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Vellenga, Sipco

Published in:
Journal of Religion in Europe

DOI:
[10.1163/18748929-00802004](https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-00802004)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2015

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Vellenga, S. (2015). Ritual Slaughter, Animal Welfare and the Freedom of Religion: A Critical Discourse Analysis of a Fierce Debate in the Dutch Lower House. *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 8(2), 210-234. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748929-00802004>

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Ritual Slaughter, Animal Welfare and the Freedom of Religion: A Critical Discourse Analysis of a Fierce Debate in the Dutch Lower House

Sipco Vellenga

University of Groningen

s.j.vellenga@rug.nl

Abstract

In 2011, the Dutch House of Representatives voted for the first time in its history for banning the practice of unstunned ritual slaughter in accordance to Jewish and Islamic rites. How should this remarkable vote be understood? In order to answer this question, a critical discourse analysis has been carried out. Three discourses are discerned in the debate: 'unstunned ritual slaughter as an outdated practice,' 'ritual slaughter as a form of ritual torture' and 'unstunned ritual slaughter as a legitimate religious practice.' The growing parliamentary support for the first two mentioned discourses is related to recent changes in the Dutch political landscape. In a wider context, it is related to a shift in the national self-conception of the Netherlands and, linked to that, to a change in the perceived position of traditional religious minorities within Dutch society in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 'Fortuyn revolt.'

Keywords

ritual slaughter – animal welfare – freedom of religion – Dutch politics – national identity – mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion – critical discourse analysis

1 Introduction

On the night of June 22, 2011, the Lower House of the Dutch Parliament debated until 3.23 a.m. the legislative proposal introduced by the pro-animal PvdD (*Partij voor de Dieren*, Party for the Animals) to ban the ritual slaughter of animals without prior stunning in accordance with Jewish and Islamic

rites.¹ The proposal was passed with a large majority of 116 votes to 30.² The bill was supported by all parties in parliament, except the Christian-identified parties: the Christian democratic CDA (*Christen Democratisch Appel*, Christian Democratic Appeal), the conservative Protestant CU (*Christen Unie*, Christian Union) and the Reformed Protestant SGP (*Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij*, Reformed Political Party), as well as three members of the labor Party PvdA (*Partij van de Arbeid*, Labor Party) and one member of the populist nationalist party PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, Party for Freedom). The law, if accepted in the Upper House, would not completely abandon halal slaughter, as a large part of this method is already carried out with pre-stunning, but would outlaw kosher slaughter which hardly ever involves stunning.

In December 2011 and June 2012, the bill was debated in the Upper House of Parliament. Remarkably, in this debate the right-wing liberal party VVD (*Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), the labor party PvdA and liberal democratic party D66 (*Democraten 66*, Democrats of 66), which had all supported the bill in the Lower House, now rejected it, arguing they found the proposed ban on unstunned ritual slaughter ad hoc, symbolic, hardly feasible and a disproportional infringement on the right to religious freedom.³ Their critique was in line with the advice the Dutch Council of State previously gave on the bill.⁴ The rejection in the Upper House can partly be attributed to the larger distance between this Chamber and the electorate, its specific role to monitor the quality of legislation, and the influence of the lobby by Jewish and Islamic organizations.

At the end of the debate in the Upper House, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture Henk Bleker, a Christian democrat, declared he committed himself to find a compromise which would meet the objections of the Senate and the will of the Lower House to limit the suffering of the animals. On June 5, 2012, he presented a covenant between the government and Jewish and Muslim representatives which stipulated that the practice of unstunned ritual slaughter was accepted, but only on the condition that an animal loses consciousness within

1 This article is based on several sources: the transcriptions of the debate on ritual slaughter within the Dutch House of Representatives, interviews with Marianne Thieme, the leader of the pro-animal PvdD, and Henk Jan Ormel, the spokesman of the Christian democratic CDA in the debate, and responses in the media (newspaper articles, public letters, books etc.) to the debate in the Dutch Lower House. I am very grateful to the respondents for giving me the opportunity to interview them. All transcriptions of the parliamentary debate on ritual slaughter can be found at: <https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/dossier/31571> [accessed July 1, 2014].

2 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 28, 2011, TK 98-25-44.

3 Handelingen Eerste Kamer, June 19, 2012, EK 33-5-25.

4 Raad van State, Advies W11.08.0398/IV (Den Haag 2008).

40 seconds from the moment its throat is cut.⁵ With this compromise, a period of heated argument and polarization came to an end, at least for the time being.

This article focuses on the debate in the Dutch House of Representatives on ritual slaughter. This debate is highly remarkable for several reasons.⁶ Firstly, it meant a break with the uninterrupted support by the liberal and labor people's parties in the postwar period for the right to ritual slaughter for religious minorities. Why did they change their position? At the same time, the debate meant a huge breakthrough for the pro-animal PvdD, which for the very first time in its existence has had a legislative proposal approved, and with an overwhelming majority. Furthermore, the debate marked a restructuring of Dutch politics along a dividing line precipitated by several 'immaterial' issues, with Christian-identified parties on the one hand and secular parties on the other hand. This line has also become visible in debates on, for instance, the abandonment of the prohibition on blasphemy, the regulation of the Sunday rest and the removal of the permission for registrars to refuse to conduct a wedding ceremony between people of the same sex when they have principled—mostly religious-based—objections to it. Finally, the debate is remarkable because it gave impetus to a stormy and emotional public discussion in the Netherlands. It triggered Jews and Muslims, but not only them, to participate—apart but sometimes together—in the debate. In the Netherlands, the Jewish method of slaughter of animals has only been banned during the period the country was occupied by Nazi Germany from 1940–1945. As such, the proposed bill evoked associations with this period, especially in Jewish circles.⁷ It also touched upon the sensitive topic of the character and position Islam in the Netherlands which had already given rise, for many years, to heated debate in the country. These two elements contributed, together with heartbreaking media pictures of bloody scenes in ritual slaughterhouses, to a heated and emotional public debate.

The political and public debate on unstunned ritual slaughter in the Netherlands was certainly not an isolated Dutch phenomenon. European countries are strongly divided about this issue.⁸ Un-anaesthetized slaughter has been banned in Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Estonia, Iceland, while it is allowed in countries such as Germany, France, Spain and

5 *Convenant onbedwelmd slachten volgens religieuze riten*, (Den Haag, June 5, 2012).

