders, they could access the media and thereby strengthen their position *vis-à-vis* other factions. This was especially important after Levant Yilmaz had announced that he would step down as director in 2005. Osman Aydogan, a representative of the mosque, contextualises the Contract in relation to these field dynamics

What the course will be [after Yilmaz leaves], I don’t know. But we are surely the engine of Milli Gorus-North [the more liberal of the two sub-branches of Milli Gorus in the Netherlands, *authors*]. This is where it happens. ...

What happens in Heemskerk, Alkmaar or Beverwijk is not really of much significance compared with what happens in Amsterdam. If Theo van Gogh is assassinated ... they come to us, and we're definitely going to use it—a bit of power [laughs] (Aydogan, interview, 28 April 2006).

These remarks in themselves express an embodied feel for the game of mediated politics. Aya Sofia could also rely on historically cultivated connections with the Amsterdam Centre for Foreigners (ACB), an agency that provides support to migrant organisations and had facilitated the leadership in its rise to power. With these skills and connections, they had the power to make concrete suggestions on how the Contract should be implemented and which measures should be described in the so-called Protocol. In addition, Aya Sofia translated its concern about the discrimination of Muslims into a concrete demand to neighbourhood chairman Van Gils: an agency in the neighbourhood that would specialise in registering and combating discrimination against Muslims, the so-called Registration Point Muslim Discrimination (*Meldpunt Moslimdiscriminatie*, MMD). Even though a large majority in the neighbourhood council disagreed with the exclusive focus on discrimination against Muslims, Van Gils pushed through MMD with the justification that it was a process of give and take.

In sum, the representatives of Aya Sofia gained considerably from the negotiations. They enjoyed their interactions with the government and their mediated performances. They could determine the content of the Contract and they were able to establish a state-funded institution designed to combat discrimination against Muslims. Most importantly, the liberal leaders managed to position themselves in the centre of attention and as the spokespersons for the Milli Gorus federation. One frustration of the Milli Gorus leadership, however, was that the other mosques

did not play according to the rules of the game as they were dictated by the neighbourhood government and, to a lesser extent, Aya Sofia itself. Most criticism is directed against Said Bouzit who served as a spokesperson for the Moroccan Al Fath mosque and not only rejected the Contract but also criticised it on Amsterdam's local television channel (AT5). Another frustration of Aya Sofia was that the Pakistani mosque participated in all the press ceremonies but refused to sign the Protocol that followed up the Contract. When Milli Gorus signed the Protocol in the presence of the prime minister, representatives of the neighbourhood council and a battery of cameras, the Pakistani mosque was (quite literally) also in the picture all the time. Why, then, did they participate in the entire process without putting their signature at *le moment suprême*?

#### Noor-ul-Haram (the Pakistani Mosque)

In an interview with a representative of the Pakistani mosque, he repeatedly stated that he had 'very good relationships' with the neighbourhood government. When we asked him if he participated in the dialogue group, he again said that he had very good relationships with the neighbourhood council. After we had indicated that the dialogue group consists mostly of neighbourhood residents, he answered that he 'talked to so many people' that he could not say exactly where they were from, only to then again return to the mosque's relationship with the neighbourhood council

Mister Van Gils comes often and supports us, the police do too. We have very good relationships, always.

Such remarks illustrate that the mosque had a quite open attitude to outsiders but that the neighbourhood government was seen as a special partner. Unlike the Turkish mosque representatives, the representatives of the Pakistani mosque (and the Moroccan mosque) had difficulty grasping the technicalities and subtleties of the negotiations,

but the representatives were eager to make a good impression.

In the mosque's first meeting with the neighbourhood government on 10 November, six people, adapting to the habits of the hosts, sat on the floor in the mosque to discuss the Contract: Jaap Van Gils, two representatives of the mosque, one civil servant of the welfare department and two public relations officials. The minutes show that the two representatives immediately agreed with the contract, but they quickly changed the topic to discrimination

A Dutch person like Van Gogh who insults Muslims is idealised while a Muslim insulting Dutch is—maybe not punished—but [surely] put down.

