

Chapter Six

Representation and inclusion in the online debate: the issue of honor killings*

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Introduction

The Internet is often praised for its ability to provide spaces for every person to present her or his view. In doing so, the Internet potentially allows for more inclusion and participation in the public debate, as everyone who has economic and social access to the Internet has at least the opportunity to take on the speaker's role. Each individual that wants to participate in the debate – either through reading or writing – is free to do so in the online environment. The social advantages of taking on this speaker's role are expected to be the largest for those groups that have been excluded from this role, either in the media or in other areas of the public sphere. Because of the low costs of publishing, participation in the public sphere is considered attainable for people 'beyond elites in wealthy societies' (Bohman, 2004: 137), and for those outside the centre of politics:

It is clear that the Internet permits radical groups from both Left and Right (...) to construct inexpensive virtual counter-public opinions (...). The opinions of these groups have traditionally been excluded or marginalized in the mass-media public sphere. The Internet offers them a way not only of communicating with supporters, but also the potential to reach out beyond the 'radical ghetto' both directly (disintermediation) and indirectly, through influencing the mass media (Downey and Fenton, 2003: 198).

The Internet is, thus, seen as a new discursive space that allows groups normally silenced in traditional media to 'voice themselves and thus become visible and make their presence felt' (Mitra, 2004: 493). It is seen as being able to challenge traditional media because societal groups, institutions, or states do not have to compete for access; it 'can be used by anyone, at any time, from any place on the planet' (Karatzogianni, 2004: 46).

Considering these arguments concerning the potential democratic and participatory benefits of the Internet, the central research question of this chapter

* This research is funded by the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO), grant number 425.42.008.

is ‘to what extent do Internet discussions indeed provide in practice a platform for inclusion and discussion of both dominant and marginalized voices’? In an ideal democracy, citizens have access to the entire range of opinions and arguments that exist on a specific issue. According to deliberative democracy theories (see for instance Bohman, 1996; Bohman and Rehg, 1997; Elster, 1998; Dryzek, 2000), such access should be provided through participation in public debates. Currently, the prevailing idea is that newspapers and other traditional media do not take on this role sufficiently; many scholars (for instance Papacharissi, 2002; Albrecht, 2003; Liina Jensen, 2003; Janssen and Kies, 2004; Dahlgren, 2005; Wiklund, 2005) have, thus, turned to the Internet as a possible key for participation in public discourse.

This chapter will zoom in on a specific issue – honor killings – to see which actors and positions are represented. How broad is the range of viewpoints and how inclusive is the online debate? Inclusion, one of the central features of the democratic debate (for an overview of different criteria for democratic debate, see Ferree *et al.*, 2002), ideally results in the actual representation of difference, in terms of actors, positions, and arguments. Not only the voicing of all relevant issues, arguments, and representations is a requirement, also the opportunity to access all of these different positions and arguments becomes important.

Honor killings

The inclusiveness of the online representations is examined through the analysis of a case study, which offers discourses on a particular issue situated within the broader public debate on immigration and integration in the Netherlands. The specific issue that is chosen for this purpose is ‘*eerwraak*’, which can be translated as ‘honor revenge’. This broad term not only includes so-called ‘honor killings’ but also refers to other forms of (physical) violence in order to ‘restore’ the honor of a family [1]. This issue has received increased media attention after a number of honor killings. Amongst many others, the public statements of a member of parliament, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, have drawn public attention to this issue. As these statements have created an upsurge in the debate, they provide the timeframe and material for the analysis in this chapter.

This case study allows for a comparative analysis of newspaper articles and online postings in web forums. The selected newspaper articles consist of the articles that are intended to allow public participation and opinion formation, namely editorials, opinionating articles, and letters to the editor. Both types of media products will be analyzed in relation to the actors that are given voice and to the content level. Although these newspaper articles and online postings have a number of similarities (see for instance Liina Jensen, 2003: 370), they can hardly be equated, as for instance the selection procedure differs strongly. Morrison and Love (1996: 45–46) summarize this as follows:

Typically, editors select well-written and cogently argued contributions (...) rather than openly offensive pieces (...) and these are generally in keeping with the established ideological direction of the publication. (Morrison and Love, 1996: 45–46.)

Selection of the issue and timeframe

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a then member of the Dutch parliament for the VVD (a liberal right-wing party), gave an interview in *De Volkskrant* on 4 February 2005. Some of her statements in this interview were specifically related to honor killings [2]:

The perpetrators of honour killings know the Dutch legal system. They put a [male] minor on the girl, because he will get a less severe punishment. The boy does the job, reports himself with the police, says he acted on an impulse and the case is closed. The justice department has a murder, a murder weapon and a perpetrator. Case closed. Finished. The whole family keeps silent and the justice department leaves it as it is. That's why I propose to do things completely different. We recently got a new terrorism law. That law says that information from the intelligence services can be used in court as evidence. Why don't we put those services onto the families of the hundreds of women who are currently in hiding? They are talking about it in those families! Why don't we keep them under permanent surveillance, why don't we tap their phones? [3].