6 Cf. MarkhaValenta, "Pluralistic Democracy or Scientistic Monocracy? Debating Ritual Slaughter," *Erasmus Law Review* 5/1 (2012), 27–41.

7 Cf. Lody van de Kamp, *Dagboek van een verdoofd rabbijn. Persoonlijke notities bij een politieke aardverschuiving* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012).

8 Florence Bergeaud-Blackler, "New Challenges for Islamic Ritual Slaughter: A European Perspective," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33/6 (2007), 965–980.

the UK. In several European countries this practice was recently the topic of renewed regulation or debate. In March 2014, for example, in the UK the debate on ritual slaughter flared up when the new head of the British Veterinary Association, John Blackwell, stated that the ritual slaughter of animals should be banned if Muslims and Jews refused to adopt more humane methods.⁹

The Dutch debate on ritual slaughter was carefully monitored in some other European countries, Arab countries, Israel and the USA. Some foreign actors tried to influence the Dutch debate, often opposing the proposal introduced by the animal party PvdD by arguing that it constituted an unacceptable infringement upon religious freedom. Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, for instance, sent a letter to the members of parliament of the Netherlands on February 25, 2011 and visited the Netherlands on May 11, 2011 to lobby against the ban. The European Jewish Congress called the bill “blatantly discriminatory” and “a violation of human rights against the Netherlands Jewish community.”¹⁰ A group of ten leading US congressmen and women, both from the Republican and Democratic parties, have launched an appeal to the Dutch Senate to block legislation that would ban kosher slaughter of animals.¹¹

The main question of this article is how the shift in the Dutch House of Representatives from support for unstunned ritual slaughter to rejection during the first ten years or more of the 21st century can be understood. In 1998, Wim Kok, PM of a cabinet supported by the labor PvdA, the right-wing liberal VVD and the liberal democratic D66, praised the Dutch tolerant legislation with regard to ritual slaughter, and 13 years later a large majority in the Dutch House of Representatives was in favor of a proposal to ban the practice of unstunned ritual slaughter. How can we understand this shift?

In order to answer this question, I will carry out a critical discourse analysis.¹² The Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament can be considered as an arena where political parties struggle for power in order to control and

9 *The Times*, “Stop ritual slaughter of animals says top vet,” March 6, 2014.

10 *The Jerusalem Post*, “EJC may sue to stop Dutch anti-ritual slaughter bill,” June 26, 2011.

11 *The Jewish Chronicle Online*, “US politicians urge Dutch to block ‘unfair’ kosher meat ban,” December 13, 2011. <http://www.thejc.com/news/world-news/60192/us-politicians-urge-dutch-block-unfair-kosher-meat-ban> (accessed July 1, 2014).

12 Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995); John E. Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers. An Approach From Critical Discourse Analysis* (New York: Palgrave, 2007); Titus Hjelm, ‘Discourse analysis’, in: M. Strausberg & S. Engler (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (London / New York: Routledge, 2011), 134–150; Titus Hjelm, “Religion, Discourse and Power: A Contribution towards a Critical Sociology of Religion”, *Critical Sociology* 40/6 (2014), 855–872.

influence the government's policy and to bring laws into being. A parliamentary debate involves several different discourses. A discourse can be defined as "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories that are produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical, social and mental realities."¹³ The proponents of competing political discourses try to get support for their definition of reality and political aspirations and struggle for discursive and political dominance. In a critical discourse analysis three steps of analysis can be distinguished: the textual analysis, the discursive practices analysis or an analysis of the practices which produce these texts, and the social practices analysis or an analysis of the context in which the texts and the discursive practices are embedded. Central to critical discourse analysis is the focus on power on all levels. In critical discourse analysis there is a broad variety in the ways in which scholars work with texts. In my textual analysis the focus is not on the linguistic aspects of the texts, but on the level of meaning. I am especially interested in the argumentations given in the contributions to the debate in the Dutch House of Representatives.¹⁴

Before carrying out the three steps of critical discourse analysis, I will first go into the question of what the debate on ritual slaughter was about and give a brief overview of the history of the way ritual slaughter was regulated in Dutch legislation. I will finish the article with a brief summary and a concluding remark on the meaning of the Dutch debate on ritual slaughter for the current debate in the sociology of religion on public religions.

2 Kosher and Halal Slaughter

Since the settlement of Jewish communities in the Dutch Republic in the first decades of the 17th century, ritual slaughter has been performed in the Netherlands.¹⁵ In both Islam and Judaism, the slaughtering of animals, both for sacrificial purposes and for the daily consumption of meat, has to take place

13 Cf. Maarten A. Hayer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse. Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 59.

14 Richardson, *Analysing Newspapers*; Hjelm, *Discourse analysis*, 142–143.

15 Wasif A. Shadid & Pieter S. van Koningsveld (eds.), *Islam in Dutch Society: Current Developments and Future Prospects* (Kampen: Kok, 1992); Bart Wallet, "In het land van dierenvrienden. Kleine geschiedenis van de rituele slacht" *Trouw*, May 14, 2011; Bart Wallet, "Ritueel slachten en godsdienstvrijheid in een seculiere samenleving," *Religie & Samenleving* 7/2 (2012) 2, 166–183.

according to certain rules that originate in ancient religious laws. In Judaism the proscriptions on ritual slaughter are derived from the Torah and Talmud, while in Islam the Quran is considered as the main source of proscriptions. The traditional Jewish method is called kosher slaughter or *Shechita*, and the Islamic method is called halal slaughter or *Dhabiha*. Food proscriptions, including specific procedures for the slaughtering of animals, work as an important identity marker within these religions; they contribute to the formation and maintenance of a communal identity and create a distinction between 'us' and 'them.'¹⁶

According to both traditions, only living and healthy animals are allowed to be slaughtered. They stress that animals may not suffer during slaughtering and underline the necessity of the humane treatment of animals. There are important similarities between both methods, including proscriptions with regard to the fixation of the animal, the knives used, the method of cutting, and the actions to stimulate the bleeding out.¹⁷ In both methods the act of ritual slaughter is carried out by cutting the animal's throat with a sharp knife, causing the blood to drain out.

