

Desperately constructing ethnic audiences:

Anti-immigration discourses and minority audience research in the Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper examines how ethnic audiences are measured, and thus constructed, in the Netherlands today. The analysis shows that this process is tightly woven into the dominant assimilationist and neoliberal discourse. This discourse portrays specific minority groups as deviant in relation to an essentialised notion of Dutchness.

Furthermore, it presents social inclusion as an opportunity that is limited to well-adjusted, profitable consumers. Different attempts to represent minority audiences—including efforts to promote a more just minority representation in Dutch media—are compelled to accommodate to this dominant discourse. The paper underscores the limited scope for contesting hegemonic representations of minority groups and national belonging in the Netherlands today.

Key words: audience research, the Netherlands, ethnic minorities, cultural essentialism, neoliberalism

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That audiences are discursive constructs is not new in communication scholarship. Researchers have described the problems associated with media industries', marketing agencies', and other institutions' reliance on specific technologies of measurement to represent the audience(s) (e.g., Ang, 1991; Ettema & Whitney, 1994a; Napoli, 2003). The problem with these representations is not that they are false. In fact, to acknowledge audiences as discursive constructs is also to acknowledge that no single representation can be treated as the true representation of an audience. Audience representations can be problematic for a different reason: They are deceiving because they 'gloss over the fact that measurement technologies and the audiences that they construct always serve particular purposes and reflect particular interests' (Miller in Ettema & Whitney, 1994b: 9-10).

This paper aims at understanding the specific ideological interests and purposes at work in the measurement—and thus, the construction—of ethnic minority audiences in the Netherlands today. More specifically, it analyses how minority audiences are being described within an increasingly minority-adverse neoliberal context. By doing that, the paper goes beyond most efforts to problematise audience research in important ways. First, the focus on disempowered cultural groups' characterizations as audiences sheds light on the specific dangers of cultural essentialism in audience research. While Ang (1991: 63) criticizes the television industry's general strategies to measure audiences for reducing 'the individual to a "typical" audience member who can be objectively classified', the analysis below shows that this kind of reductionism can be particularly problematic when it relates to questions of cultural identity and national belonging. Second, the processes of audience construction analyzed in this paper cannot be

understood on the basis of a purely (or largely) commercial drive, as it has been the case with most scholarship in this area. The analysis necessarily moves beyond strategies justified to ‘giving the (industrially constructed) audience what it wants’ (Turow, 2005: 105), to call attention to strategies aimed at identifying what (politically constructed) minority audiences should consume. Moreover, the analysis shows that the dominant political discourse about minority and migrant groups in the Netherlands does not only influence attempts to represent minority groups for marketing purposes, but also—and paradoxically—efforts to promote a fairer minority representation in Dutch media.

To underscore the connection between characterizations of minority audiences and broader public discourses, the paper starts with a discussion of how specific minority groups are talked about in the Netherlands. This discussion specifically focuses on the strong anti-immigration sentiment that has arguably transformed the country’s politics and self-understanding during the last decades and on the neoliberal logic that has accompanied this shift. Anti-immigrant and neoliberal ideologies, it is explained, converge in the essentialist understanding of cultural difference articulated in the Netherlands’ recent policies towards immigration and cultural diversity.

The second part of the paper examines Dutch minority audience research in relation to this dominant ideological context. The analysis includes studies commissioned and/or produced by media themselves, as well as by governmental institutions, marketing agencies, and other organizations concerned with minority audiences. Although these different studies do not share a common agenda, they clearly overlap and influence each other. By paying attention to the overlaps and continuities, the analysis provides evidence of how dominant representations of minority groups affect (and are thus amplified by)

other—seemingly pro-minorities—discourses.

Dutch public discourse: Cultural essentialism and assimilation

According to a 2006 large-scale survey conducted by the Dutch Population Statistics Bureau (CBS) and the Dutch Foundation for Electoral Research (SKON), 37% of Dutch voters think that the biggest national problem in the Netherlands are ethnic minorities (followed by health with 24%) (Schmeets, 2008: 63-4). The percentage that identified minorities as the country's first priority was higher (i.e., 43%) in urban areas, which is where most ethnic minorities are concentrated. These numbers may not be the highest in Europe (see Card et al., 2005), but seem strikingly high for a society traditionally characterized as tolerant and open-minded.