This interview was published a week before a parliamentary debate that was scheduled to take place on 10 February 2005. Both in the newspaper articles and online forums, the number of contributions to the debate on honor killings increased after Hirsi Ali's statements. This analysis will include the public statements made until 1 month after Hirsi Ali's comments were published (4 February 2005–4 March 2005). The rationale for choosing this period is twofold: both the newspaper and the online debates have died out after 1 month, and such a timeframe provides a feasible number of articles for analysis.

Selection of the newspaper articles and web forums

The newspaper articles in the chosen timeframe come from seven newspapers. Six national newspapers were selected for analysis [4]. In addition, one free newspaper – *Metro*, which is mainly distributed at train and bus stations throughout the Netherlands – is included. In utilizing *Lexis Nexis*, all editorial articles and letters to the editor that mention 'eerwraak' (honor killings) were selected [5]. This resulted in a total of 21 editorial articles and nine opinion pieces and letters to the editors. The distribution was as shown in Table 1.

The selected online discussions come from the sample of forums used in my Ph.D. research, which exists of seven popular sites (in terms of the number of readers and postings). The sample includes rightwing-oriented (both extreme

Table 1:

Distribution of articles in newspapers

Newspaper	Frequency
Volkskrant	6
AD	4
NRC	3
Trouw	4
Parool	4
Metro	5
Telegraaf	4
Total	30

and moderate) and leftwing-oriented websites, as well as ethnic minority websites. On these forums, a search to find discussions on honor killings was performed. Only the web forums fok.nl, weerwoord.nl, and maroc.nl contained relevant material within the timeframe [6]. The three forums represent different types of websites as follows:

- ‘Fok’ is a general Dutch discussion website with thousands of members [7] that have posted almost 30 million postings in 700,000 threads [8]. Here, a discussion was started in the political section of the website on 4 February 2005 at 15 : 25 by Umm-Qsar. The thread was titled *Honour killings not Terrorism*. The thread stopped within 48 hours, with the 36th posting on 6 February at 13 : 51.
- ‘Weerwoord’ is a discussion forum that focuses on political topics. It has almost 8,000 threads in which 1,800 registered users posted over 200,000 messages. Here, Koos posted a message in the section ‘Immigration and Integration’ on 4 February 2005 at 4 : 08. The thread was called *Hirsi Ali wants to deploy the AIVD [Dutch Intelligence Service] against honour killings*. There were 64 reactions to this initial posting. The last posting dates from 6 February at 18 : 40.
- *Maroc* is a website that is specifically aimed at people of Moroccan descent living in the Netherlands, but increasingly sees ‘native’ Dutch people populating the forum. It has almost 2 million postings in 125,000 threads and 46,000 members. Here, a thread called *The debate on honour killings* was started by Te quiero, who initiated the discussion by quoting a newspaper column on honor killings (by Anil Ramdas) that appeared in *De Volkskrant* on 14 February 2005. Te quiero made this posting on 20 February 2005 at 00 : 44. There were 37 reactions within 2 days; the last message was posted on 21 February at 20 : 47.

Debate on honor killings

The selected newspaper articles and web postings were then coded, using the actor [9] as a basic level of analysis. Both in the newspaper articles and web postings, this

first quantitative content analysis focuses on who is given voice, and on their characteristics. In a second analysis, the emphasis is placed on the positions that are taken and the practices of inclusion and exclusion. Here a quantitative content analysis is combined with a critical discourse analysis (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, see also Philips and Jørgensen, 2002 for a good overview).

Who is represented?

Table 2 shows a fairly varied distribution in terms of sex and origins among the 22 people that were given voice in the newspaper debate on honor killings. Ten out of 22 actors are female, and ten are male (two people's sex was unknown).

Table 2:

Voices in newspapers

Sources quoted/authors	Freq.	Position	Sex	Descent
VVD-MP Hirsi Ali	12	Politician (g.p.)	Female	Immigrant
CDA-minister Donner	10	Politician (g.p.)	Male	Native
Chairman of the VVD party, Van Aartsen	4	Politician (g.p.)	Male	Native
PvdA-MP Albayrak	4	Politician (opp.)	Female	Immigrant
LPF-MP Kraneveldt	3	Politician (opp.)	Female	Native
CDA-MP Sterk	3	Politician (g.p.)	Female	Native
W. Timmer, police coordinator	3	Administration	Male	Native
Researcher C. van Eck, VU	2	Academic	Female	Native
VVD-minister Verdonk	2	Politician (g.p.)	Female	Native
Civil servant of the department of Justice	1	Administration	—	—
GroenLinks-MP Azough	1	Politician (opp.)	Female	Immigrant
F. Bouali	1	Columnist	Female	Immigrant
K. van der Donck	1	Citizen	—	Native
J.A.A. van Doorn	1	Columnist	Male	Native
G. Dorsman (50), lawyer	1	Citizen	Male	Native
CDA-MP Van Haersma Buma	1	Politician (g.p.)	Male	Native
Pamela Hemelrijk	1	Columnist	Female	Native
T. Hesseling (43), housewife	1	Citizen	Female	Native
K. Hooreman (Haarlem)	1	Citizen	Male	Native
R. van Kaam (23), student	1	Citizen	Male	Native
Frank van Pamelan	1	Columnist	Male	Native
A. Ramdas	1	Columnist	Male	Immigrant
Total	56			

NB: (g.p.) stands for a politician from a government party (at the national level), including ministers; (opp.) stands for a politician whose party is in the opposition.