In addition to these similarities, there are distinct differences. Jewish law proscribes that the butcher must be accredited by a religious authority, whereas the Islamic tradition requires the butcher to be a Muslim. According to this tradition, the act of slaughtering ought to be preceded by mentioning the name of God. Since in the opinion of interpreters of Jewish law stunning may impair the perfection of the animal, stunning is not allowed. In the Islamic tradition the question of whether or not animals may be stunned before slaughtering is unanswered.¹⁸

In practice, approximately three quarters of all halal slaughtered animals in the Netherlands are killed with prior stunning. According to State Secretary for Agriculture Henk Bleker, in 2010, the number of legally unstunned slaughtered animals was at least 370,000 and at most 1,1 million in the Netherlands.¹⁹ Altogether about 500 million animals are slaughtered in the Netherlands every year.

16 David M. Freidenreich, *Foreigners and their Food. Constructing Otherness in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

17 Carla M. Zoethout, "Ritual Slaughter and the Freedom of Religion: Some Reflections on a Stunning," *Human Rights Quarterly* 35/3 (2012), 651–672, 656.

18 Shadid & Van Koningsveld, *Islam in Dutch Society*.

19 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, April 13, 2011, TK 73–2–17.

3 Historical background

With the introduction of the national Law on Meat Inspection in 1919 stunning prior to slaughtering became obligatory in the Netherlands.²⁰ In line with the basic philosophy of the system of pillarization which characterized the Netherlands from the end of the 19th century till the 1960s, an exception was made for “those animals destined to be slaughtered by means of a throat-cut according to the Israelite rites.”²¹ According to this philosophy, religious and ideological communities should have the freedom to establish their own organizations in almost all societal domains and to live their (social) life as much as possible according to their own values and normative standards.²²

During the occupation of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany, ritual slaughter was banned.²³ After the war, this ban was lifted and the pre-war order was restored. In the post-war period the number of animals kosher slaughtered for the domestic market was limited. However, there was an increase of the export of kosher slaughtered meat to meet the needs in particular of the new state of Israel.

In the 1960s, the first Moroccan and Turkish immigrants settled down in the Netherlands. Whilst initially they expected to return home after a short stay, by the mid-1970s many of them decided to prolong their stay. This decision precipitated the start of the process of family reunion. The number of Muslims increased quickly and with that the need for halal meat. Despite the fact that the first sign of the need of Muslims for ritual slaughter reached the government in 1965, it was not until 1977 that halal slaughter was permitted by law in the Netherlands.²⁴

In the 1970s and 1980s, there were protests against Islamic ritual slaughter from the side of animal protection groups, orthodox Christian parties, as well as the right-wing BP (*Boeren Partij*, Farmers Party).²⁵ However, the most radical

20 See about the history of ritual slaughter in the Netherlands: Shadid & Van Koningsveld, *Islam in Dutch Society*; Wallet, “Ritueel slachten en godsdienstvrijheid in een seculiere samenleving”; Tetty Havinga, “Ritueel slachten. Spanning tussen religieuze tolerantie en dierenbescherming,” in: Anita Bocker et al. (eds.), *Migratierecht en rechtssociologie, gebundeld in Kees’ studies* (Nijmegen: Centrum voor Migratierecht en Instituut voor Rechtsociologie Radboud Universiteit, 2008), 211–220.

21 Staatsblad no. 285, 1920.

22 Cf. Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation. Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

23 Havinga, “Ritueel slachten. Spanning tussen religieuze tolerantie en dierenbescherming”.

24 Shadid & Van Koningsveld, *Islam in Dutch Society*.

25 Remarkably, in these years the orthodox Protestant parties in the Dutch House of Representatives were all in favor of a ban on ritual slaughter because they perceived ritual

criticism was voiced by the anti-foreigner CP (*Centrum Partij*, Centrum Party) which characterized ritual slaughter as 'primitive' and 'barbaric'.²⁶ Despite these protests, the mainstream groups and parties in the Netherlands remained tolerant to the practice of ritual slaughter. In 1999 this stance was clearly expressed by PM Kok, leader of the 'purple coalition,' made up of the VVD, the PvdA and D66, when he mentioned in the general debate in the House of Representatives the legislation on ritual slaughter as an example of Dutch tolerance and a topic where existing rules had been adapted to the desires of new fellow citizens.²⁷ This position fitted in with the concept of the multicultural society which had become dominant in the Netherlands since the 1960s and 1970s. The proponents of this concept regard ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in essence as a positive value, and support ethnic, cultural and religious groups and individuals to express their identities in public life.²⁸ In Dutch immigration policy this concept was expressed in the slogan 'integration with the preservation of identity.'

In the 1990s, however, the opposition to the model of the multicultural society swelled and the policy of integration with the preservation of identity came increasingly under attack.²⁹ As a result, the notion of cultural adaptation entered the political debate. In 2000, Paul Scheffer, a prominent member of the social democratic party PvdA, spoke about 'a multicultural drama' and Paul Schnabel, director of The Netherlands Institute for Social Research SCP, about 'a multicultural illusion'.³⁰ In the aftermath of 9/11, Pim Fortuyn appeared on the political firmament. He criticized the policy of multiculturalism fiercely and pleaded for a public culture which stands for progressive values, such as the freedom of speech, the separation of church and state, gender equality and the equal treatment of homosexuals and heterosexuals.³¹ On May 6, 2002, Pim

slaughter to be in contravention of Christian norms and values and/ or the Christian character of the Netherlands the parties wanted to promote. Later, they changed their position and opposed banning it.

26 Wallet, "Ritueel slachten en godsdienstvrijheid in een seculiere samenleving".

27 Handelingen Eerste Kamer, November 18, 1998, EK 8–160.

28 Cf. Ruud Koopmans, "Multiculturalism and Immigration: A Contested Field in Cross-National Comparison," *Annual Review Sociology* 39 (2013), 147–169.

29 Cf. Sipco J. Vellenga, "Huntington" in Holland. The Public Debate on Muslim Immigrants in the Netherlands," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 21/1 (2008), 21–41.