The anxiety about ethnic minorities among some groups of the Dutch population is closely related to an important change in policy since the late 1980s. A paradigmatic example of Europe's so-called 'retreat of multiculturalism', the Netherlands has replaced its multicultural policy with a policy of integration (Joppke, 2004). In Dutch official discourse, these two terms, multiculturalism and integration, label significantly different political agendas. While multiculturalism was described as a model of inclusion of immigrants 'with retention of [their] own culture'; under the current integration model, one's cultural identity—if different from the dominant Dutch identity—is an impediment for civic participation. This justifies calls for minorities' cultural assimilation. In other words, today 'Dutch identity must "cannibalize" other identities in order to turn immigrants into reliable citizens' (Geschiera, 2009: 166).

Assimilationist policies treat culture as something that is lost or gained in a zero-sum game. Well-integrated immigrants are expected to leave behind their culture in order

to replace it with the culture of the ‘host’ society. This logic essentialises both minority and mainstream cultures. Not only does it rely on simplistic and static images of what Moroccan and Turkish identities are, to mention the most prominent examples in discussions about minority groups in the Netherlands. Assimilationism also assumes an authentic Dutch identity, based on a common culture and history. It neglects power relations and, together with them, the historical and political circumstances that have shaped cultural groups and their social position. The result are clear lines between those who belong and do not belong to the nation, which provide the grounds for a racism based on cultural difference: ‘From this perspective, an ideal nation is culturally homogeneous’ and minority cultures are ‘alien cultures’ (Duffield, 1984: 29).

The concern with defining and strengthening the Dutch identity is not only a key concern of right-wing politicians, but also increasingly present in the agenda of more mainstream political parties. It is evident, for example, in the government’s commissioning of a Dutch Canon, an official version of the country’s history to be used in schools, as well as an ‘integration resource’ (van Oostrom, 2007: 23). While these kinds of efforts to fix a monolithic national identity are always problematic, the task seems particularly elusive in Dutch society, which for most of the 20th century was structured on the basis of different pillars, still fresh in the memory of many. According to Geschiere (2009: 158),

Even in the early 1960s, the vaderlandse geschiedenis (history of the Fatherland) taught in the Protestant Free University in Amsterdam differed markedly from the version taught at the Catholic University of Nijmegen—or from the socialist

version taught at the University of Amsterdam, in those days the bulwark of secularization and socialism.

Western and non-Western allochtonen

The problematic distinction between the native or authentic Dutch and those who do not share the Dutch identity is captured in the official and unofficial labels used to name minority groups in the Netherlands. In the media, the most common way to refer to people from Turkish or Moroccan descent—the two groups that most commonly make it to the news—is to simply call them ‘Turks’ or ‘Moroccans’. When reference is made to various ethnic minority groups at the same time, the prevalent term is allochtonen, meaning non-autochthonous. Used rather vaguely in academic scholarship in the early 1970s, ‘allochtonen’ and its opposite, ‘autochtonen’, became official terminology in the Allochtonen policy of 1989 and have been further institutionalized by the Dutch Population Statistics Bureau (CBS), which assigns the allochtonen status to every resident, Dutch citizen or not, with at least one parent born outside the Netherlands.

Within the larger allochtonen group, there are consequential subdivisions. There is, first, an official distinction between Western and non-Western allochtonen. Immigrants (and therefore their children) are Western allochtonen if they come from European countries, the US, Canada, Australia, Japan, or Indonesia (which has a special status as a former Dutch colony). Those coming from the rest of Asia, Africa, Latin-America or Turkey are non-Western allochtonen. Of the 16 and a half million people living in the Netherlands in 2010, approximately 1,500,000 were Western allochtonen (including some 380,000 people of German descent and a similar number of Indonesian-Dutch) and

1,900,000 were non-Western allochtonen. The threat of immigration and most of the new policies (especially the most restrictive ones) refer to this last group (CBS, 2008; 2010).