Van Gils immediately agreed to include “the double standard” in the contract. He also promised to make a public declaration that insults are hurtful to Muslims. He kept his promise and made such a statement in the national television programme *Rondom 10*, translating his privileged access to the media into a resource for bargaining. Van Gils used his (informal) power over the state during the negotiations. He requested that the police patrol around the mosque during the Friday prayers and when the mosque representatives asked what they can do against a drunken man who shouts insults at them, he said that

Those are two offences: public drunkenness and discrimination. You can go to the police and call upon the Contract. They will take the report more seriously because of it.

After the Contract had been signed and communicated to the public, the next step was to translate the agreement into a Protocol, which would be signed during a press ceremony with prime minister Jan-Peter Balkenende. The representatives of the mosque were also enthusiastic about this plan. They had little knowledge of the Dutch political field, but

the idea that they would meet the prime minister was very exciting to them. Yet still they were uncomfortable about the Protocol. The Contract was a one-page document with some very general agreements, but the Protocol was a five-page document that had been drafted by the government in co-operation with Aya Sofia. Moreover, Noor-ul-Haram had much less time to consider the document than Aya Sofia (see Table 1). The representatives of Noor-ul-Haram indicated that they did not disagree with the Protocol, but that they did not have enough time and conviction to explain to their constituents why they should sign.

Three days before the press ceremony with the prime minister was to take place, on 2 September 2005, Jaap Van Gils and Bahar Basak, a civil servant of the welfare department, went to the Pakistani mosque after the Friday prayer and presented the Protocol to all 150 people present. According to Bahar Bazak, this was a “weird meeting” and attendants asked “very critical” questions. Among many other things, they wanted to know why only Islamic associations were expected to participate. The administrators departed in good spirits, though. The mosque representatives held Van Gils' hand with both their hands, nodded and gave a generous smile. Both Van Gils and Basak interpreted the warm farewell as a confirmation that they would indeed sign. Yet this was a misinterpretation.

On 4 September 2005, a Noor-ul-Haram representative phoned chief of public relations Saskia Wieringa to say they had held a meeting with 300 people about the Protocol earlier that day. They decided not to sign. Van Gils was unpleasantly surprised that he had not been invited to this meeting. Yet the show had to go on, so the Noor-ul-Haram representatives travelled with the representatives of the Turkish mosque and the neighbourhood officials to the press ceremony in The Hague on 5 September. Only the Turkish mosque signed, but all present had their picture taken.

How to explain the response of the Pakistani mosque? Unlike Milli Gurus and Al Fath, Noor-ul-Haram is not part of a larger network of mosques. Clearly, the mosque representatives felt that a good relationship with the government is of vital importance. It brought benefits in the form of a secure feeling and the representatives looked forward to a press ceremony in the spotlight. The representatives of Noor-ul-Haram thus accepted the discourse of the administrators and co-operated with media performances as much as they could. The discursive power of the government, however, found its limitations in the resistance of the mosque attendants. Although it was not possible for us to inquire directly into the infrapolitics of the mosque organisation (see Bousetta, 2000), it seems that the leadership's skills and will power were not strong enough to convince their constituents of the need to support the Contract. Being caught between their constituents and the government, the representatives chose to go along as long as they could without actually trying to shape the course of events.

### **Al Fath (the Moroccan Mosque)**

After the neighbourhood council expressed its intention to establish a Contract with the Al Fath mosque, both parties met on 14 November 2004. The minutes of this meeting reveal that the representatives of the mosque immediately expressed doubts about their capacity to counter radicalism

Mohammed B (the assassin of Theo van Gogh; *authors*) did not have a job, did not go to school and he received benefits just like that. Then what can we do as a mosque?

Another representative argues

Here we just pray. There are no speeches, no food, no debates, and this is not the place where friendships are made. That all happens outside. It's just people between 30 and 70 years old praying.

To which a third representative adds

The kids are standing at the [cannabis] coffee shop, a group of 20 to 30. Keep them at school or at work. Guys between 16 and 35 should not hang out on the street.

The then chairman of the mosque says

Fifty per cent of the mosque attendants cannot write. They say: 'leave us alone'. They want to keep discussions outside. The other fifty per cent is here at the table.

