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Speaking the Body

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Chapter 3: Speaking the Body: Examining the Intersections of Sexuality, Secularity and Religion in Dutch Sexuality Education

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This chapter focusses on the Dutch approach to sex education. It investigates understandings of the body in irreligious and religious sexual health programmes implemented by Dutch NGOs in both the Netherlands and Uganda. Grounded in ethnographic research, the chapter demonstrates that Dutch sexual health approaches convey a rather disembodied notion of sexuality, privileging the practice of speaking openly about sex. It suggests that the body in Dutch sex education is primarily a 'speaking body'. The chapter argues that this emphasis on speaking about sex renders irrelevant more embodied forms of communication, and also neglects the complicated power relations in which these supposedly open conversations are embedded. The chapter then seeks to understand this privileging of spoken words over materiality in the context of broader secular/protestant modern discourse, arguing that the Dutch approach to sexuality is normative rather than neutral and therefore not necessarily culturally sensitive nor universally applicable.

Introduction: The Story of the Nun

During her PhD research on NGOs working on the topic of sexual health, Bartelink often was told about 'The story of the nun'. This particular story is about a nun who was invited to a workshop on sexuality education in Uganda. The participants to the workshop had gathered from various parts of the country to discuss how sexuality education more adequately could be implemented in education. Many of the participants did not know each other well, and some appeared uncomfortable with the idea of speaking about sexuality. The workshop was the first in a series of workshops initiated by Dutch NGOs, who found themselves struggling with bringing sexuality into conversation with their Ugandan counterparts. Since the Dutch

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organisers had anticipated the participants of the workshop would be unfamiliar with the topic of sex education, and in view of the Protestant and Catholic backgrounds of the participants and their organizations, the organisers had invited a nun who could accentuate the importance of sex education from a Christian perspective. The nun, known for providing sex education to teenage girls in Uganda, was thus invited as a role model for a Christian approach to the topic. Unfortunately, her presentation at the workshop was quite disappointing for the organisers, as one of them explained to Bartelink in an interview from 2009:

Naïve as we were, we thought her [the nun] to be a magnificent example. [At previous occasions] she had been very liberal in how she had approached these girls; she had been really empowering and very open about sexuality. She had distributed condoms and had encouraged them to make their own choices in sexuality. (...) Yet, at the workshop she told a completely different story than what she did in practice.

Indeed, in the presence of all the representatives of the Christian organizations, including Catholic and Anglican (male) clergy, the nun highlighted the importance of abstinence as an important Christian sexual moral.

‘How [stories] are told, who tells them, when they are told, how many stories are told is really dependent on power’ (Adichie, 2009). Therefore, the frequent narration of the story to various audiences in the Netherlands invites us to explore how sexual health promotion is vested in power relations (Bartelink, 2016). We argue that the nun in this story embodies an interesting paradox. On the one hand, she represents an embodiment that is ‘historically associated with theistic religion’ (Hirschkind, 2011:638). Her habitus and religious dress appear to represent the subjection to a specific form of religious discipline. As a pious religious woman invited to teach professionals from various faith-based organisations, the nun resembles both submission and authority. While invited by the Dutch sexuality educators to convey and embody open speech about sexual matters, she was asked to embody the assumed opposite of this. Speaking about abstinence, she contradicted the plea for speaking openly about sexuality, which is the typical approach for Dutch sexual health organisations (Roodsaz, 2018; van den Berg, 2012). In the story’s narration afterwards by the Dutch professionals, the nun therefore paradoxically comes to embody secularity: she represents and reconfirms the secular notion of submission to religious norms (Mahmood, 2005). In this chapter we therefore conceive of this story as an

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insightful source to interrogate the so-called ‘Dutch approach’ to sex education. We seek to explore the sensibilities that the figure of the nun brings to life in the Netherlands, while further exploring how these sensibilities play out in sexuality education as it is taught in schools in the Netherlands.

In what follows, we first elucidate why we understand the Dutch approach to sexuality to be an overtly secular one, and explain our focus on materiality. Then, we briefly outline the ethnographic approaches of both researchers that this chapter is grounded in. Subsequently, we turn to our ethnographic case-studies, investigating how Dutch actors introduce the Dutch approach to sex education in the context of Uganda by emphasizing open speech, and then exploring how these claims and acts of speaking sexual truths are similarly introduced and embodied in sex education in the Netherlands. In both cases, we explore the acts of secular delineation as well as their proposed outcomes: we ask which practices are denoted as irreligious, why, and how. How is religion portrayed in such imaginaries? Which embodied configurations are applauded, and which are condemned? What role does the body take in sex education classes and how is that role presumed and suggested to relate to religion? Finally, we situate the Dutch approach to sexuality education and its emphasis on words and speech in the broader discourse of secular/ protestant modernity.