Among non-Western allochtonen, the focus is most commonly on the four largest non-Western allochtonen groups, what CBS calls the ‘classic’ allochtonen groups. These are people of Turkish (384,000), Moroccan (349,500), Suriname (342,000), and Antillean (138,000) descent (CBS, 2010). Turks and Moroccans started to arrive to the Netherlands as ‘guest workers’ in the late 1960s and were expected to leave after some time. They are, for the most part, Muslim. Surinamers and Antilleans emigrated from former Dutch colonies around the same time. They, and specially their children, are supposedly more religiously diverse as well more secularized than people of Moroccan and Turkish decent (CBS, 2009). The four groups together constitute the comprehensive category of ‘allochtonen’ for which this term is most commonly reserved. Furthermore, the media as well as academic and governmental publications commonly—even if unofficially—refer to ‘third generation allochtonen’ when talking about the grandchildren of people born in Turkey, Morocco, Surinam or the Antilles.

A final and more recent distinction among allochtonen reflects the contingency of this classificatory system. Because the Antillean-Dutch and especially the Suriname-Dutch are ‘now more and more seen as examples of a quite successful integration’, they are often treated as a special case or left outside the allochtonen category altogether (Geschiere, 2009: 150-1). This implies that the allochtonen who are addressed as the major national problem in surveys and as a top priority in political discussions are Muslim immigrants and their children. In a context where the dominant discourse ‘pictures Islamic migrants as problems and enemies of the nation’ (Ghorashi, 2003: 163),

the term 'allochtonen' has particularly negative connotations. It is 'experienced by many as a message of "being excluded"', argued the Dutch Integration minister in 2009, when he proposed replacing 'allochtonen' and 'autochtonen' with 'new' and 'old' Dutch people (van der Laan, 2009: 1). However, given the prevalence of the allochtonen/autochtonen vocabulary, the impact of the minister's proposal did not go beyond some immediate news coverage.

Neoliberal underpinnings

While old multiculturalism was associated with the welfare state (Penninx, 2005), the current approach follows a neoliberal logic. State subsidies and other initiatives to improve minorities' situation in areas such as employment, education, housing, and the strengthening of minority organizations, have shrank or disappeared. Meanwhile, the burden of responsibility has been placed on immigrants themselves:

In line with neo-liberal thinking, the government no longer opts for welfare state measures and anti-discrimination policies to promote integration. Instead, stricter demands are placed on immigrants to learn the language, accept a common political culture and respect values labelled 'Dutch', such as tolerance, gender equality and freedom of expression (Roggeband & Verloo, 2007: 282).

The turn towards the individual responsibility of minorities coincides with cultural essentialism in disregarding the structural conditions that hinder minorities' participation in Dutch society and reinforcing the unidirectionality of assimilation: If discrimination towards minorities does not exist, it is really up to minorities themselves to adapt in order to make integration possible. As expressed in the title of the 2007-2011 Minority

Memorandum from the Ministry of Housing, Neighborhoods and Integration (2007), the call for minorities is: ‘Make sure that you fit in!’ (‘Zorg dat je erbij hoort!’).

With its denial of racism and its burden on individual responsibility, neoliberalism has further consequences for the representation of disempowered social groups. Dávila (2008), for example, shows how marketability has become the key criterion to measure the value of Latinas/os in the United States and thus the latter are promoted as ‘a targetable “niche” constituency for marketers, politicians, and privatization pundits’ (Dávila, 2008: 4). ‘The pressure to look good’ constrains even the most well-intentioned efforts to advance a more positive representation of Latinas/os, argues Dávila (2008: 6). ‘[T]here is less and less room for even raising issues of equity, where only positively spun stories can be told’ (2008: 45).

Like Latinas/os in the United States, stigmatized minority groups elsewhere are the subject of cost-benefit calculations (For examples from Germany and Canada, see Bauder, 2008; Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). In the Netherlands, this kind of analysis practically did not exist until the end of the 1990s. By the turn of the century, ‘an economic dimension was added to public debates on immigration’ (van de Beek, 2010: 415). Since then, research focused on ‘non-Western allochtonen’ has concluded that their costs for the Dutch economy surpass the benefits (e.g., Lakeman, 1999; Roodenburg et al., 2003; van der Geest & Dietvorst, 2010). Not surprisingly these conclusions are used to argue against government expenditure to support immigrants and their children and for a selective immigration policy that would welcome ‘profitable’ immigrants, while minimizing family (re)unification and the requests of asylum seekers (see Nieuw Migratiebeleid..., 2010).