30 Paul Scheffer, "Het multiculturele drama" in: *NRC Handelsblad*, January 29, 2000; Paul Schnabel, "De multiculturele illusie. Een pleidooi voor aanpassing en assimilatie," in: Paul Schnabel (ed.), *De multiculturele illusie* (Utrecht: Forum, 2000) 5–26.

31 Cf. Pim Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundamente* (Utrecht: Bruna, 1997).

Fortuyn was assassinated. Nine days later his party, the LPF (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*; List Pim Fortuyn), won the elections, becoming the second-largest party in parliament after de Christian Democrats with 26 of the 150 seats. This election victory marked the abandonment of the program of multiculturalism in the Netherlands and the rise of the concept of the Netherlands as a progressive, (mainly) secular country.

In Dutch politics the attitude to ritual slaughter also shifted. In 2006, the populist nationalist PVV, led by Geert Wilders, entered the Lower House with nine of the 150 seats. This party takes a radical stance against Islam, including halal food and the ritual of halal slaughter.³² Moreover, in that same year, the pro-animal PvdD entered the Second Chamber of Dutch Parliament with two MPs, strengthening the voice of the animal rights movement in Dutch politics. Under the influence of this party D66, the SP and Groen Links took a more critical stance towards unstunned ritual slaughter. In the autumn of 2007, Marianne Thieme (PvdD) and Ineke van Gent (Groen Links) submitted a motion asking the government to ban unstunned ritual slaughter, which, however, was rejected.³³ The most significant change regarding ritual slaughter took place in the right-wing liberal VVD and the labor PvdA. While traditionally these parties had always opposed a ban on unstunned ritual slaughter, in the debate in 2011 they both supported the proposal submitted by the animal party to prohibit this practice, what made that for the first time in Dutch parliamentary history a majority in the House of Representatives was in favor of a ban on it. The question is how this shift can be understood.

4 Three Discourses

Within the parliamentary debate on ritual slaughter three discourses can be discerned, namely: unstunned ritual slaughter as an outdated practice, ritual slaughter as a form of animal torture, and unstunned ritual slaughter as a legitimate religious ritual.³⁴ In the description and analysis of these discourses, the focus will be on three topics. Firstly, the framing of the effects of unstunned

32 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, September 9, 2007, TK 93–5265/66.

33 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, November 1, 2007, TK 18–1265/6; Handelingen Tweede Kamer, November 6, 2007, TK 19–1306.

34 This distinction is the outcome of a process of reading and rereading the complete texts of the debates in the Dutch House of Representatives and reflection on the issue of the commonalities and dividing lines between the contributions the spokespersons of the political parties made to the debate.

slaughtering on animal welfare. The question is whether or not there is consensus within the scientific community about the harmful effects of this practice. Secondly, the framing of the right to freedom of religion which is at stake in the case of kosher and halal slaughter. This right is anchored in Article 6 of the Dutch constitution.³⁵ The scope of this right is not unlimited, but curtailed by proscriptions in law in, for instance, the interest of the protection of public order. The question is whether or not the interest of the prevention of supposed avoidable extra animal suffering is a legitimate rationale for limiting the religious freedom of orthodox Jews and Muslims. Finally, the framing of the strategy which should be followed to achieve the goal of the improvement of animal welfare. The question is whether this goal should be achieved by changing the law or by making an agreement with Jews and Muslims to whom unstunned ritual slaughter is an essential part of their religion.³⁶

a *Unstunned Ritual Slaughter as an Outdated Practice*

The dominant motive behind this discourse was a great concern for animal welfare. Proponents of this discourse considered unstunned ritual slaughter as an avoidable, (extremely) animal-unfriendly method of slaughter. This kind of slaughter causes unnecessary pain, suffering and distress and must come to an end.

In order to underpin this claim, advocates of this discourse stated that there is unanimity within the scientific community on the harmful effects of unstunned ritual slaughter on animal welfare, referring in the debate frequently to statements made by associations such as the European Society for Veterinarians, the British Farm Animal Welfare Council and in particular the Royal Dutch Society for Veterinary Medicine. Notably, they not only claimed that scientific research provides this discourse with an empirical basis by offering reliable knowledge about the effects of unstunned ritual slaughter, but also with a normative basis, namely that these effects are 'unacceptable.' By that, they crossed the line between descriptive statements and normative judgments:

35 Article 6 of the Dutch Constitutions says:

1. Everyone shall have the right to profess freely his religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, without prejudice to his responsibility under the law.
2. Rules concerning the exercise of this right other than in buildings and enclosed places may be laid down by Act of Parliament for the protection of health, in the interest of traffic and to combat or prevent disorders.

36 These topics corresponds with Benford and Snow's distinction between diagnostic and prognostic framing. See: Robert D. Benford & David A. Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review Sociology*, 26 (2000), 611–639.

For this legislative proposal we have studied the whole spectrum of scientific reports on this subject. These all come to the uniform conclusion that unstunned slaughtering causes an unacceptable encroachment on animal welfare.³⁷

Proponents of this discourse perceived unstunned ritual slaughter as an outdated practice. In pre-modern times this practice was perhaps the most humane method available, but nowadays it is totally obsolete. In a speech in 2006 at the beginning of the Feast of Sacrifices, Marianne Thieme said: "Today (...) more than 80.000 animals, mostly sheep, will be slaughtered in a 'medieval way'."³⁸ According to the supporters of this discourse, this method is outdated in two ways. Firstly, it has been taken over by modern techniques of slaughtering which are more animal- friendly. Marianne Thieme said: "Three-thousand years ago, there were no anesthetics. But since then we have developed more humane methods."³⁹ Besides, it has become outdated due to the development of morality with respect to animal welfare. What was perhaps experienced as morally acceptable even in the 1990s, is not acceptable any longer. Martijn van Dam, MP of the labor party PvdA, hinted at this when he said during the debate: "During the last years, the attention for animal wellbeing has also been increased strongly."⁴⁰

According to the animal party's discourse, the proposed ban on unstunned ritual slaughter did not contravene the right to freedom of religion. In Thieme's opinion: "The legislative curtailment of the freedom of religion refers only to the dimension of behavior and not to the conviction itself. By that, this legislative proposal does not touch the faith of a single Jew or Muslim."⁴¹ She stressed that believers retain the freedom to consume halal or kosher meat. The ban was about the production of this meat, not the consumption; it did not forbid the import of this meat from abroad. Nevertheless, she pointed out that she considered the ban on the production in the Netherlands as the first step in a process leading to a prohibition of the import of unstunned ritual slaughtered meat in the Netherlands.⁴²

37 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, April 13, 2011, TK 73-2-3.