Secularity, Religion and Sexuality

This chapter combines two important theoretical branches in the study of the secular. First, it draws on the work of scholars who have suggested how advances for gender and sexuality equality do not necessarily relate to the power of the secular, nor to the detriment of religion (Cady & Fessenden, 2013; Scott, 2018). Second, this chapter draws on the work of scholars who have highlighted the corporeal and material dimensions of the secular (e.g. Asad, 2003; Engelke, 2015; Hirschkind, 2011; Scheer, et al., 2019). Rather than studying secularism – understood here as an ideology that seeks to identify religion, to subsequently relegate it to particular segments of society – we will study secularity, which we take to imply to also take seriously the corporeal and material dimensions on which secular ideologies draw.

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Important in this regard is our observation that the term ‘secular’ has two different interpretations. First, it is used to refer to what is considered an irreligious identity. However, after a closer examination, this interpretation then hinges on what is considered religious, and hence secularity remains a rather unclear, unstable concept that pre-eminently is constituted by that what it is not. In this chapter, we, therefore, prefer a different interpretation of the term secularity and its adjective secular. Charles Hirschkind’s (2011:643-644) ‘failed’ attempt of finding an ‘ontological’ secular body has suggested that the essence of secularity is not so much a stable determinant set of embodied dispositions, but rather a particular capacity to mobilise the religious/secular tension in a productive way. In other words: particular phenomena are perceived to be religious or irreligious not because they ‘are’ religious or irreligious in an ontological sense, but because they have been identified as such by particular powers in specific contexts. We propose to take this suggestion one step further, and, in our fieldwork, to set out to find such empowered acts that seek to mobilise the religious/secular boundary, and which subsequently identify and convey representations of what religion supposedly is. Seen in this light, a secular actor would not be someone that is irreligious, but someone, religious or irreligious, who seeks to distinguish religious matters from secular ones.

This chapter will explore secular acts that aim to identify religion, as well as the effective results of these attempts of identification within the context of sex education classes orchestrated by Dutch sexual health organizations. We deem sex education of particular relevance to study religious and secular interactions because it is undergirded by a historical and nationalistic sentiment, which is captured in the emic-notion of the ‘Dutch approach’ to sexuality.

The “Dutch Approach” To Sexuality

In 2015, Diana Veldman, director of the Knowledge Centre Sexuality Rutgers, published a blog post entitled “Has the time come for a Dutch approach?”:

The Dutch have a very open attitude towards sexuality. This approach towards young people and sexuality is pragmatic: they accept that all young people have sexual feelings, just like everyone else. Young people will have sex anyway, so we better give them sex education. Then they will acquire know-how and skills to make well-informed choices and consequently they will start having sex only

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when they feel they are ready for it. Therefore, sex education has been included as a statutory subject in the attainment goals of primary as well as secondary schools.

As reflected in this quote, the ‘Dutch approach’ is mostly an emic term, mainly used by Dutch non-governmental and governmental actors and sometimes by non-Dutch actors to point out the distinctive features of sex education as it is introduced by Dutch actors. To better understand how this characterization of the Dutch approach to sexuality education as particularly open and pragmatic relates to religion, we will give an introduction on socio-historical context of the Netherlands in which the case is situated.

In the course of the 20th century, the Netherlands has come to view itself as being at the forefront of developing effective approaches to sexual health. This was done in particular by creating an infrastructure for sexual health services. The counselling clinics on contraception that were called Rutgershuizen [‘Rutger’s homes’] – after Johannes Rutgers who was among the first to advocate access to services – have become the model for the government-organised sexual health services since the 1970s when a fruitful collaboration between government and non-governmental actors emerged. When the AIDS pandemic in the 1980s affected people in the Netherlands, its impact turned out to be less severe than initially expected (Dijstelbloem, 2014). Currently, Rutgers is the leading Knowledge Centre on Sexuality in the Netherlands working in partnership with the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) of the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport sexual health in the Netherlands, while also implementing programmes across the globe.²

The championing of the ‘Dutch approach’, however, relies more on a self-image of the Netherlands as a progressive, liberal nation, than on the effective organisation of sexual health care. It is vested in a ‘Dutch narrative of modernity (as) a story of progressive secularization in which religion (is) considered to be dangerous, a cause of conflict and unruly, irrational behaviour’ (Knibbe, 2018:658). In Dutch collective memory, the 1960s are recalled as the most formative years of the Dutch approach to sexuality. In this memory the radical progressive youth and feminist movements of that time are seen as liberated people, who began to discuss