By grounding policy discussions in economic calculations, the neoliberal rationale displaces decisions about immigration and support to minority groups outside the political realm (Clarke, 2010; Giroux, 2005). When groups' desirability is measured in terms of market profit, declaring a group undesirable appears to be a technical assessment. This is one of the ways in which '[n]eoliberalism effectively masks racism' (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010: 253). In the case of the Netherlands, then, overtly political discourses against so-called non-Western allochtonen are strengthened by the allegedly apolitical ways in which neoliberalism dictates the value (or lack thereof) of certain minority groups.

Dutch minorities as media audiences

Like in overtly economic calculations, in the conceptualization of Dutch minority groups as media audiences, neoliberal and assimilationist politics operate through allegedly technical or scientific knowledge that, in turn, feeds back into policy. The analysis that follows exposes this process by examining research on minority audiences collected and summarized by Mira Media, the largest and most important organization dedicated to improving the representation of minority groups in Dutch media's workforce, content and audiences. While most of Mira Media's activities are based on the Netherlands, the organization is also well-known internationally. It has been involved in the production of important European-wide events and projects, including the 2008 European Broadcasting Union's (EBU) Diversity Show and a Diversity Toolkit for the training of EBU members' staff. Arguably, these kinds of activities have turned Mira Media into an example among its European counterparts (see Rigoni, 2005).

In its Facts and Figures online section, Mira Media collects studies about minorities

and the media produced since 2002. Each entry includes a short summary of the study and, in most cases, links to the primary document(s). The 91 entries posted by March 2011 made reference to 44 studies about Dutch minorities' media use. These constitute the sample for this paper. 36 of the studies were commissioned and produced by various external agents, while eight studies are the result of Mira Media's own desk research. The analysis considered the entry itself (i.e., Mira Media's syntheses of the research reports) and, when available, the corresponding studies each entry links to.

Although Mira Media provides the largest publicly accessible collection of minority audience research in the Netherlands, it does not include all existing studies on this topic. The sample necessarily reflects specific concessions and constraints. These concessions and constraints are particularly relevant for the present study: Since Mira Media's main goal—namely, the better representation of minority groups—runs counter to the country's growing anti-immigration and essentialist rhetoric described earlier, the organization's selection and discussion of the different studies as well as its own reports, offer a valuable insight into the difficulties and possibilities entailed in the counter-representation of minority groups in the Netherlands.

The analysis starts by focusing on the primary documents collected by Mira Media. With the exception of one study, which is based on focus groups, this research relies mainly on surveys, either as primary (29 studies) or secondary data (four studies). The analysis considers the studies' goals and design, including the questions posed to respondents, as well as how the latter are categorized and named. Likewise, the way in which studies report their results provides important clues of how differences among respondents are assessed and interpreted. The last part of the analysis focuses on Mira

Media's own desk research and its own efforts to advance a more minority-friendly discourse.

Who is behind minority audience research?

The studies produced by external institutions and included in the Mira Media database differ significantly in terms of quality and length, as well as on their focus. Some pay attention to minorities' media use in general, while others focus on specific media, including newspapers, group-targeted publications, women's magazines, internet, radio, cinema, satellite and/or cable television. Apart from a few studies that refer to the urban youth (a particularly diverse social segment) or to minority groups in general, and two studies that focus exclusively on the Moroccan-Dutch, people of Moroccan and Turkish decent are present throughout the sample. In most cases, they are also accompanied by Suriname- and Antillean-Dutch and, in two studies, by another 'non-Western' group, either people of Chinese or of Cape Verdean descent.

Based on the main interests motivating the studies, they can be broadly classified as marketing-, government-, and academic-oriented research. The first and largest category comprises 18 reports produced—mostly by organizations fully or partially dedicated to 'ethno-marketing'—for specific media or for companies aiming at minority consumers. The second category consists of 12 reports produced for government agencies. These include larger studies with a section on minority media use, such as three studies conducted by the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) and financed by one or more ministries (Economy, Justice, Transportation, Health, or Education, Culture and Sciences) and six studies produced for large municipalities (Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam). Three other government-based studies focus exclusively on minority media

use; they were commissioned by the Province of North Holland; by the Dutch public broadcaster and the Dutch government's information agency (Rijksvoorlichtingsdienst); and by the Ministry of Justice's National anti-terrorism coordination agency (NCTb). A third category includes five studies aimed specifically at scholarly publications (including two master's theses). Finally, there is a study commissioned by the Press Museum and the Dutch Journalism Union, which does not fit into the categories above.