In terms of origin, the table shows that five actors are of immigrant descent, whereas sixteen actors are native Dutch. If this number is compared to the number of immigrants in Dutch society, actors of immigrant descent are thus reasonably represented. However, if one holds the view that the issue of honor killings affects immigrants more and that they should therefore take part more in the debate, they are rather poorly represented.

Looking at the types of actors that are quoted in terms of the number that belongs to the political elite (and both the ‘governmental’ politicians and the ‘oppositional’ politicians), the picture is very different. Six out of 22 actors are politicians from governmental parties (including two ministers). Another two are linked to the administration. Only three members of the opposition are included; together, the political elite grasps more than two third (44 out of 56 quotations) of times that people are given voice in the newspapers. Furthermore, even though five of the quoted actors are (presented as) citizens, they only have five quotations out of the total number of 56 quotations.

Furthermore, Table 3 shows that these citizens only get a voice in the free newspaper, the *Metro*. Readers of the *Volkscrant* only have access to the voices of the government on this matter. In contrast, *Algemeen Dagblad* quotes opposition politicians five times. As a whole, newspaper readers are only confronted with oppositional political voices in six out of 30 newspaper articles. In seventeen articles, the readers can read the statements of governmental politicians.

Online, we can see a different distribution (see Table 4). First, and very prominently, there is an unequal distribution of sex, most specifically on Fok. Women are almost totally absent (one women posted one message out of a total of 36 postings). On Weerwoord, no information is provided about the sex of the

Table 3:

Actors quoted per newspaper

Newspaper/ source	<i>Volks- krant</i>	<i>AD</i>	<i>NRC</i>	<i>Trouw</i>	<i>Parool</i>	<i>Metro</i>	<i>Tele- graaf</i>	<i>Total</i>	Number of actors
Politician (governmental party)	8	6	5	3	3	1	5	31	6
Administration	2	1			1			4	2
Politician (opposition party)		5	1	1	1		1	9	3
Citizen		1				4		5	5
Columnist			1	3		1		5	5
Academic		1			1			2	1
Total	10	14	7	7	6	6	6	56	22

Table 4:

Online participants

Participant	Frequency	Sex	Total No. of posts	Average	Member since	Origin
Participants on Fok.nl						
opa	9	Male	1683	23	Oct-99	
pool	6	Male	7730	390	Dec-03	
sjun	4	Male	12438	420	Apr-03	
Musketeer	3	Male	138	17	Jan-05	
desiredbard	2	Male	1711	180	Nov-04	
Jereon	2	Male	2627	120	Jul-03	
SCH	2	Male	66794	1980	Nov-02	
Umm-Qsar	2	Male	1057	60	Apr-03	
Chewy	1	Male	4341	150	Jan-03	
GewoneMan	1	Male	7270	360	Jan-04	
Gia	1	Female	13877	240	Apr-00	
IntroV	1	Male	1391	25	Jan-01	
pberends	1	Male	38534	1440	Jul-03	
tommytheman	1	Male	1133	60	Jan-04	
Total	36		11480	390		
Participants on Weerwoord.nl						
Koos	20	Male	391	65	Nov-04	
Alfatrion	7	—	2420	73	Aug-02	
Theo	7	Male	3677	141	Mar-03	
Xeno	7	—	1547	50	Oct-02	
Anne	4	Female	1486	57	Mar-03	
Torero	4	—	2449	66	Apr-02	
Moppersmurf	3	—	609	55	Jun-04	
waarbenik	3	—	702	47	Feb-04	
Circe	2	—	1102	38	Dec-02	
Gert	2	Male	73	2	Dec-01	
John Wervenbos	2	Male	3795	74	Feb-01	
curacaoteam	1	—	3971	95	Nov-01	
Eduard Genen	1	Male	1440	206	Oct-04	
Olga	1	Female	206	11	Oct-03	
P040	1	—	616	41	Feb-04	
Total	65		1632	68		

(Continued)

Table 4: (Continued)

Participant	Frequency	Sex	Total No. of posts	Average	Member since	Origin
Participants on Maroc.nl						
Ron Haleber	10	Male	4109	137	Nov-02	NL
sjaen	6	Female	1109	101	Jun-04	NL
mark61	4	Male	17071	1004	Dec-03	—
Goodnight	3	Female	6992	388	Nov-03	Morocco
tr_imparator	3	Male	1279	426	Feb-05	Turkey
Mill	2	None	2308	68	Jul-02	—
S@decQ	2	Male	722	52	Mar-04	Morocco
Simon	2	None	8712	235	Apr-02	Liechtenstein
Te quiero	2	None	618	103	Nov-04	NL
~Panthera~	1	Female	13226	357	Apr-02	NL
Couscousje	1	Female	19740	439	Aug-01	NL
Japio	1	None	76	8	Aug-04	Spain
Rabi'ah	1	Female	4417	147	Nov-02	Suriname
Total	38		6183	266		

users, but when the names of the participants are used as indicators [10], only two 'obvious' female names can be found, in contrast to five male names. On Maroc.nl, a more equal situation can be found, as five women are represented, in contrast to four males and four 'onzijdig' (male nor female)' [11].