² RIVM. 2018. ‘Het nationale actieplan soa, hiv en seksuele gezondheid 2017-2022’. Accessed on March 8 2019 via <https://www.rivm.nl/publicaties/nationaal-actieplan-soa-hiv-en-seksuele-gezondheid-2017-2022>

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and approach sexuality in an open manner, while simultaneously positioning themselves against Christian political and religious leaders (Hekma et. al., 1990; Buijs et. al., 2014). The rapid secularization after the 1960s has further strengthened the self-understanding of the Netherlands as a sexually liberated nation (Bartelink, 2016; Knibbe, 2018; Wiering, 2017).

Dutch governmental and non-governmental organizations that promote sexual and reproductive health and rights often emphasise the importance of breaking taboos around sexuality, particularly when their efforts are geared at cultural and religious ‘others’ (Bartelink and Knibbe, 2019). This bias is observed when sexual health interventions are implemented in developing contexts, and in the Netherlands when focused on inhabitants from non-European descent (Bartelink, 2016; Knibbe, 2018). This leads to a suspicion towards religion and an anti-religious sentiment that is an important yet very implicit layer in the field of sexual health (Schrijvers & Wiering, 2018).

This implicit positioning vis-a-vis religious actors is also visible in how Dutch governmental and non-governmental actors engage in international networks. Since the Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1994 and the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1996, the Dutch government collaborates with civil society actors such as Rutgers to be a progressive voice in the culture wars around topics such as sexuality education, access to contraception and safe abortion in the context of global politics (cf. Adams and Pigg, 2005). In her report of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2014, the then Minister of International Trade and Development Cooperation Lillianne Ploumen reported that sexuality education was a controversial issue in the negotiations between participating member states. She stressed the importance of initiating dialogues with “those who think differently”, including traditional and religious leaders, about sexuality and gender, which illustrates how the “Dutch approach” is seen as juxtaposing religious approaches (cf. Bartelink and Groeneweg, 2019). Sexual and reproductive health and rights have been a priority theme in the development policy of Minister Ploumen and of the three other Ministers for Development Cooperation that have been in office since 2003 (Bartelink, 2016; Bartelink and Meinema, 2014; , Roodsaz, 2018).

In May 2011, the predecessor of Lillianne Ploumen, the Minister for Development Cooperation Ben Knapen, stated for example that the Netherlands is particularly suited to put sexual and

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reproductive health and rights on the development agenda. He suggested that the Netherlands was one of the first countries to realise the emancipation of women; a form of sexual nationalism that is empirically problematic considering for example that labour participation until the 1990s was quite low, while women in the Netherlands still face considerable income differences compared to men (SCP, 2018). In addition, Knapen stated that the Dutch have something special to offer in contexts where sexuality is surrounded by cultural taboos.

Given the Dutch pride regarding their Dutch approach to sexuality, it may not come as a surprise that the Dutch government is active in funding local NGOs for implementing comprehensive sexuality education programmes across the globe. Knowledge centre Rutgers runs an international programme that has introduced comprehensive sexuality education in 11 countries, and has local offices in Indonesia, Vietnam and Pakistan. Rutgers receives substantial funding from the Dutch government for their international programmes, while the Ministries of Health and of Foreign Affairs consider Rutgers the primary societal partner when it comes to sexual health (cf. Annual report, 2017). Dutch development organisations – often in collaboration with local partners – implement programmes for sexuality in similar “resource poor” contexts across the globe. The seven NGOs researched by Roodsaz for example, all received Dutch funding for their sexuality education programmes (cf. Roodsaz, 2018). Bartelink has conducted research on the Educaids network in which three Dutch development organizations that collaborated with local NGOs in five countries in Sub Sahara Africa to improve sexuality education in schools (cf. Bartelink, 2016).

Interestingly, the “Dutch approach” is recognised as distinctive by people beyond the Dutch sexual health sector as well. In the British Medical Journal in 2018, Sheldon publishes the article ‘Could Dutch style sex education reduce pregnancies among UK teenagers?’ which considers the Dutch “sex positive approach” as exemplary for the UK (Sheldon, 2018). The UK-based journalist Lyn Enright (2019) refers to this article when writing in her book *Vagina, A Re-education* that the Dutch model of sex education leads to more pleasurable and enjoyable sex for teenagers and the UK should follow this model. However, both Bartelink and Roodsaz demonstrate in their respective studies, that the “Dutch approach” is appreciated as well as resisted and criticised abroad (Bartelink, 2016; Bartelink and Meinema, 2014; Roodsaz, 2018).