38 M. Thieme, Offerfeest van start, vlees van ritueel geslachte dieren hele jaar door op bordje onwetende consument, January 10, 2006. Available from: <https://www.partijvoordedieren.nl/recent/news/i/304> (assessed July 1, 2014).

39 *BBC World Service*, "Dutch MPs effectively ban ritual slaughter of animals," 28 June 28, 2011.

40 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, TK 96-16-128.

41 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, April 13, 2011, TK 73-2-14.

42 Interview Marianne Thieme, June 2, 2014.

Proponents of this discourse justified the proposed ban on the production of halal and kosher meat by referring to Article 9.2 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), and in particular to the 'protection of morals' mentioned in it.⁴³ To their mind, the protection of animal welfare had become a fixed part of present-day morality in the Netherlands. This fact offered a legal basis for the limitation of the freedom of religion in the case of unstunned ritual slaughter. In their argumentation they referred to previous examples of limiting measures, such as women's right to vote, the equal treatment of homosexuals and the refusing of blood transfusions for children.⁴⁴

Marianne Thieme, the author of the legislative proposal, was not willing to start a dialogue with Jews and Muslims. According to her:

Trust in self-regulation by means of a covenant is naive, just because the religious organizations concerned are firmly convinced that they don't want to stun. Therefore legislative measures are the only appropriate means.⁴⁵

At the end of the debate, representatives of D'66, the PvdA the VVD and Groen Links, which all supported the proposed bill, offered a concession to the Jewish and Muslim communities by allowing religious congregations to request an exception for a maximum of five years, if they could provide evidence that animals slaughtered by traditional methods would not suffer more than those slaughtered in accordance with the regular procedure.⁴⁶ This amendment was passed by the majority of the Lower House.

43 Article 9, the article about freedom of thought, conscience and religion, of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms says:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are proscribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

44 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, TK 96-16-139.

45 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, TK 96-16-140.

46 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, Kamerstuk 31571, no. 12.

b *Ritual Slaughter as a Form of Animal Torture*

Within this discourse ritual slaughter was defined as ritual torture which should be forbidden totally. In the debate Dion Graus, MP of the anti-immigrant PVV, frequently spoke about ritual slaughter in terms of the ill-treatment, the abuse or the torment of animals. Proponents of this discourse did not consider only unstunned ritual slaughter but also stunned ritual slaughter as a form of animal torture. This is why the PVV characterized the proposed ban as 'a second best option' which it, nevertheless, wanted to support. The party's aim is also to ban the import of ritually slaughtered meat.⁴⁷

An important motive behind the standpoint of the PVV on ritual slaughter was its anti-Islam stance. From its inception in 2005, the PVV has considered Islam as incompatible with and inferior to the central values of European civilization. To this party, Islam is currently the greatest threat to European heritage and culture which is penetrating Europe and should be combatted and stopped. One aspect of its program is the total legislative ban of the 'barbaric' practice of halal slaughter.

The PVV-discourse is Islamophobic but not anti-Semitic.⁴⁸ The PVV did not try to exclude Jews from the nation-state as populist nationalist parties in Europe have attempted the past, nor did this party approach Judaism as a threat to the future of European civilization as it frames Islam. On the contrary, it attempted to build good relationships with Jewish communities in the Netherlands and to get the reputation of being a friend of Jews and Israel. It considered Israel to be a stronghold of Western society in the Arabic world in the struggle against the danger of Islam. However, this position did not prevent the PVV from seeking cooperation with groups within which anti-Semitic sentiments can be noticed, such as the French Front National, in the period around the European elections in 2014.

As the proposal introduced by the animal party meant a ban of unstunned halal slaughter as well as unstunned kosher slaughter, it placed the PVV in a dilemma: if it gave support to the proposal, it would put its ties with the Dutch Jewish community and Israel under stress, but if it did not support the proposal, it would contribute to the possible continuation of the—in its eyes—disgusting practice of ritual slaughter and in particular halal slaughter. At the end of the debate, 23 members of the PVV voted for and one against the proposal, namely MP Wim Kortenoeven, who would leave the PVV in July 2012, as he himself reported, partly because of this issue.⁴⁹

47 *De Telegraaf*, 'PVV verdeeld over ritueel slachten', April 14, 2011.

48 Cf. Matti Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatred Old and New in Europe* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2007).

49 *Elsevier*, 'Ex-PVV'er Kortenoeven: Joodse sponsors woest op PVV', August 21, 2012.

The PVV-discourse perceived Judaism as a religion and Islam as a “totalitarian doctrine directed to discrimination, violence and suppression.”⁵⁰ In the debate Dion Graus stressed the limited scope of the right to freedom of religion or belief when he said that:

freedom of religion may never result in suffering. It may never lead to the suppression of women, the abuse of homosexuals or animals. The ritual and/or religious torture of animals came up in an era when anaesthesia or stunning did not exist (...) I hope that everyone is willing to move with the times, also believers. I'm sure that there is no single God who would want this, with the knowledge we have now.⁵¹

Also in the eyes of proponents of this discourse, it did not make sense to speak with Muslims or Jews about stopping ritual slaughter. In their opinion the only way to stop this practice was a legislative ban.⁵²

c *Unstunned Ritual Slaughter as a Legitimate Religious Practice*

According to advocates of his discourse, unstunned ritual slaughter should be permitted by Dutch law as long as it is experienced by orthodox Jews and Muslims in the Netherlands as an essential aspect of their religion. Ritual slaughter falls within the scope of the constitutional right to freedom of religion. A ban on unstunned ritual slaughter would be an unacceptable infringement upon this right.