With regard to the origins of the participants, very little information was found on both Fok and Weerwoord, and very little variety is suggested when taking names as indicators. On these two forums, thirteen out of 29 have 'Dutch' names and in only two cases there is a reference to other nationalities (*desiredbard*, who refers to Ireland as his home country, and *curacaoteam*, who refers to Curacao as his/her country of origin). On Maroc, information on the 'national affiliation' is available, as participants are asked to choose a flag when registering. Even on this site, which focuses on people of immigrant descent (in specific Dutch Moroccans), the majority of the flags are Dutch. This, of course, does not necessarily imply that the participants cannot be of immigrant descent, but they are at least not representing themselves as such through their flag selection. In addition to the Dutch flag, only the following 'national affiliations' are represented in the honor killings discussion through their flags: Moroccan, Spanish, Surinamese, Turkish, and Liechtenstein [12].

In terms of the type of online users, specifically Maroc and Fok show heavy users. However, on all of the websites there are also less frequent posters participating. Moreover, heavy users do not dominate this specific discussion in terms of the number of contributions per participant. Likewise, 'young' and

'old' (in terms of their registration date) are equally present on all of these forums; neither group dominates the discussion. When looking at the dynamics of the discussion, particular participants do dominate the discussion. On all three forums, the top three posters are responsible for more than half of the contributions. On Weerwoord, one of the contributors is responsible for one third of the messages. This concurs with other studies into the dynamics of online discussions, as is discussed in Witschge (2004). The question is, however, to what extent this influences the content of the debates. In the next section, I will turn to the diversity with regard to positions and arguments in the debate.

Which positions are represented?

Looking at both the online and the newspaper debate, the most prominent disparity is the difference in the amount of information. The newspaper articles focuses on the *process* of the debate instead of the 'content' of the debate. Only in 9 out of 30 articles, the content of the proposal of how to deal with honor killings made by Hirsi Ali is considered. (In five of the articles, a negative position was taken, in one a positive, and in three articles the issues was considered without taking on a negative or positive position.) Hirsi Ali's suggestions were not taken well by government actors and some opposition actors. Most of the newspaper's attention was devoted to these critiques. Statements that did relate to honor killings showed surprisingly little variety. Most of these statements dealt with the question whether or not honor killings should be seen as terrorism or whether the new terrorism law should indeed be utilized to deal with honor killings. Only two statements favored linking honor killings and terrorism, the other ten were negative.

What remained remarkably absent in the newspaper debate was an argumentation developed on honor killings in general and on its relation to terrorism in particular. No information was given about honor killings – barring one article that reported on an interview with the national police coordinator in charge of dealing with honor killings [13]. Almost no information was provided about the nature of honor killings, its possible causes, or alternative solutions.

In contrast, this kind of information *was* found in the online debates. The participants discussed the issue, provided arguments, reacted to each other, and shared information (see Table 5).

Online participants used different types of sources to inform each other, to provide additional information or to dispel fallacies. In addition, the range of viewpoints and ways of looking at honor killings is much broader. The online debate was clearly focused on the legal aspects of honor killings and on its nature, making these elements much more apparent than was done in the newspapers.

In analyzing the online discourses, two main themes were identified: (1) how should honor killings be interpreted? and (ii) how should honor killings be dealt with? Within each of these two themes, two additional topics emerged.

Table 5:

Types of utterances on web forums

Type of utterance	Frequency			Total
	Fok	Weerwoord	Maroc	
Providing information	6	13	2	21
Personal attack	0	0	6	6
Meta-talk about the discussion	0	2	1	3
Statement about honor killings	14	20	3	37
Argument for statement on honor killings	7	18	1	26
Reaction to others	12	36	1	49
Asking for information	2	4	1	7
Alternative solution	7	17	0	24
Total number of messages	36	65	38	139

Note: Not every message contained one of these types of utterances, and some contained more than one type of utterance.

Within the first theme – how honor killings should be interpreted – two perspectives on honor killings can be distinguished. Honor killings are articulated (a) as a terrorist act and (b) as a cultural or religious phenomenon. In terms of how honor killings should be dealt with – the second main theme – again two perspectives can be identified: who should deal with honor killings, from a legal point of view (i.e. is the intelligence service indeed the right organization, as Hirsi Ali suggests); and whether honor killings should evoke a signal of disapproval (from the media, public opinion, or politicians). Before discussing these themes, it is important to point out that all four perspectives are very much interdependent and intertwined.