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Problematic in particular is that Dutch sexual health programmes claim to be culturally sensitive, while introducing particular normative frameworks (Bartelink, 2018; Roodsaz, 2018, cf. Adams and Pigg, 2005) and forms of embodiment. As we will argue in the following section, this is interrelated with the emphasis on open speech, or “speakability” in Dutch sex education (Roodsaz, 2018; Van den Berg, 2014). The quotes of Veldman and Knapen in this section are illustrative as both stress the idea that the Dutch are open about sexuality which supposedly has resulted in good sex education programmes that should be implemented elsewhere in the world as well. Asking what the “effective representations” (Scheer et. al., 2019) of the secular are in the Dutch approach beyond its contrast to religion, we therefore suggest looking at the emphasis on “open speech”.

A Brief Note On Methodology and Approach

This chapter draws on qualitative empirical research from two different PhD projects and long-term engagement with the Dutch sexual health sector by the authors. Since 2004, Brenda Bartelink has, in multiple roles (academic researcher, policy advisor and NGO staff), engaged with the Dutch field of sexual health. This included multiple periods of qualitative and ethnographic fieldwork in the Netherlands and Eastern Africa. Part of this research was an anthropology of religion and development, investigating the discourses and practices of the Dutch government and Dutch NGOs on the intersections of religion, development, gender and sexuality (Bartelink, 2016; Bartelink & Buitelaar, 2011). Another part was focused on applied research with religious NGOs to evaluate programmes aimed at engaging religious actors and communities in promoting gender equality, maternal health and HIV and AIDS. The dataset on which this chapter is based includes 20 key-informant interviews with Dutch and Ugandan actors in the Educaids network and participant observation in training and a conference in Uganda, and two public events in The Netherlands carried out between 2008 and 2010. The long-term research enables an analysis of how the Dutch government and Dutch NGOs have approached and introduced sexual health and rights outside the Netherlands. The data presented in this chapter is analysed for that purpose, opening up a perspective on the Dutch approach to sexual health. This means that the contextualisation of the case in the broader context of sexual health approaches in Uganda and broader East Africa is outside of the scope of this chapter.

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Wiering's fieldwork was undertaken as part of his PhD project on the entanglements of religion, sexuality and secularity in the Netherlands. Wiering conducted his fieldwork between 2016 and 2018. Rather than focusing on sexual health organizations as such, Wiering instead investigated the field of sexual health more generally. This focus on a particular social field (Bourdieu, 1993) rather than on a specific population enabled him to also include in his research actors who did not have so much to do with sexuality as such, but who nevertheless were germane to how the field was constituted. During his fieldwork, Wiering participated in seminars; interviewed several sexologists, general practitioners, 19 sex educators; was trained as a sex educator himself; observed 15 sex education classes; and taught 30 sex education classes himself. All interlocutors referred to in this chapter have been assigned pseudonyms.

Sexuality education classes were quintessential activities in the field he investigated. Understood rather broadly here, sexuality education classes refer to a variety of activities orchestrated to teach people about sexuality. Most of the time, they were addressed to high school students but sometimes the lessons were taught to adults as well. Within the smaller context of the Netherlands one can observe a large variety of organizations working on the topic of sex. Some are small, consisting only of a few individuals; others are large and entail more than twenty employees. There are also 70 CHS (Community health services) ["GGD-en"], situated all over the country. In the Netherlands, Dutch high schools are obligated by the state to integrate the topic of sexuality in their curriculum. This implies that there is a significant demand for sex education classes, and this demand constitutes an important financial source for the organizations Wiering studied.

Speakability and the Body in Dutch Sex Education

In this section, we will present the findings from our fieldwork. We both focus on how the emphasis on open speech became reified in sex education, and how this speakable sexuality is realised through a particular form of embodiment. As stated earlier, we suggest that this presumed need for more conversations about sex is partly constructed as one that is considered and conveyed to be in contrast to the taboos presumed to flourish in religious contexts. Hence, we understand speakable sexuality, at least in the contexts we discuss here, to be a secular

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practice: as one that is part of an act that produces representations of what religion is, and what it is not.

Teaching Sex Education in Uganda

We first investigate the activities of Dutch NGOs to introduce a particular approach to sex education in formal and informal school programmes in Uganda. These activities included a series of training workshops for capacity building of the staff of education organisations who directly offer sex education lessons in schools and/or work on implementing sexual health policies in school contexts. Such capacity building workshops are interesting and relevant for our analysis because of how these introduce an ideal-type approach to sex education that in this case was referred to as “comprehensive sexuality education”. While we analyse the workshops mainly in terms of our interest in the “Dutch approach”, it is important to be aware that a majority of participants of the workshops were already trained in a form of sexuality education that focussed on teaching young people to abstain from sexuality before marriage. This approach was in line with government policy in Uganda at the time, while internationally subject to contestation and critique (Bartelink and Meinema, 2014; Bartelink, 2016).