Those present indeed indicated a willingness to engage in some sort of partnership, though it is clear that these are expressions of interest and nothing like a well-articulated discourse ("we should not disconnect"; "everyone, the police, the neighbourhood district, should co-operate"; "The Netherlands should stay nice").

When the government officials realised that the Moroccan mosque was reluctant to participate, it tried to impose its discourse through subtle intimidation. The administrators gave the mosque representatives the impression that non-co-operation could lead to cuts in benefits or a refusal of permits. The administrators did not make explicit threats to this effect, but they also did not stop the rumours among the mosque attendants. One administrator told us in an interview that he thought it was "good" that the Noor-ul-Haram and Al Fath mosque would stop taking "their entitlements" for granted and panic a little bit because this would stimulate them into participation. Several administrators indicated that they intentionally first mobilised Milli Gurus to put pressure upon the other two mosques.

However, this strategy had an adverse effect on Al Fath. The cause can be found in the particular context that had shaped the dispositions of the representatives as well as the attendants of the mosque. Like many other Moroccan mosques, Al Fath has

a constituency that is made up in large part of people who do not trust the government, both because of their experiences in Morocco (where the dictatorial king used mosques to control his subjects) and their experiences in the Netherlands (where politicians constantly portray Moroccans as a nuisance or a threat). The internal organisation of the mosque is very weak. Unlike Aya Sofia, it does not attempt to extend or diversify its activities. The mosque representatives also do not have a strong stature. They are amateurs who are selected (or appointed) in informal meetings. When it became apparent that the representatives considered co-operating, they immediately lost their status within the mosque. According to rumours, the mosque representatives who had started the negotiations were first harassed by some of the mosque visitors and then replaced. We were not able to verify these and other rumours, but the fact that they circulate with great intensity is indicative of the stress that the representatives experienced.

Giving in to this pressure would not only jeopardise the relationship between the representatives and the attendants, but also the position of mosque within the Ummao, a federation of Moroccan mosques in and near Amsterdam. A representative of one of the other mosques told us in an interview

I said: they should not do it, no! Before you know it, *all* mosques will have to sign such contracts. We cannot make those kinds of promises.

All Ummao mosques agreed that the Contract would put more pressure upon other mosques than they could bear. The federation then pushed forward Said Bouzit. At the time he was a spokesperson for Ummao and he actively co-operated with the municipality to restore civic peace after the assassination of Theo van Gogh. He reiterated tirelessly that the assassination had no religious legitimacy and co-produced

several government-subsidised campaigns against extremism and for dialogue. Unlike the mosque's leadership, his regular performances in the media and his eloquence had imbued him with the discursive power to stand up effectively to the government.

After some initial contacts, Bouzit informed the neighbourhood council through e-mail that he disagreed with the very idea behind the Contract. In an interview with us he says

I think [the Contract] sends out a wrong signal because you confirm that the mosques are a factor in the problems around the assassination of Theo van Gogh. So you confirm the prejudice that we, as mosque association, try to counter ... Maybe we can function much better as mosques, but the problem comes from elsewhere. [Signing the Contract] should not be a return for something else. 'If you do not sign, then I can do nothing for you'. That is not how our society works ... So I thought the construction was completely flawed (Bouzit, interview, 23 March 2006).

This stance had been taken from the beginning by the representatives of Al Fath, but they had not been powerful and confident enough to articulate it. Since the assassin of Theo van Gogh was a Moroccan Muslim, a refusal of a Moroccan mosque to co-operate with a policy against radicalism could easily be construed as a sign of bad faith, but Bouzit's well-known commitment to moderation and dialogue made it impossible to stigmatise Al Fath as a stronghold of Islamic radicalism.

Needless to say, we also tried to arrange an interview with the mosque representatives of Al Fath. Our attempts failed, but when one of our colleagues called the mosque to request an interview, a long and tense telephone conversation took place with one of the new board members. The Contract was, in the view of the mosque representative, "a publicity stunt" and "we will hear nothing of it after the elections". He went on to suggest that "the Jews"

were behind the attacks of 9/11. There is no way to assess how representative this declaration is and this is also beyond our immediate concern (for what it is worth, we do know that this person has friendly relationships with Jewish neighbourhood residents). From our perspective, what matters is that these remarks signal an utter lack of a feel for the game of mediatised politics. In an attempt to thwart attention, the mosque representative made statements that could cause a scandal.