First, the question of ‘who’ should deal with honor killings is closely related to the question of ‘how’ honor killings are seen. Should honor killings be seen as ‘normal’ murders, as the Dutch minister Donner suggests in *De Volkskrant*? Or are they inherently different, and should they consequently be dealt with differently? And if so, what makes the difference with other murders? These questions, while hardly touched upon in the newspapers, formed the focal point of the online debate.

Honor killings were not seen as a normal crime, as is illustrated by the following example. These statements seem to not only suggest that honor killings are different from other murders but they are worse.

Young sons that slaughter their sisters, being ordered by the family, with a cultural/religious motive, I do not see that as a ‘normal’ crime. (Kooos, WW, 4 February 2005, 14:26.)

There seems to be an intensity scale underlying the different crimes: ‘normal’ murder, honor killings, and terrorism. One of the participants used this scale in his reasoning as to why honor killings should not be treated as terrorism:

By calling cases that are clearly not terrorism-related, such as honour killing terrorism, she [Hirsi Ali] doesn't take real terrorism serious enough. A real terrorist has the intention to overthrow the state, disrupt society, create fear, etc. (Pool, Fok, 4 February 2005, 15:39.)

This links up with the notion that the AIVD, the Dutch Intelligence Service, should not deal with honor killings, as they should be dealing with more ‘serious’ crimes such as terrorism.

In opposition, there are also participants that did see parallels between terror and honor killings. First, a number of discussants looked at it from the victim’s perspective; for them, the victims are clearly being terrorized.

I find honour killing terror. Often against the woman, and certainly against the individual. (John Wervenbos [moderator], WW, 4 February 2005, 19:07.)

In reaction to this view, there were also counter-positions.

Of course, honour killing is a normal crime and not terrorism. Family terror is no terrorism. (Gert, WW, 6 February 2005, 18:15.)

It became clear that participants hold very specific and varying notions of what terrorism is. For some, the individual being terrorized signifies that the crime itself should be seen as terrorism, while others disagree. Other debaters take on a different perspective and argue that honor killings can be viewed as a form of resistance against Dutch society, as they prioritize cultural values over Dutch law.

Whether you can call it terror, I don't know, but you can see it, I think, as a ritual murder by people that find their culture/religion more important than our laws. And that requires a different approach than normal crimes. (Koos, WW, 4 February 2005, 19:17.)

For some it can, thus, be defined as ‘full’ terrorism.

*Honour killing has characteristics that are similar to terrorism: 1) Honour killing is preferably acted out in public [...] 2) The community often pressures the father or the brother to revenge the honour. The murder is thus planned by a **network** of people. (Koos, WW, 5 February 2005, 01:16, emphasis in original.)*

The earlier quotes refer to the cultural character of honor killings and what sets them apart from other crimes, a second theme in the discourse on the interpretation of honor killings. Here the cultural or religious character of honor killings is emphasized. This will be discussed separately in the next section, as this theme shows the mechanisms of exclusion that are at work in the honor killings discourse.

With regard to how participants feel that honor killings should be dealt with, there are two perspectives: the legal issue and the societal response issue. In terms of the legal approach to honor killings, online discussants explore a broader range of possible ways of dealing with honor killings (in comparison to the newspaper content). They view the issue from multiple angles and try to determine whether or not the new terrorism law should really be utilized in dealing with honor killings. In this respect, many of the discussants feel that the present-day police powers concerning the tracing of criminals should be sufficient for dealing with this crime and that the Dutch Intelligence Services (AIVD) should not be involved.

What do these people have to do with state security? Police business ... they can also tap phones. (waarbenik, WW, 4 February 2005, 11:39.)

The argument here is that the AIVD already has too much to do. Additionally, they are not considered the right institute to deal with this type of crime. In contrast, others do agree with Hirsi Ali that the AIVD should deal with honor killings. These proponents mostly provide us with pragmatic reasons such as the following quote demonstrates:

But the AIVD does have the means to track and map these sorts of crimes. That it's not terrorism is no reason. And that it's not possible by law [to use the AIVD] isn't a reason either. Then they should just change the law. (Moppersmurf, WW, 4 February, 22:24.)

Some participants were very ingenious in thinking of alternative ways of dealing with the issue of honor killings. One example is the proposal to establish a CARE police force.

There used to be a 'zedenpolitie' [vice squad] that dealt with 'zedendelicten' [sex offences]. (Does it still exist?) Why don't we expand this or have a new squad that deals with infringements against the general norms and values (which used to be called 'zeden' [14]) of ethnical, cultural and religious background. CARE-police ('Culturele Achtergronden Religies en Etniciteit' [Cultural Backgrounds Religions and Ethnicity]). (Eduard Geenen, WW, 5 February, 13:43, emphasis by author.)

The discourse in the online debates shows that honor killings are considered to be a very severe crime (some called it terrorism, others still considered it an ‘ordinary’ crime). It is also apparent that respondents do not feel that this crime is being given the attention it deserves. Both in a penal as in a political sense, the seriousness of the issue is being underestimated according to the online discussants. Part of the problem for them is that the legal, political, and public signals of disapproval are too weak. Therefore, a call is made to amplify this societal signals to demonstrate the ‘Dutch’ aversion to this crime.