Proponents of this discourse argued—in opposition to the proponents of the first mentioned discourse—that there is no consensus within the scientific community about the precise welfare effects of ritual slaughter. There exists no scientific evidence that proves ritual slaughter causes more suffering to animals than regular methods. They stressed that the legislative regulation of ritual slaughter could only be partly based on scientific research and is mainly a political decision. CDA MP Henk Jan Ormel said: “Not only in this debate, but also in many others, it is always possible to find a scientific research report that suits your own political view. However, I will not do that.”⁵³

According to supporters of this discourse, the principle of the separation of Church and State in the Netherlands implies that politicians should not express their opinion about whether unstunned ritual slaughter is an essential part of Judaism or Islam or not. It is up to believers to judge what the basic elements

50 PVV, *Verkiezingsprogramma* (Den Haag: PVV, 2010).

51 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011; TK 96-16-135.

52 Cf. Shadid & Van Koningsveld, *Islam in Dutch Society*, 22.

53 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, February 17, 2011, TK 54-4-8.

of their religion are and the state has to respect their convictions. Because of the value advocates of this discourse place on the freedom of people to profess their religion, they perceived the debate “more as a debate on human rights than on animal welfare.”⁵⁴

Advocates of this discourse stated that it is misleading to say that the Jewish and Islamic methods of slaughter are cruel. On the contrary, these methods practice the greatest possible concern for the well-being of animals and render the act of slaughter as painless as possible. Actually, animals do not undergo extra suffering because of these methods. Nevertheless, improvements can be realized, in particular in cases where the cut to the throat does not kill the animal immediately. That is why the Christian-identified parties submitted an amendment at the end of the debate stating that an animal must lose consciousness within 45 seconds after the cut.⁵⁵

Supporters of this discourse were in favor of the strategy of dialogue. They saw possibilities to safeguard the right of religious minorities to practice kosher and halal slaughter and to improve animal welfare by, for example, limiting the maximum length of time an animal is conscious before dying. Henk Jan Ormel called upon the government to come to an agreement with representatives of Jewish and Muslim communities. “I say it clearly, it’s the opinion of the CDA- parliamentary group that there should be discussed with religious minorities, not about religious minorities.”⁵⁶ In this respect, Esmé Wiegman-van Meppelen Scheppink referred to the appeal Chief rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks made to the members of Dutch parliament: “Let us work together. Let us find another way.”⁵⁷

5 Political practices

We notice that we discerned in the debate on ritual slaughter in the Dutch House of Representatives three discourses. The main question now is why the support for the first two discourses has been growing since the turn of the century at the expense of the support for the third one. It is important to realize in this respect that almost all large political parties were internally divided on the issue of what the right balance was between the value of animal welfare protection and the right to freedom of religion. The member congress of D66,

54 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, TK 96-16-103.

55 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, TK 96-16-104.

56 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, February 17, 2011, TK54-4-5.

57 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, TK 96-16-112.

for example, opposed the ban on unstunned ritual slaughter, while its group in the Lower House supported it.⁵⁸ Not only were the parties which supported the PvdD proposal divided, but also in the CDA there was no unanimity in views on this issue.⁵⁹

The positions the political parties but also the government took in the debate were strongly influenced by substantive and strategic considerations. Related to this, four features of current Dutch politics are worth noticing. Firstly, the fact that during the last three decades Dutch politics has increasingly gained the character of an open market in which parties are bidding for the preference of the voter. In the past, many parties could count on a fixed electoral constituency, but since the 1960s and 1970s the 'floating voters' part in the electorate has been growing constantly, which forced political parties to increasingly take into account the preferences of their potential voters. In the last decades, the societal significance of religion has decreased and the value attributed to animal welfare has increased among the Dutch population.⁶⁰

The open market character of Dutch politics strengthens the position of the mass media in the political process.⁶¹ The media mediates between electorate and politicians. Simply said, the media informs citizens about politics, and conversely, informs politicians about pertinent issues in society. In fact the media is doing more than offering information, namely it also plays a major role in the way societal and political items are framed by the public and politicians. In fact the media influences not only the process of 'agenda setting' in society and politics, but also the process of 'frame setting'.⁶² The media reported extensively on unstunned ritual slaughter and the parliamentary debate on this topic. Bloody pictures and videos of ritual slaughter practices stimulated the sympathy for a ban on this practice.

Thirdly, the entrance in 2006 of the PvdD, the entrance in 2002 of the LPF and in 2006 of the PVV in parliament is important. These parties gave a strong impetus to the 'unstunned ritual slaughter as an outdated practice' discourse and the 'ritual slaughter as a form of animal torture' discourse respectively. Under the influence of the PvdD, D66, the SP and Groen Links changed their

58 Elsevier, 'Congres D66 stemt tegen verbod op ritueel slachten', May 28, 2011.

59 Interview Henk Jan Ormel, April 2, 2014.

60 Tjard de Cock Buning et al., *Denken over dieren: dier en ding, zegen en zorg* (Amsterdam 2012).

61 Wouter van der Brug, et al. "New Lines of conflict. European integration and immigration," in: Carsten K.W. de Dreu (ed.), *Social Conflict within and between Groups*, (London/ New York: Psychology Press, 2014) 151–165.

62 Dietram A. Scheuvel, "Framing as Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication* 49/1 (1999), 103–122; Peter Vasterman, *Mediahype* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2005).

position and became supporters of a ban on unstunned ritual slaughter. The relatively large parties on the far right side (LPF, PVV) and the far left side (SP, Groen Links) of the Dutch political spectrum put the traditional mainstream parties VVD and PvdA under pressure to also take a more critical stance on ritual slaughter.

In Dutch politics no political party has the majority. This means that the country is always ruled by a coalition of different parties. In the first decade of the 21st century the Netherlands saw five different cabinets. In 2011, the year the debates on ritual slaughter were held in the Dutch House of Representatives, the coalition was made up of the VVD and the CDA and supported, under conditions, by the populist nationalist party PVV. The coalition agreement did not cover the topic of ritual slaughter, or, in other words, this topic was a free issue.