The start of the series of training workshops was the meeting to which the nun was invited to speak about her experience in talking about sexuality to girls, as was referred to in the vignette. This talk signposts the importance of “speakability”, which was emphasised through other activities as well (cf. Roodsaz, 2018). The workshop participants were engaged in games and exercises that would help them discuss sexuality more openly. An example was an exercise to list the kinds of sexual acts (young) people engage in and name them out loud and explicitly in the group. To just mention kissing was not enough, it had to be more explicit in describing forms of sex and intercourse, as the trainers emphasised in informal conversations with Bartelink. This was seen as important by the trainers, because, contrary to what is often expected, scientific studies have shown that young people engage in all kinds of sexual practices ranging from masturbation to penetrative sex. Naming sexual acts was a way of “opening up” as well as a way to familiarise the participants with what was seen as the “reality” of young people’s sexual lives.

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In interviews conducted several months later, during the third workshop in the project, participants shared with Bartelink that they had struggled with naming sexual acts in the group:

(The trainer) is very open and she really wanted us to talk about the sexual organs (laughing). It was an eye-opener on how we need to address these things with the young people openly. (...) Yes it was new to hear people speak so boldly.³

Many of the participants interviewed by Bartelink recalled the first workshop as challenging and impressive. Some of them fiercely resisted the approach to sexuality education introduced by the trainers, while others recalled it as a difficult but eye-opening experience as stated in the quote.

As much as this exercise seems playful, it also connects to responsible behaviour. In particular in the context of HIV and AIDS, as Burchardt (2013) has argued for faith-based interventions, motivating religious clergy to speak about sex was seen as crucial to open religious contexts to address matters of sex. This was often done in such a way that sex emerges as a technical procedure that requires knowledge, while distancing it from the morally more difficult dimensions of lust and sin. The performance of talking about sex as a means of opening-up in the case of the Educaids network however, also seems to underline the importance of speakability in Dutch approaches to sex education that has also been observed in Bangladesh (Roodsaz, 2018) and the Netherlands (Van den Berg, 2014; Wekker, 2016).

As became clear in the course of Bartelink's research, it was not always possible to speak about sex in the same way across different political and social contexts. The experience with naming sexual acts and sexual organs in the workshop did not guarantee that the education experts would also do this when teaching sexuality education in schools. Bartelink noted that the choices made to talk about sex and in which words depended heavily on the power relations within particular contexts. In Uganda, the language used to address matters of sex and sexuality traditionally was indirect, using proverbs and particular expressions (De Haas, 2017; Sadgrove et al., 2012). People would talk about sexuality while at the same time respecting the culture of secrecy in which sexuality was embedded. Growing up as a child and teenager included a

³ Interview with participant, Shareframe workshop organized by the Educaids Network in March 2009 (Shareframe refers to Shared Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights), cf. Bartelink 2016.

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gradual discovering of these secrets guided by family members of the same gender (De Haas, 2017). The gendering of power relations in the story of the nun, and the denial of this in how the story is narrated in the Netherlands is significant. Performing “speakable sex” when engaging with girls, the nun acted like a female family member, hence acting in a culturally sensitive way. In a public setting the same sensitivity would ask her to choose more concealed vocabulary. Addressing an audience of professionals and religious clergy, the nun was put in a position of authority and agency. Her choice to speak according to cultural and religious gender norms can be seen as an agentic act, as it is in cognisance of the power relations in which she as a female religious authority was embedded. These gendered power relations are grossly overlooked in the narration of the story, in which the submission to religious authority was primarily emphasised.

The story of the nun as it was narrated in the Netherlands, by virtue of demonstrating the opposite, also suggests that the Dutch approach emphasises “sincerity”, i.e. what people say and do should be consistent. Research suggests, however, that sexual health approaches go through various modes of translation to ensure sensitivity within the particular community and local context in which it is introduced. Such processes of translation are demonstrated by Van de Berg (2012) in her study in the Netherlands, and by Bartelink in a study on Uganda (2016) and by Roodsaz (2018) in Bangladesh, while subsequent (unpublished and applied) research by Bartelink that included conversations with experts in Malawi and Ghana suggest the same (Bartelink, 2015). It is important to note that the Dutch/ international field of sexual health strongly overlaps with the field of international development. Development programmes on gender and sexuality are guided by exclusionary mechanisms (Roodsaz and Van Raemdonck, 2018), that revive historically unequal power relations and are affirmed by unequal capital flows. In these unequal power relations the forms of translation performed in response to the Dutch approach, often also include forms of resistance against the normative claims and assumptions underlying these programmes. In this perspective the act of the nun to not speak openly, can once more be seen as an agentic act.