In any case [there should be] more severe punishments and attention in the media. I also think that the ministers Verdonk and Donner should speak out on this matter. (Koons, WW, 5 February 2005, 00:27.)

In this respect, even the term ‘eerwraak’ is challenged. As explained earlier, the Dutch term is used both for honor killings as for other violence with regard ‘to protecting or restoring the honor’. One of the participants linked this term to the way this issue is viewed.

Such a premeditated murder shouldn’t have such a euphemistic name as ‘eerwraak’. In my opinion, it is better to mercilessly expose the immaturity and unscrupulousness of those people that are involved in this murder. (sjun, Fok, 6 February 2005, 08:35.)

In addition, others linked the Dutch societal condemnation of the crime with a possible condemnation by the community in which honor killings are practiced.

That’s why it’s so important that honour killing is going to be condemned within the [Islamic] community. For that to happen, politicians will first have to communicate the view that honour killing is not tolerated. (Koons, WW, 5 February 2005, 17:21, emphasis by author.)

In general, the call for condemnation in Dutch public discourse is concurrent with the notion of honor killings originating from cultural values of ethnic and religious minorities within the Netherlands. Many discussants linked the practice of honor killings explicitly to culture and religion. This particular perspective is explored more in-depth in the following section.

Discursive exclusions

Within the discussion on honor killings, three exclusionary (linguistic) mechanisms can be traced. First, people and positions were explicitly treated as inferior, although this did not happen very often. For example, one of the

participants referred to another participant's educational level ('VMBO', the lowest level of Dutch secondary school), suggesting an inferior quality of argumentation. The same participant called people that hold a different opinion than he, 'Dumbos'. As such, these participants are treated unequally and their positions are not taken seriously. Another example of this exclusionary mechanism is the exclusion of one of the participants of Maroc.nl, who said he resisted integration. He is told to 'veil himself in exotic clothes and build some wooden huts and dig his own well' (sjaen on Maroc.nl). Here, failure to integrate into Dutch society is clearly equated with being 'backward' or 'primitive'. Resistance against integration is ridiculed.

The second exclusionary mechanism – othering – is much more widespread. Martin Rojo (1995: 50–51, emphasis in original) describes this process as follows:

The exclusion is articulated on two axes: DIVIDING, that is, establishing the categories which will be opposed in the conflict—us, with several different referents, vs them, or, nearly always, him; and REJECTING, that is, segregating, marginalizing, creating a negative image. The creation of an enemy, them or him, makes it possible to establish, as the opponent, an inclusive subject, we, which is defined simply by opposition. In the same way, the construction of a negative image of the enemy, using the fact that he flouts a series of established values and is given negative features like irrationality or madness, provides the inclusive we, by opposition, with a positive image. The result is a we which is indefinite but which evokes a set of shared values that remain implicit. Both the subject and the values are thus underdefined, but despite this the reader absorbs them and becomes part of them.

Participants in the online discussions feel strongly about what is Dutch and what is not. Throughout the online discussions (and at times also the newspapers), it is apparent that honor killings are seen as something 'outside' of Dutch society. Basically, the idea is that this phenomenon has no place in the Netherlands. This, of course, conforms to the conception of crime, which has to be placed outside social normality. Unlike the ways in which other crimes may be discussed, honor killings are seen as 'foreign' to Dutch society, and its values and practices. Some examples that illustrate this are as follows:

In any case, it [honour killing] is not normal, at least not in our culture YET. (xeno, WW, 4 February 2005, 17:52, emphasis by author.)

It should be made clear that honour killing is not tolerated anymore over here (...). So, no more keeping silent, as the Netherlands still do, but making it clear that we find this outrageous. (Koos, WW, 4 February 2005, 19:17, emphasis by author.)

The discourse that aims to eradicate honor killings from the Netherlands is focused on its perpetrators. The participants of online forums discussed whether or not these perpetrators can or should still be viewed as Dutch citizens, showing that honor killings are not just any crime, but impinge on the nation state itself. Some view it as terrorism, as something that challenges the very basis of the Dutch legal system. Some examples are as follows:

[Honour killing is] murder with the aim to resist the ruling system. In that sense you could compare honour killing to terrorism (...). The slogan: 'Your nation state is not mine' has taken root in Holland. (opa, Fok, 4 February 2005, 23:10, emphasis by author.)

It [The Netherlands] is their nation state. They will deny it, particularly the duties that come with it, but yet these duties still apply. We are entitled to enforce these duties, which brings along the enjoyment of these rights. (Pool, Fok, 4 February 2005, 23:30, emphasis by author.)

The online discussion later turned to the subject that not all Dutch citizens are considered equal. As one of the participants stated, 'I would like to see all citizens of Holland as fellow citizens.' (opa, Fok, 5 February 2005, 00:11, emphasis by author). He 'would like to' see them as fellow citizens, but his formulation suggests that he does not.