How to make sense of Al Fath's response to the Contract? The representatives were uncomfortable with the idea of a Contract during the entire process, but they could not immediately leave the negotiations. They felt obliged to keep in dialogue and the government forced the idea upon them that they, as Moroccan Muslims, had to, as Van Gils put it during a meeting, "put in 10 kilos to restore the balance" in Dutch society. However, the mosque's representatives were not only at the disposal of the neighbourhood government and the media. Compliance with the rules of mediatised politics (as they were dictated by the neighbourhood government) would result in a loss of recognition within the field of Moroccan mosque associations in which they were embedded. This is a major difference with the Pakistani Noor-ul-Haram mosque whose representatives could participate in the press ceremony because they did not belong to a field where such performance would lead to loss of recognition. The bleak fate of the Moroccan representatives who initially wanted to enter the negotiations indicates that such sanctions were much more severe for Al Fath.

## Discussion

The case study shows that the government concentrated discursive power, but that it was not hegemonic. The government was able to create good pre-conditions for the negotiations, but the outcome depended

in part on dynamics in fields that were beyond its control. The Moroccan mosque federation and Noor-ul-Haram's mosque attendants did not share the government's problem definition. They did not feel that their mosques had any special duty to demonstrate to media audiences that they try to counter radicalisation and they certainly disagreed with the extension of the state's power into the mosque. Although some leaders enjoyed the prospect of a mediated meeting with the prime minister or other notables, these incentives did not entice the mosque's constituents. Discursive power varied not only situationally but also temporally. The Moroccan mosque was initially locked into a relationship with the government and the Turkish mosque, but due to the input of Bouzit the mosque could change the course of events and avert the danger of stigmatisation.

The different cases point to one structural problem that haunts any attempt to create stronger partnerships between government and minority associations in the context of mediatised politics. Although both the government and the associations express their desire to co-operate, there is a conflict between the demands by the (mostly native Dutch) media audiences and the constituents of minority associations. On the one hand, Van Gils and his team wanted to show to media audiences that the government was restoring order and preventing future attacks. The administrators argued for co-operation but—anticipating accusations that they are 'too soft'—felt that mosques had to prove their good intentions and make firm commitments. On the other hand, the mosque representatives had to deal with the concerns and anxieties of their constituents who were deeply frustrated about the stigmatisation of Muslims in the media. They do not welcome plans based on the premise that it is now Muslims' turn to show loyalty or, in the words of Van Gils,

that Muslims have to “put in 10 kilos extra to restore the balance”. That may have been true according to Van Gils and media audiences, but it was certainly not true according to mosque constituents.

It seemed that only Aya Sofia found a way out this dilemma. The Turkish mosque agreed to a contract but it confidently presented this step as part of its own strategy to conquer a place within Dutch society. This strategy had as the intentional side-effect that it boosted the profile and position of the liberal leadership of Aya Sofia within Milli Gorus. The liberal leaders at this point were at the top of their game. The Contract was one in a series of events and projects through which a liberal leadership had acquired the power to define the association’s discourse and to nestle itself into governance networks at various levels. However, the speed and degree to which Yilmaz and his associates reformed the association and immersed themselves in Dutch politics would eventually lead to a rift between the liberal leadership and other Milli Gorus leaders. Some time after the Contract was signed, a conflict between different factions within Milli Gorus surfaced. According to media sources “conservative hard-liners” sponsored by the German headquarters had made a “coup” against the “liberals”, sponsored by the Amsterdam municipality (for example, Beusekamp, 2007).

The downfall of the progressive leaders robbed the social democrats of Amsterdam of what had perhaps been their greatest success story, but the government suffered a direct blow when it became clear that it had given an indirect subsidy of 2 million euros for the construction of the mosque complex. Sahin had told the government that such a subsidy was necessary to prevent a conservative take-over, but in yet another media revelation it became apparent that he had agreed to hand over ownership of the mosque to the federation’s headquarters as

soon as it had been constructed. The new leaders said in an interview that they considered all these revelations as evidence that Sahin had been a charlatan all along and that they felt that the municipality should not interfere with the internal functioning of Milli Gorus. Yet the municipality and the neighbourhood council refused to reconsider the agreements that Sahin had made about the mosque’s liberal course. The housing corporation that was supposed to co-develop the mosque and the adjacent housing refused to carry on with the project for this reason. At the moment of writing (winter 2009) the different parties are still in a stalemate: they have millions of euros invested in a piece of land that has now been vacant for 15 years.