Summing up, the Dutch approach as it emerges from sex education programming promoted outside the Netherlands introduces a particular form of embodiment. The body primarily

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appears to be a speaking body. Its agency is located in what is expressed in words, which then is assumed to be in accordance with which actions that body take in all contexts and circumstances. Hence, the assumption is that the speaking body is a body when speaking about healthy sex will also engage in healthy sex, regardless of the power relations in which it is situated.

Sex Education in the Netherlands

The various sex education classes that Wiering attended during his fieldwork also featured an emphasis on the act of speaking: the audience was often expected and stimulated to engage in dialogues about sexuality. It was often assumed by the sex educators that this was the first opportunity for the audience to engage in such dialogues about sex. To increase the chances of such a conversation to emerge, sexuality educators first tried to create what they referred to as a “safe environment”. This was an environment where everyone would feel comfortable enough to discuss intimate issues. Teachers employed various strategies to create such an environment. Susan, a 35-year old woman working for a large sexual health organisation that offered thematic seminars on sex for various organizations and companies, for example, said:

Well, we usually arrive around dinner time and then we eat pizza together with the group. That’s [the pizza] arranged by the organization we are visiting. Or roti, we just really don’t care about what we eat actually, but the point is that everyone is seated together at a table. Not just a group of people listening to us standing in front of them: no, we are all seated at a table. Well, then you just try to make a bit of contact, and then we just talk about sex unforced. [...] So there is some kind of bonding idea that underpins the act of eating together: we all eat, much similar to how we all have sex. Well, it really helps to break the ice.

The undergirding idea of such an introduction was that, after “the ice was broken”, the audience was more willing to discuss intimate issues related to sex. Indeed, often after such an introduction, questions about sex came up. For example, one time during a sexuality education held at an “intermediate vocational education” [“ROC”], a question about STIs led to a lot of hilarity. A male student said: “Miss, can I ask. Let’s say I have sex with a girl, and I am wearing a condom. Then, I go out, upon which she gives me a blowjob. Can she, then, get a STI?”. One of the girls attending shouted: “What kind of weird ideas do you have man? Ha-ha.”. The whole

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class laughed loudly, and the teacher smiled and said, “Well I do not really think this is likely to happen, but if so, she can get a STI from herself indeed. It will spread.” Taking the question seriously, the teacher demonstrated that, indeed, every question could be asked.

These kinds of questions and comments appeared to be exactly the kind of input that sex educators were alluding to during their lessons. They went beyond giving public health information and actively connected to students’ personal sexual practices, while confirming that these practices were ‘normal’. In the informal chats Wiering had with sex educators after such lessons, students’ personal stories were recalled and evaluated as indicating the level of success of an education. One time during such a chat, a teacher for example said:

Yeah those were strange questions, right? No idea why one would wonder about those kinds of things! Well, now you saw yourself that there is much more going on in their minds than one might think. They are really thinking about sex, and they are having all kinds of weird ideas that they have drawn from porn clips. But the lesson was good! There was a lot of input from the group. They were engaged!

Somewhat later in his fieldwork, when Wiering had taught some sex education classes at high schools himself, he began to realise how he similarly had begun to appraise lessons on the grounds of how much personal information had been shared by students. He had begun to consider such stories as the apotheosis of a well-conducted lesson and as wonderful examples of what a proper sex education could lead to.

This supposed need for bringing such intimate stories of course reminds us of the work of Michel Foucault (1976) on the governmentality of sex, which has inspired a critical reading of HIV counselling in Sub Sahara Africa. In such forms of counselling, the notion of sexual openness as promoted by governmental and non-governmental organizations, creates “transparent sexualities” that can be influenced and changed in the name of health or other concerns (Caceres, 2002). Like HIV counselling (Burchardt, 2013; Nguyen, 2013), pedagogical interventions such as sex education aim to govern the body. Seen in this light, promoting speakability pertains to efforts of creating a transparent sexual body, which actions meet certain (health) standards.

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Interestingly, the importance of sharing personal accounts was so embedded that, when Wiering had slightly adapted his lessons to make them a little less personal, he began to receive feedback from teachers who did not like this adaptation. They told Wiering:

- “Try to go much more into the personal experiences of students. That brings the topic much closer.”
- “You should try to let the quiet students speak more.”
- “Try to make more use of examples given from within the class, student’s experiences. That will make it more relatable for our students and it will stimulate conversations.”