The variety of interests involved in the studies, and, in particular, the participation of specific government agencies, already suggests the specificity of (at least some of) the audience research under consideration. The efforts of public, if not governmental, organizations to research audiences are mostly absent in the literature on this subject, which focuses primarily on commercial based research (e.g., Ang, 1991; McQuail, 1997; Napoli, 2003). However, a closer examination of how the studies characterize minority groups is necessary to further understand their distinctiveness. Specifically, such an examination shows the unique role that difference plays in research on minority audiences in the Netherlands. Whereas the use of technologies of measurement to identify and reinforce differences across groups (and even across individuals) is a generalized trend in audience research (Turrow, 2005), the studies sampled here stress and simultaneously stigmatize difference in exceptional ways.

Differences that count (and not)

The primary differences external studies focus on are those between 'autochtonen' and specific groups of 'non-Western allochtonen', as well as differences among the latter. Significantly, more than half of the studies (20 out of 36) explicitly compare the data obtained for minority groups with data from 'autochtonous', 'indigenous', or simply

‘Dutch’ respondents. This additional set of respondents—sometimes even referred to as ‘reference’ or ‘control’ group—provides a measure of normality against which the responses of minority groups are interpreted. An example is an SCP study on the use of digital technologies that concludes that ‘among ethnic minorities, Turks and Moroccans are found to have a relatively large disadvantage relative to the indigenous population, whereas Surinamese and Antilleans have skill levels that almost or fully match those of the indigenous Dutch’ (van Ingen et al., 2007: 85). The authors interpret this as proof of diversity across minority groups, but do not question the presumed lack of diversity within the reference group. Like in other studies that include ‘autochthonous’ respondents, the latter are treated as relatively homogeneous.

The illusion of uniformity contained in the notion of ‘autochtonen’ has been criticized for silencing historical, religious and regional differences (Yanow & van der Haar, 2010: 29-30). In the context of this paper, additional categories of audience segmentation should be added. In fact, at the same time as minority audiences are conceptualized in relation to a single mainstream audience, studies focusing on the latter assume that ‘segmentation based on age, gender and wealth are not sufficient anymore’ (van Niekerk, 2010: 2). This is at least how the Dutch public broadcaster justifies its taxonomy of eight different ‘lifestyles’ to understand and try to reach the general audience. Notably those distinctions are ignored when the aim is to calculate certain minorities’ alleged gap with respect to an ‘autochthonous’ norm.

Once the autochthonous norm has been established, difference is measured in ways that do not simply reflect variety across groups, but establish a hierarchy among them. Difference is treated as deviance, such that the closest a group’s responses are to those of

the ‘autochtonen’ population, the better positioned that group is. Following this logic, the Suriname- and Antillean-Dutch are commonly attributed a ‘middle group’ position, to cite the above-cited SCP study (van Ingen et al., 2007: 23). This may explain why this and other studies sometimes combine the data for the Antillean- and Suriname-Dutch, on the one hand; and the data for the Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch, on the other. Likewise, it may explain Mira Media’s (2003) reference to a study with 600 respondents of Turkish, Suriname, and Moroccan background conducted by a specialized ethno-marketing organization: ‘[A]pproximately two thirds of the Turks and Moroccans find that the translation of information brochures does not impede [integration], while 40 percent of Surinamers find that this is the case’. The distinction suggested here—between 33% of some respondents and 40% of the others—is not statistically significant ($\chi^2[1, N = 600] = 2.56, p = .11$), but may seem reasonable if one assumes a special (i.e., ‘less different’) status for the Suriname-Dutch in relation to the Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch.

The Suriname- and Antillean-Dutch ‘middle group’ position may also explain why they are not as present in the studies as the Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch. It would not be surprising if they were eventually excluded from this kind of research. A study about the media use of people of Suriname, Chinese, Antillean, Turkish, and Moroccan decent, for example, justified the exclusion of Malaccan-Dutch respondents arguing that ‘their media behaviour is nearly equal to that of the Dutch’ (Baardwijk et al., 2004: 7).

Likewise, an assumed lack of difference would explain why the media use of so-called Western allochtonen—including almost 400 thousand people of German ancestry and a similar number of people of Indonesian decent—is never mentioned in the sampled studies. The question arises whether they are simply filtered out of the surveys or

integrated into a different category. Only one report—a study about Rotterdammers' use of their free time—answers this question: 'when a distinction is made between autochtonen and non-western allochtonen, western allochtonen are counted as autochtonen', it explains (Centrum voor Onderzoek en Statistiek, 2004: 13). The decision is not explained further, suggesting that its logic is somehow obvious and, thus, simultaneously neglecting the power relations at stake in such a (re)categorization.