All these four characteristics affected the positions political parties took in the debate on ritual slaughter, and they partly explain the shift in the position of the liberal party VVD and the labor party PvdA from opposing to supporting the ban on unstunned ritual slaughter. The debate split the ruling coalition, with the members of the VVD voting in favor of the proposal and the members of the CDA voting against it.⁶³ Members of the PVV, which signed a deal to partner the government, supported the proposal too. Due to the fact that in the coalition the topic of ritual slaughter was a free issue, State Secretary for Agriculture Henk Bleker had, to a certain degree, the freedom to follow his own course in the debate. At the end of the debate in the House of Representatives, he pointed out his own position. He let the House know that according to the government there is avoidable extra animal suffering in the existing ritual slaughter procedures, it makes sense to differentiate according to types of animal, in particular between (heavy) cows and other animals, and there is a problematic tension between Marianne Thieme's proposal and Article 6 of the Dutch constitution on the right to freedom of religion and belief, however, without giving a final judgment on the proposal.⁶⁴

6 National Identity and Mechanisms of Inclusion and Exclusion

In a broader context, the recent changes in the approach to ritual slaughter in Dutch politics should also be understood in the context of developments in the wider Dutch society. They are in particular related to changes in national identity, or more specific, Dutch national self-conception, and, related to that,

63 Cf. Valenta, "Pluralistic Democracy or Scientistic Monocracy?"

64 Handelingen Tweede Kamer, June 22, 2011, TK96-16-144/5.

mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in Dutch society. The term 'national self-conception' refers to the images prevailing in the Netherlands about what Dutch society is and, more importantly, what Dutch society should be.⁶⁵

Since the turn of the century, the dominant national self-image of the Netherlands as a multicultural society has been replaced by the image of the Netherlands as a progressive, predominately secular society.⁶⁶ This observation is confirmed by Oskar Verkaai's study on naturalization rituals in the Netherlands in which the author concluded that current Dutch civil culture has become dominated by 'progressive secularism.'⁶⁷

In this transition two tendencies are significant. Firstly, the change from a self-perception of being a mixed society in terms of world-views into being a mainly secular society. In his analysis of the development of the Dutch national identity the sociologist Frank Lechner noted that 'the Dutch had become one nation, without God.'⁶⁸ It would be a misconception to state that secularism has become dominant in the Netherlands since 2001, that is to say the doctrine that religion should be abandoned fully from public life. Although there are public figures who convey this doctrine, such as Paul Cliteur and Hans den Boef, it is not prevailing.⁶⁹ The dominant image is that the role of religion in Dutch society is and should be limited, without claiming that religion has only harmful effects on people and society, and without stating that religion should be consigned completely to the private sphere. The consequence of this image is that people are more inclined to limit the freedom of religion than in the past when the social status of religion was higher.

65 Cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/ New York: Verso, 2006); WRR, *Identificatie met Nederland* (Amsterdam: AUP 2007).

66 Cf. Frank Lechner, *The Netherlands: Globalization and National Identity* (London/ New York: Routledge, 2008); Oskar Verkaaik, *Ritueel burgerschap. Een essay over nationalisme en secularisme in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2009); Pieter Dronkers, "De tolerante natie en haar 'multireligieuze drama'. Nieuwe burgerschapsvisies en de ruimte voor religieuze loyaliteit," in: Peter van Dam, James Kennedy, Friso Wielenga (eds.), *Achter de zuilen. Op zoek naar religie in naoorlogs Nederland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2014). 155–178.

67 Verkaaik, *Ritueel burgerschap*.

68 Lechner, *The Netherlands*, 135.

69 See Paul Cliteur, *The Secular Outlook: In Defense of Moral and Political Secularism* (Malden/ Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2012), and Hans den Boef, *Nederland seculier! Tegen religieuze privileges in wetten, regels, praktijken, gewoonten en attitudes* (Amsterdam: Van Gennep, 2003).

The change is rooted in the dominant trends of church decline and the decline in the belief in God or a higher power. According to the longitudinal research project '*God in Nederland*' (God in the Netherlands), the percentage of the Dutch population affiliated to a church declined in the period 1966 till 2006 from 67 to 39, while in that same period the percentage of the category theists in the Netherlands declined from 47 to 24.⁷⁰ Although church affiliation and religiosity are not the same, the trends concerning them are going in the same direction. A recent study carried out by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research SCP confirms this observation. In 2012, 30 percent of the Dutch population belonged to a church and 21 per cent could be defined as being theists.⁷¹ Probably more important is the decline of the popularity of religious parties in the Netherlands. In 1963 all religious parties combined had 80 seats in the Dutch Parliament, and in 2006 they had 49. The shift was strongly confirmed by the fall in support for the CDA from 41 to 21 seats during the national elections of 2010.

The second tendency visible in the national self-conception is the change from being a pluralistic society in terms of norms and values into being a progressive one. This change is rooted in the rise of what Dick Houtman and Jan Willem Duyvendak called 'a progressive moral majority' in the Netherlands.⁷² The key values this majority propagates are: individual freedom, freedom of speech, gender equality, equality between heterosexuals and homosexuals, equal relations between children and parents, and also animal welfare. Most of these values broke through in the 1960s and 1970s, and received more and more support from that time on. In line with this trend, the 'purple' cabinets (1994–2002), led by PM Kok—based on an alliance between the PvdA, the VVD and D'66 which did not include, for the first time in almost 80 years, Christian parties in the ruling coalition—legalized abortion, euthanasia and gay marriage. However, these cabinets tried to take into account in their policy the interests and values of 'deviant,' traditional groups. However, this policy was abandoned in Dutch politics after 2000, when several prominent public and political figures wrote off multiculturalism and made a plea for strengthening the national identity and imposing progressive values upon 'traditional' newcomers.

70 Ton Bernts, Gerard Dekker & Joep de Hart, *God in Nederland 1996–2006* (Kampen: Kok, 2007), 14, 40.

71 Joep de Hart, *Geloven binnen en buiten verband. Godsdienstige ontwikkelingen in Nederland* (Den Haag: SCP, 2014), 38, 72.

72 Dick Houtman & Jan Willem Duyvendak, 'Boerka's, boerkinis en belastingcenten. Culturele en politieke polarisatie in een post-christelijke samenleving,' in: Willem Schinkel et al (eds.), *Polarisatie: bedreigend of verrijkend* (Amsterdam: SWP, 2009) 102–119.