The liberal leaders of Milli Gorus managed to contain unrest and dissent for some time, but in the end they, too, fell victim to the same sort of pressure as their Moroccan and Pakistani counterparts; the government demanded more commitment and loyalty than their constituents were willing to give. The government seems to have given the liberals within Milli Gorus a kiss of death: the intense co-operation provided conservatives within Milli Gorus with ammunition to make the case that the leadership had stopped representing the interests of the members and the association.

## Conclusion

There are many ways to investigate urban conflicts, but here we opted for a variant of discourse analysis that is inspired by the work of Bourdieu. One great advantage of Bourdieu’s field theory is that it enables us to locate neighbourhood actors in fields that extend way beyond the neighbourhood scale. If we analyse the various forces that weigh upon local actors in the present and that weighed upon them in the past, we can better understand why they developed a certain understanding of the situation.

We could understand, for instance, why the representatives of the Turkish mosque were so enthusiastic about showing their commitment to counter radicalisation, while the Moroccan mosque resisted the attempts of the government.

The goal of the analysis was not only to explain how these different understandings arose, but also why some actors had more power to promote their understandings than others. We showed that the media played an increasingly important role in shaping the power relations among actors, but that the effects of the media were not uniform; in one period, the interest of the media bolstered the morale of actors in the neighbourhood and strengthened connections between them, but in another period the media created tensions. How to understand these divergent outcomes? The role of the government is key to our explanation. In the first phase we studied (between 9/11 and the assassination of Theo van Gogh), the government was heavily involved, but it did not attempt to control the agenda. Community workers offered support to civil initiatives and administrators participated in events, but civil society associations decided on the timing and content of their interventions. However, in the second phase (after the assassination of Theo van Gogh), the government intervened directly, selected the actors that were to be involved and dictated the agenda. The second part of the case study therefore points to problems associated with mediatisation.

The first problem is that mediatisation may augment power inequalities between governance actors. Many studies have observed that the media rely strongly on government sources and are very much focused on parliamentary politics. Schudson says that organisational studies consistently find that “official sources dominate the news” (quoted in Hajer, 2009, p. 41). As the number of public relations officials has gone up in every policy

domain (Cook, 1998), it appears that the power of politicians and administrators over the media is growing rather than decreasing. Our case study used qualitative methods to demonstrate what these general patterns mean in concrete interactions. We showed that public relations officials did not simply dictate a story to the press, but rather created conditions that were very favourable to administrators and very unfavourable to the mosques which were expected to co-operate. Especially when civil society associations represent groups that are stigmatised in the media, there is a risk that they become mere objects of media reports.

The second problem is more fundamental. Even when mediatisation does not result in growing power inequalities, it may lead to a sort of mirage. The careful reader may have noted that we did not devote any attention to the detection of Islamic radicalism or the measures that were taken to prevent it. The reason is simply that none of the three mosques nor the government believed that radicalism was a problem. The government acted against radicalism *not* because it observed radicalism in the neighbourhood, but because it sensed that there was a demand among media audiences for *images and narratives* of the struggle against radicalism. It is for this reason that we cannot think of the media as simply representing what goes on in civil society. Under some conditions, actors’ strategies are guided and motivated by their actual and anticipated representations in the media (Uitermark and Duyvendak, 2008). This becomes a problem when the concerns of media audiences are different from the concerns of neighbourhood residents. And this seems to be the case; administrators chose to focus their interventions on a non-existing problem in an effort to reach out to national media audiences rather than to identify and act on the concerns of people within their jurisdiction.