Analysis of the discussion also reveals that the nature of the crime is very much interwoven with its perpetrators. The following examples illustrate how some notions, such as honor killings and terrorism, have strong ethnical or religious connotations.

There's bound to be natives that have killed a family member, something that can resemble an honour killing. That's why I don't think it is terrorism. (pberends, Fok, 4 February 2005, 20:34.)

As honour killing takes place in different cultures, like the Christian, you can impossibly call it terrorism, in my opinion. (anne, WW, 6 February 2005, 15:42.)

Feelings of superiority further strengthen the view that honor killings are incompatible with Dutch cultural values and are not practiced by 'Dutch' people. Honor killings are not only seen as 'foreign' but also as 'backward' and 'barbaric'. The position that enables the participants to condemn honor killings is one of 'enlightenment' that has not yet touched the 'foreign and backward'.

We view honour killing as an offence, and in the Netherlands (where we fortunately still live) it is considered a crime (...). To me it seems particularly useful to monitor all types of acts that are inspired by backward foreign 'values'. (Torero, WW, 6 February 2005, 00:02, emphasis by author.)

We're fed up with all this Islam shit. Taking a firm position on this is the only remedy for such barbaric matters! (GewoneMan, Fok, 4 February 2005, 23:36, emphasis by author.)

If it is not a Dutch phenomenon, but 'foreign' to the Dutch, the question in the debate becomes whose problem is it, anyway? Does the Dutch society have to deal with this, and is the Dutch society really affected? In this respect, the following quote claims that 'our' wives are not affected by honor killings.

Bad idea, the AIVD already has her hands full with the followers of the 'Lachende dodder' [Laughing slayer] [15] that has it in for our society (...). That they also make their own wives' lives miserable is annoying, but that has to be dealt with in a different way. (xeno, WW, 4 February 2005, 8:57, emphasis by author).

The notion that it is not an issue for the Dutch to deal with becomes clearer through the solution people present for this issue. Participants cared more about 'where' honor killings take place (not in Holland) than to 'whom' it happens. The discourse seems to suggest that participants do not inherently condemn it, as long as it does not take place on Dutch soil.

Honour killing is completely unacceptable in the Netherlands (...). People who want such a society, should build it elsewhere, for where I'm concerned, but not here in the Netherlands. (John Wervenbos (moderator), WW, 5 February 2005, 0:01.)

This position is questioned by one of the participants by raising the following question: who should be deported? What if they are Dutch or Surinamese? However, the solution proposed by this specific discussant is still exclusionary, even though it deals with a slightly narrower group of people.

You also have madmen amongst the Dutch-white-townspeople-and-country folk ethnicity [sic]. What do you want to do with them? Deport them as well? Or Surinamese or Antilleans? I do think, however, that those with double nationalities should be mercilessly deported and have their Dutch citizenship withdrawn, when there is conclusive evidence of serious criminality. Children or no children, rich or poor. I couldn't care less ... deport these corrupting forces. (Eduard Geenen, WW, 5 February 2005, 13:14, emphasis by author.)

An alternative solution that is less popular, but still advocated by some, is an attempt to bring about cultural changes within the group that practices honor killings. This change is mostly envisaged to occur through a 'simple' transferral

of Dutch values. In the ‘inburgeringscursus’ (a course that aims to teach immigrants the Dutch language as well as Dutch cultural values) the ‘other’ can be taught how ‘the Dutch’ deal with family life. The following quotes illustrate how the discussants view this cultural transformation.

The honour killing phenomenon has a clear cultural (specifically Turkish) background (...). Only a change in culture will really solve the problem with this group (...). Demanding that the honour killing issue becomes an explicit part of the ‘inburgeringspakket’ [a set of (educational) instruments that should enable immigrants to become a citizen of the Netherlands] (how we DO deal with this in Holland) would be much more realistic. (Theo, WW, 4 February 2005, 17:11, emphasis in original.)

This example shows the perceived simplicity of cultural value changes. The ‘other’ is shown the ‘Dutch’ way, which will lead to the necessary shift in practices and values. There are a few discussants, however, that propose a slightly less one-directional solution and put more agency with the community in which honor killings are considered to be a tolerated and practiced phenomenon. These discussants called for emancipation from within the community in order to bring about societal change.

The resistance against primitive matters such as ‘honour killing’ will eventually have to come through the emancipation of Muslims themselves. (curacaoteam, WW, 5 February 2005, 20:17, emphasis by author.)

Even though different in outlook, this discourse is also filled with stereotypes of the Islamic community. The issue nevertheless seems to be at least a shared issue, proposing to involve ‘the other’.

Conclusions

The Dutch national newspaper analysis showed that the issue of honor killings was only described through the procedure of the (parliamentary) debate. Rather than representing different viewpoints, the issue was described formally, without defining the issue and without having different perspectives explored and questioned. Even though some variety of actors (in terms of gender and ethnicity) was given voice, almost no citizens or other non-governmental actors were represented in the newspaper debate.