Minority media use and assimilation

Ironically, the stigma of difference is reinforced in a few external studies that try to play down the gap between 'allochtonen' and 'autochtonen'. Another study by SCP, for example, concludes that '[t]he differences in media consumption between indigenous and ethnic groups are smaller than the many satellite dishes on display would suggest' (van den Broek & Keuzenkamp, 2008: 224). Furthermore, the study predicts that the daily lives of 'allochtonen' will increasingly resemble the lives of 'autochtonen'. Similarly, the press release of a study by a marketing and a broadcasting organization, both specialised in young people, carries the title: 'Many similarities between allochtone and autochtone youth' (Veel Overeenkomsten..., 2008). Remarkably, the press release refers to a few general commonalities—that both groups find education important and use more or less the same media—while the list of differences is not only longer, but much more specific. By stressing commonalities between specific minority groups and an indigenous measure of normality, without questioning the value of such a comparison, these efforts legitimize the angst against difference (including, for example, the presence of satellite dishes). Far from rejecting the view of difference as a problem, they suggest that difference—and thus the problem at hand—can be minimized or erased.

Efforts to minimize difference by reorienting it towards the mainstream and the essentialising logic underlying them were described earlier in terms of assimilation. In fact, the distrust of differences in minorities' media use is based on the assimilationist assumption that media consumption follows the zero-sum logic assigned to cultural identity: The more access one has to minority outlets, the more one is pulled towards a foreign 'motherland' and the less one consumes mainstream media. The latter, in turn, would be agents of integration. Though criticized by media researchers (e.g., Sreberny, 2005; for the Netherlands, see Bink, 2002; Leurdijk, 2008), this assumption is prevalent in the Dutch political context and in its translation into media research and policy (Awad & Roth, forthcoming).

The study that most explicitly exposes this assimilationist logic and its flaws is a survey commissioned by the Dutch public broadcaster and the Dutch government's information agency. Aimed at assessing minorities' media use in relation to integration, the study included respondents of Chinese, Antillean, Moroccan, Turkish, and Suriname descent as well as an 'autochtonen reference group'. Integration was conceptualized along six dimensions: language use, knowledge of Dutch society, contact with Dutch people, Dutch identity, motivation to integrate, and adherence to Dutch norms. As a measure of Dutch identity, interviewees were asked: 'To what extent do you feel Dutch or not? For the most part, do you feel Dutch, half Dutch, a little Dutch or not Dutch?' and the same question adapted to their specific background (i.e.,: To what extent do you feel Turkish/Suriname/Chinese...). For assessing adherence to Dutch norms, respondents were confronted with eight statements allegedly countering dominant Dutch views 'or less fit in an individualistic, secularized, and individualistic society' (Baardwijk et. al, 2004:

174-5). Thus, disagreement with the statements was taken as a sign of integration. Some of the statements were: 'It would be terrible if one of my children married with someone from another faith'; 'Old parents can live better with their children than in a retirement home', 'It is a pity that religion is increasingly less taken into account in the daily life in the Netherlands'. Notably, a considerable percentage of control group respondents actually agreed with these views (from 11% for the first statement to 47% for the last one), in some cases providing less 'integrated' responses than Suriname-, Chinese- or Antillean-Dutch respondents. Yet, the study correlated the integration results with those of media use and concluded that integration is directly related to the use of 'Dutch' media, while 'less integrated' people rely more on television and newspapers from their 'motherland' (Baardwijk et. al, 2004: 135).

By assuming that national identity can be measured in discrete proportions and that Dutch norms can be translated into a fixed set of statements, Baardwijk et al.'s (2004) study underscores how cultural essentialism operates and how it defies people's everyday experiences (including, in this case, 'autochtonen' respondents' own disagreement with 'Dutch norms'). However, as 'epistemologically limited' as this kinds of studies may be, they are also 'institutionally enabling' (Ang, 1991: 35). This specific study, for example, is a common reference in discussions about minority media use and integration in the Netherlands. It is not only included in Mira Media's database, but is also the only source of information about this subject in the website of the Dutch public broadcaster. Moreover, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science sent the study to Parliament, describing it as a policy tool for both the public service broadcasting and the Dutch government's information agency (van der Laan, 2004).