The identification of these problems is especially important in the light of our finding that mediatisation, at least in our case, was not entirely a 'blind process' (Elias, 1978). There was a general proliferation of media attention, but actors within the government reinforced this process and actively reorganised their relationships with civil society in order to produce positive media images. It would be interesting to compare De Baarsjes with neighbourhoods that opted for a different approach. Such an investigation could be part of a larger effort to investigate how mediatisation is reshaping government. Our case study showed through qualitative methods that mediatisation reshaped the balance of power within and between government agencies and civil society associations. Given the seemingly unstoppable rise in the number and influence of public relations officials and the communication techniques they promote, there is every reason to extend this research and to strive for a more comprehensive and comparative understanding of how mediatisation is reshaping politics and reshuffling power relations.

## Notes

1. Since we draw upon Bourdieu's work, it is perhaps important to point out that his concept of 'symbolic power' is not synonymous with our concept of discursive power. Symbolic power, for Bourdieu, is
 

that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even they themselves exercise it (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 163–164).

 In contrast, integration politics, and in fact all politics, is characterised by contention and so it would be wrong to assume the existence of a single and omnipotent discourse. Discursive power, in our view, does not require the actors to share the views that subordinate them. The goal is precisely to investigate power relations between actors with different views.

2. People familiar with Dutch integration politics will know the main figures of our story, but we changed the names of our interviewees to protect their anonymity as much as possible.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank four anonymous referees, and Christian Broër, Jan Willem Duyvendak, John Grin, and Jean Tillie for comments on earlier drafts.

## References

- Beusekamp, W. (2007) Liberale moskee kwam er nooit, *De Volkskrant*, 5 March.
- Bolt, G., Kempen, R. van and Ham, M. van (2008) Minority ethnic groups in the Dutch housing market: spatial segregation, relocation dynamics and housing policy, *Urban Studies*, 45(7), pp. 1359–1384.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996) *The State Nobility*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) Rethinking the state: genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field, in: P. Bourdieu, transl. by R. Johnson *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, pp. 35–63. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bousetta, H. (2000) Institutional theories of immigrant ethnic mobilisation: relevance and limitations, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 26(2), pp. 229–245.
- Cook, R. (1998) *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution*, 2nd edn. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Couldry, N. (2003) Media meta-capital: extending the range of Bourdieu's field theory, *Theory & Society*, 32(5/6), pp. 653–677.
- Dahl, R. (1961) *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Elias, N. (1978) *What is Sociology?* New York: Columbia University Press.

- Hajer, M. (2009) *Authoritative Governance: Policy Making in the Age of Mediatization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hajer, M. and Uitermark, J. (2008) Performing authority: discursive politics after the assassination of Theo van Gogh, *Public Administration*, 86(1), pp. 5–19.
- Heelsum, A. van, Fennema, M. and Tillie, J. (2004) *Moslim in Nederland: Islamitische organisaties in Nederland*. Working Paper No. 106, SCP, The Hague.
- Jasper, J. (1997) *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lindo, F. (1999) *Heilige wijsheid in Amsterdam. Ayasofya, stadsdeel De Baarsjes en de strijd om het Riva-terrein*. Het Spinhuis, Amsterdam.
- Onderwijzer, F. (2006) 'Wij hebben een afspraak': de rol van lokale overheid bij crisissituatie in De Baarsjes, Amsterdam. MA thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- Snel, E., Burgers, J. and Leerkes, A. (2007) Class position of immigrant workers in a post-industrial economy: the Dutch case, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(8), pp. 1323–1343.
- Stadsdeel de Baarsjes (2004) *Een kwestie van Samen Leven: Visie Sociale Pijler De Baarsjes*. Stadsdeel de Baarsjes, Amsterdam.
- Uitermark, J. and Duyvendak, J. W. (2008) Citizen participation in a mediated age: neighbourhood governance in the Netherlands, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 32(1), pp. 114–134.
- Wacquant, L. (1992) Toward a social praxeology: the structure and logic of Bourdieu's sociology, in: P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant (Eds) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, pp. 1–59. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Wacquant, L. (2008) On symbolic power and group-making: Pierre Bourdieu's reframing of class, Preface to Pierre Bourdieu's *Et klassersmal*. Oslo: Forlaget Manifest.
- Westerloo, G. van (2004) Revolutie bij de zwarte kousenmoslims, *M. Magazine NRC Handelsblad*, pp. 11–22.