The shift in national self-conception has direct consequences for the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in Dutch society.⁷³ These (power) mechanisms point out which categories in the population are considered to be in the center of Dutch society and which categories in its margins. The first categories are defined in terms of 'real Dutchman,' while the second categories are characterized as 'outsiders,' 'autochthones,' or in more extreme terms as 'foreigners' or 'strangers.'⁷⁴ In the period multiculturalism was dominant, traditional and progressive groups were positioned in the center of Dutch society, and in particular groups which rejected this concept, such as the far-right party CP and later the CD, were marginalized. Around about 2000, the tide changed and the concept of the Netherlands as a progressive, predominately secular society became prevalent. Within this concept especially traditional religious minorities had to fight for acknowledgment as they did not fit in with the new national self-image. In particular Muslim communities, but not only they, were considered to propagate traditional values which were supposed to be incompatible with the dominant progressive values of Dutch culture.⁷⁵ They were sometimes stigmatized as lagging behind, being backward, or more negative, or professing a disgusting ideology. This change had consequences for the way the practice of unstunned ritual slaughter was perceived in Dutch society. This practice was not considered any longer as a practice which belongs to the culture of traditional religious minorities which should have the freedom to organize their (social) lives as much as possible according to their own standards, but as an outdated, or stronger, a disgusting practice which did not fit in with current Dutch society.

This new perception of the practice of unstunned ritual slaughter confronted (morally) progressive groups and parties with a dilemma. In order to understand this dilemma, it is important to take a historical view. In the 1950s, when traditional religious groups dominated Dutch culture, progressive groups, such as feminists and gay communities, fought for tolerance, the acceptance of cultural difference and the recognition of progressive identities. From the 1960s on, they became more and more accepted and in the period of multiculturalism progressive identities and traditional identities existed—as

73 Cf. Verkaai, *Ritueel burgerschap*; Erik Sengers & Thijl Sunier (eds.), *Religious Newcomers and the Nation State: Political Culture and Organized Religion in France and the Netherlands* (Delft: Eburon, 2010).

74 Cf. The classic study on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion Norbert Elias & John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders* (London: Sage, 1965).

75 Sipco J. Vellenga, "Religieuze orthodoxie als bedreiging. Verschuivingen in het publieke debat," *Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid* 2/2 (2011), 7–22.

it were—side by side. In the current period, however, progressive groups are in power and in this situation they are confronted with the choice either to continue cherishing the value of tolerance, even when this implies that the traditional religious practices they reject continue to be carried out, or to abandon these practices, but at the expense of the value of tolerance which has always been an essential part of their heritage. Looking at the case of the debate on ritual slaughter, it seems that nowadays the (morally) progressive parties tend to increasingly choose the latter option.

7 Conclusion

In the Netherlands unstunned ritual slaughter has always been permitted, except for the period of the occupation by the Nazis during the Second World War when it was banned. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, the stance of the majority of the House of Representatives changed from opposing to supporting a ban on ritual slaughter without prior stunning. How can this shift be understood? Firstly, we have noticed that a couple of recent political developments are very important. The entrance of the PvdD in 2006 in the Lower House gave a strong impetus to the discourse of ‘unstunned ritual slaughter as an outdated practice’ and the entrance of the LPF in 2002 and the pvv in 2006 stimulated the discourse of ‘ritual slaughter as a form of animal torture.’ Under the influence of the PvdD D66, Groen Links and the SP became supporters of banning unstunned ritual slaughter. Because of the popularity of the parties on the extremes of the Dutch political spectrum, there was pressure on both mainstream parties, the vvd and the PvdA, to move into the direction of the critical standpoints of pvv respectively the SP and Groen Links about ritual slaughter. Under that pressure, these two parties decided in 2011 to support the proposed ban on unstunned ritual slaughter.

In a broader sense, the shift should be understood in the context of some developments in Dutch society in the aftermath of 9/11 and the ‘Fortuyn revolt.’ Around the turn of the century, the national self-conception of the Netherlands changed drastically and the concept of multiculturalism was replaced by the concept of the Netherlands as being a progressive, predominately secular country. This change had a strong impact on the way unstunned ritual slaughter was framed. This practice was no longer perceived by many as an essential part of the cultures of accepted traditional religious minorities, but as an outdated, or abject practice which does not fit in with current Dutch society. Within this context, (morally) progressive parties were more inclined to support a ban on this practice than they were in the past.

What does the case of the debate on unstunned ritual slaughter in the Dutch Lower House mean for the discussion in sociology of religion, and broader religious studies, about public religions, or more precisely, the increasing visibility of religion in the public sphere?⁷⁶ In that debate some claim that religion has made a positive return to the public sphere of Western democratic societies and other regions of the world, while others state that this has more to do with government policies for managing religious and ethnic diversity. Applied to the situation in Europe, some hypothesize that the increasing visibility of religion must be attributed in particular to the settlement of large numbers of Muslims and other non-Western immigrants in this continent, while others point to the governments' efforts to 'domesticate' these communities. The case of the debate on ritual slaughter in the Dutch House of Representatives supports the second hypothesis. The public commotion about unstunned ritual slaughter in the Netherlands was not the result of the growth of this practice, but of the increasing political interference in it. It was the upshot of the political will to intervene in this practice in a context in which less importance was attached to the value of tolerance and to the right to freedom of religion. The case reveals the paradox that in some situations the growing public attention to religion in Europe is not an indication of a public revival of religion, but on the contrary, of the weakening of the societal position of religion in relation to the state, which tries to strengthen its grip on the lives of traditional believers.

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76 Cf. This debate started in the 1990s with José Casanova's publication *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago/ London 1994). In the debate, for example, Peter Berger and Martin Riesenbrodt take the position that there is a worldwide resurgence of religion. Berger speaks about it in terms of 'desecularization' and Riesenbrodt of the 'return of religions'. See Peter Berger, 'The Desecularization of the World. A Global Overview', in: Peter Berger (ed.), *The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1999) 1–18, and Martin Riesenbrodt, *Die Rückkehr der Religionen. Fundamentalismus und der "Kampf der Kulturen"* (München: Beck, 2000). The British sociologist of religion James Beckford is deeply skeptical about their claims. James Beckford, 'The return of public religion? A critical assessment of a popular claim' in: *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 23/2 (2010), 121–136, and James Beckford, 'Public religions and the post-secular: critical reflections' in: *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51/1 (2012), 1–19.

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