Wiering himself, however, increasingly felt uncomfortable with the idea of pursuing such conversations. Wiering realised that a Dutch class room was in fact not an intimate and safe space. Becoming increasingly aware of a sex educator’s empowered position in class, as well as the pressure students experience from classmates, Wiering noted that students often were pushed to share intimate stories. It was not so easy for them to keep their “mouth shut and simply say nothing”, which is how Wiering’s criticism was met by other teachers. Similar to the nun in the opening vignette, students are subjected to pressure in the particular power constellations of the classroom, which is often not acknowledged. An exchange between Wiering and a female student is illustrative in this regard:

Wiering: “But how would you communicate about sex? About the things you want and don’t want to do?”

Girl: “I do not know, cause in Islam we do not have sex before marriage.”

Wiering: “Alright, you do not have sex before marriage, but don’t you speak about it before marriage?”

Girl: “Yes”

Wiering: “So tell me, what is your view? How should a boy and a girl communicate about sex?”

Girl: “I do speak about sex. Just not with you.”

This conversation, like the story of the nun, dismantles the power relations by turning them around. Like the nun, the girl proved more powerful in not-disclosing and refusing to perform “speakable sex”, while she also made clear that this did not result from a lack of openness but a refusal to become “transparent”. Wiering also observed a counter example, which painfully

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illustrates what may happen when such brave acts of resistance do not occur. This happened during a lesson where the request to share personal intimate stories was, again, infused with power:

During one sex education lesson, Karin, the teacher of the class began to ask questions to the students about adoption. Pointing at a girl in the back she said: “Ah wait! Tanaika! You have been adopted yourself of course. Well, what do you think of adoption?” Wiering meanwhile noticed that Tanaika was not comfortable at all with this question. She initially did find the strength to respond. She said: “I think it is a good thing.” Karin, however, apparently had hoped for a more comprehensive account and said: “Oh, that’s it? Can’t you tell a bit more?”. Unfortunately, Tanaika could not. Instead, she began to cry, meanwhile trying to cover her eyes with her hands. Her body trembled and not long after she ran out of the classroom. “Oh well, maybe that was not so smart.” Karin mumbled to herself.

Sex education classes have the potential to address rather sensitive and intimate issues, and hence, we propose caution regarding questions that seek to evoke personal information. However, as we have illustrated, this evocation is exactly what creating “speakable” sex is about. Using techniques that come from counselling – creating what is considered a safe space and normalizing behaviours – serves the purpose of motivating speakability and creating transparent sexual bodies, which then can be forged in particular ways.

Where is the Body in Dutch Sex Education?

What strikes us in the Dutch approach to sexuality, as we have seen it being employed both in international contexts as in the Netherlands itself, is that it features a particular focus on *speaking* about sex. The body seems to be reduced to that what can be named and can be put into words, and ‘if words are bodily forms for meanings, they are nonetheless superior to other non-linguistic matter’ (Keane, 2007:66). The body in Dutch sexuality education is, in other words, primarily a speaking body. Placing primary emphasis on speech in sexuality education suggests that matters of the mind are privileged over matters of the body. Therefore, sexuality education seems to be particularly focused on influencing thinking and speaking, assuming that this will translate into particular bodily acts that serve the aim of safe and healthy acts. Why does the Dutch approach focus so much on speaking about sex? Why is there only limited

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attention for the body, for, let's say, its emotional and sensational experiences? What ways can one think of to successfully embed the body in such lessons?

As for the first question, it ironically occurs to us that these sexuality education classes have perhaps managed to distance themselves from religion on some levels, but firmly locate religious history to others. As the anthropologist Web Keane has argued in his seminal work on Dutch Protestant missionaries in Indonesia, Christianity has been extremely successful through its emphasis on the spoken word (creed), which locates the religion in the believer, rather than in institutions and authorities (Keane, 2007). Publicly performing particular words 'facilitates a disciplinary practice that tends toward bringing inner thoughts into line with public doctrine' (Keane, 2007:72). Thus, in response to the second question, privileging the verbalised body over the material body – as illustrated in the “naming of body-parts” ice-breaker – arguably has a Protestant Christian history. The teachers' expectation of students to come up with intimate stories or questions reminds one of a Catholic pastor requesting for confessions. Again, as Foucault has revealed so powerfully, individuals are disciplined through forms of self-knowledge facilitated by particular confessional technologies (Foucault, 1976; Nguyen, 2013).