The online debate, in contrast, explored the issue differently. Even though more perspectives on the issue were represented and more facets of the issue were explored, the analysis also allowed pinpointing a number of problems that nuance the optimistic-democratic approach towards the Internet. No genuine counterargument was found in the online debate. No one maintained that honor

killings could be a good way of societal organization, and no one provided an alternative or complementary mechanism to the Dutch legal system. All discourses focussed on ridding the Dutch society of honor killings. If the Internet allows for these counter-positions to be made public, it was not done on the platforms examined here [16].

Second, while citizens remained absent from the newspaper debate, no members of the political elite could be found on the web forums. Rather, references to the ‘common man’ or to ‘ordinary people’ – both in the way users named themselves and in the online postings – seems to suggest that those discussing online distinguish themselves from the political elite.

Third, in the online debate very little suggested that those of immigrant descent were represented. No discussion between the different groups could be found. Many references were made in terms of what religious or ethnic minorities should do in relation to honor killings, but no dialogue could be found in the forums that were analyzed. Even on the Moroccan-Dutch web forum, the debate was dominated by ‘native’ Dutch.

Moreover, although the online debate explored honor killings more broadly than the newspapers, it contained a number of exclusionary mechanisms: exclusion of certain practices and members of Dutch society, and exclusion through the process of othering. No open debate was found in the web forums. One could argue here that this is to be expected, because of the nature of the topic: honor killings are illegal in Dutch society and the debate is naturally focused on how to eliminate crime. However, the discourse focused on the ‘foreignness’ of the crime and on how these honor killings could be banned from *Dutch* society. The general (or global) elimination of this deadly practice was not discussed as such. Some participants remained indifferent towards honor killings as long as it is committed elsewhere, in their ‘own’ country and not in the Netherlands. Here the discourse transcends the condemnation of just a crime, and here the exclusion and the processes of othering cruelly take shape.

Notes for Chapter Six

- [1] In the online debates, the commonly attributed meaning is honor ‘killings’, and other acts of violence are rarely implied or mentioned. The focus of this chapter will be on honor killings, even though the Dutch word encompasses more than ‘killings’.
- [2] Hirsi Ali resigned in May 2006. The rest of the newspaper article demonstrated her view on Dutch ‘multicultural’ society in general.
- [3] All quotes were originally in Dutch and have been translated by the author.
- [4] The selected newspapers are *De Volkskrant*, *Trouw*, *De Telegraaf*, *NRC Handelsblad* (NRC), *Het Parool*, and *Het Algemeen Dagblad* (AD). Also only

web forums with a national focus (which are not specifically aiming at, or originating from, a specific region) are included in the analysis.

- [5] *Metro* was manually searched by checking the archived PDF-files of the entire newspaper, which can be found on www.clubmetro.nl; the selected articles contained the word ‘eerwraak’.
- [6] On the other forums, there was no discussion on honor killings within the timeframe of the study. The archives of nieuwrechts.nl and politiekdebat.nl, two other websites in the sample, were not available at the time of the data collection.
- [7] The exact number of users is not made public.
- [8] The statistics of the three forums stem from February 2006.
- [9] To be selected, actors have to have made statements regarding honor killings. They also need to be quoted or paraphrased in the newspaper article. Interpretations or evaluations of the actor’s expressions are excluded (for a similar method of coding, see Ferree *et al.*, 2002).
- [10] Whether this is less reliable method than the method of taking the self-presentation of their gender remains a question. However, it is the representation I am after, that which is perceivable by others. This representation can come as much from a name as from a gender sign.
- [11] Here, participants can indicate their sex by choosing for female, male and ‘onzijdig’.
- [12] I do not wish to imply that these are then necessarily the countries from which the participants originate. It is, however, these countries that are now represented for the other participants in the discussion. They do seem to suggest some affiliation. That these are not static attachments is illustrated by the fact that half a year after the data collection, the participant holding the flag of Liechtenstein now holds the flag of Luxembourg (the participant does seem to have a preference for small states). However, none of the other participants have changed their flags.
- [13] W. Timmer, a highly ranked member of the police force and a national expert on honor killings.
- [14] The Dutch word ‘zeden’ can refer to (in)decent behavior, but also to customs and values.
- [15] Mohammed B., who murdered Theo van Gogh, called the prophet Mohammed ‘de lachende dodder’ or the ‘laughing slayer’.
- [16] Having said this, I need to come back to the nature and limitations of the study. Only a small selection of web forums has been studied, as all postings

came from three (albeit sizable) web forums. However, this selection of web forums does represent a rightwing, an immigrant, and a general forum. Also, as another part of my Ph.D. research shows, these web forums are often chosen by participants for their variety in terms of participants and perspectives. However, this variety does not seem to be present in the case of honor killings. This might be because of the specific nature of the issue – the issue of honor killings being a contested and emotionally charged political issue. On the other hand, one could argue that the benefits of the Internet to bring together people with different perspectives should be the greatest with regard to such issues, as written language and physical distance may open up the possibilities to discuss contested issues. Perhaps we need to seek instances of dialogue on forums on a smaller scale.

References for Chapter Six

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