We consider it relevant to highlight these underpinning notions to accentuate the normative convictions that sex education classes depart from, which of course contradict their own promulgated claims of moral neutrality and cultural sensitivity. Highlighting these implicit points of departure allows those interested in teaching sex education to understand why some convictions may be relatable for some, but not for others. Gender, class, race, religion, age, ethnicity, and other axis of difference are relevant in this regard. Teachers should consider that other people might experience difficulties with such lessons. Such challenges, then, are not the result of particular people having problems with sex education classes: rather, we maintain, these challenges are the result of people incorrectly assuming Dutch sex education lessons to be neutral and universally applicable.

This brings us to the third and final question: are there ways, perhaps, to integrate the body in sex education? Ways that perhaps also take away some of the pressure related to the expectation of students to come up with personal revelations? Of course, at first sight, the privileging of

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speaking sexuality over more embodied forms of sexuality education does make sense. As the sex education class in Monty Python's (1983) *The Meaning of Life* humorously illustrates, providing embodied examples of how one actually engages in sex is awkward, to say the very least. However, we suggest that there are other ways that the body can be integrated in sex education. In fact, our second observation already has illustrated this: all our interlocutors departed from the idea that there was some ice that needed to be broken first in order to experience fruitful sex education. Through the act of eating pizza together, a particular "safe atmosphere" was constructed, in which the participants *felt* comfortable. In the workshops in Uganda, during the breaks some participants would resort to their guitars and started singing songs about how to keep one's body safe and healthy. Hence, despite the overall focus in sex education lessons on speaking sexuality, our interlocutors did to some extent realise that, in sex education lessons, the body had to be addressed too.

As a way of both closing this discussion, as well as opening up to further exploring what embodied sex education class perhaps could look like, we find some inspiration in the following observation of the body in a play performed in a Dutch high school:

Near the end of a sex education that used theatrical performance, Bruno, one of the performing actors, suddenly begins to dance in the middle of the classroom. He performs rather abnormal dancing moves: he throws his legs up high, which is reminiscent of some sort of river dance. Earlier in the play the students saw that Bruno, who is an adolescent boy, had locked himself up in his room upstairs as he wanted to hide from his father and brother because they had discovered Bruno identified as gay. After a while, his father unfortunately manages to break into Bruno's room. He is baffled as he sees his son dancing in his mother's clothes. Bruno tells his father that this is who he is, a dancer, not a soccer player, and he puts forward his hand and begs for his father's acceptance. Bruno did not receive any form of acceptance from his father. Nor did he receive acceptance from his brother, who, upon seeing Bruno begging his father for acceptance, even decided to strike him hard in the face. Bruno, according to his brother, had simply asked for such a physical correction. The play comes to its end. We see Bruno lying on the ground with his hands on his face. Another actor's singing voice pierces through our bodies in the classroom: "I can't change, even if I wanted to", he sings. After this play, the atmosphere in class has changed significantly compared to the somewhat awkward beginning of the sex education. The students, who have not been pressured to engage in any conversation at all, are silent and many later state to have been touched by what they have witnessed. The actors, by addressing our senses with

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music, but also through illustrating us their courage of dancing and singing in socially-condemned ways, have successfully created an atmosphere where students begin to think and feel differently.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the “Dutch approach” to sexuality in international contexts and in the Netherlands. Considering the derogatory attitude towards religion that often accompanies this approach to sexuality, we denoted the Dutch approach as secular. Focusing in particular on the body and embodiment, we made two major observations. Firstly, the body is often neglected in the Dutch approach, as the main emphasis is placed on the notion of speakable sex. At the same time, the body does appear to be germane for such lessons intimate conversations require the ice to be broken first. Hence, despite the overall focus on the speaking sexuality, our interlocutors do realise that the body cannot be neglected totally.

Secondly, is an observed eagerness among Dutch organisations to distance themselves from religion. However, this chapter demonstrates that Dutch approaches to sex education feature particular characteristics that have a Protestant Christian history. Spoken words are privileged over material things, and educations often feature a confession-like setting in which participants are encouraged to come up with intimate questions and personal revelations.

We do not point out these normativities to reject the Dutch approach all together. Rather, we want to highlight that the Dutch approach is normative too, and that it, despite its promulgated suspicion towards religion, actually partly draws on particular Christian sensibilities itself. We argue that proponents of the Dutch approach should bear in mind that other people might experience its undergirding presumptions as challenging, and perhaps even incompatible with their own views. Such disagreements, then, should not be considered the result of religious or cultural viewpoints only. Rather, we maintain, that these challenges are produced in the context of claims that Dutch sex education classes are neutral and therefore universally-applicable.

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