From calming fears to marketing minorities

In the studies mentioned above, respondents are most commonly referred to as ‘non-Western allochtonen,’ or simply ‘allochtonen’. Specific groups of respondents are called ‘Turks’, ‘Moroccans’, ‘Surinamers’, ‘Antilleans’ and compared to ‘the Dutch’. Although a handful of studies show an effort to circumvent this terminology, none of them fully succeeds. Even if it is just ‘for the sake of readability’, as one research team claims (Konijn et al., 2010: 52), people of Turkish decent born in the Netherlands are labeled ‘Turks’ and the media targeted at them are ‘Turkish media’. Particularly relevant for this analysis, however, is that Mira Media’s desk research relies on the same language. The organization openly states its preference for the ‘more neutral’ term ‘ethno-cultural groups’ instead of ‘allochtonen’, but also its decision to use the latter when citing sources that do so (Mira Media, n/d). As a result, Mira Media’s vocabulary does not differ significantly from the one used in the external studies.

Mira Media’s uncritical reliance on its sources, however, is not limited to terminology. It also involves the conceptualization of difference as deviance and the presumption that minority media risk pulling minorities towards their ‘land of origin’. Thus, seven of Mira Media’s eight reports compare minorities with an ‘autochtonen’ norm and present the results not simply as diverse, but as closer or further to that norm. Likewise, Mira Media adopts the classification of minority audiences as ‘homelanders’ (those who prefer their ‘own’ media), ‘adapters’ (those who prefer ‘Dutch’ media), and ‘omnivores’ (those with mixed preferences), a vocabulary that equates minorities’ ‘home’ with a place outside the Netherlands and treats Dutch mainstream media as a given that minorities need to adapt to. Questioning an essentialised notion of Dutchness,

alternatively, would also open the possibility of reconsidering what counts as ‘Dutch media’.

Mira Media’s reliance on the dominant vocabulary and logic reflects its limited resources—leading to a strong dependency on available research, for example—as well as the organization’s need to make its reports resonate with powerful institutional views in order to be heard and taken seriously. Both concerns are closely related, since Mira Media is largely dependent on government funding. Indeed, this funding has been severely threatened and reduced in the last years, at least in part as a result of negative performance reports by the advisory body for the Minister of Education, Culture and Sciences (Mira Media, 2008; Raad van Cultuur, 2008). This places Mira Media in a paradoxical position: How to defend minority groups’ special (media) needs, while securing the support of institutions concerned with normalizing difference? Mira Media articulates this tension, for example, when it reports that ‘allochtonen listen less to the radio than the Dutch, but when they listen, they listen more to Dutch broadcasters than to ones in their own language’ (van Holst, 2006: 20; emphasis added). The same report claims that—despite being more critical of mainstream media and more open to alternative outlets—minority youngsters are increasingly (and presumably naturally) tuning in to the preferences of mainstream audiences (van Holst, 2006: 30). These statements arguably attempt to calm the fear that minorities are being ‘pulled’ away from Dutch norms by suggesting that minorities are increasingly ‘normal’ (in this case, with respect to media preferences).

Another way in which Mira Media accommodates to, rather than challenges, anti-immigration, and markedly neoliberal discourses is by endorsing ‘the business case for

diversity'. This strategy implies translating (and thus limiting) diversity to business opportunities, displacing it from the sphere of justice and politics (Awad, 2008). An example is Mira Media's (2009) report 'Ethnic groups' market potential for print and online media in the Netherlands'. Apart from restating the argument that minorities' media preferences are moving towards the mainstream, the report makes the case—though rather unconvincingly—that groups in a disadvantageous socio-economic position and with high levels of unemployment (mainly people from Moroccan and Turkish decent) have a 'reasonably large' market potential. In this way, Mira Media promotes minority ethnic groups as marketable and unthreatening consumers. At the same time, it undermines calls for structural reforms to improve minorities' political and economic representation as well as measures to expand notions of Dutchness to include a wider diversity of ethnic and cultural identities. Moreover, if, as the report suggests, minority ethnic groups are becoming attractive markets and being absorbed by mainstream audiences, one may question the need for organizations such as Mira Media. In sum, tempted to present economic disadvantaged groups as desirable consumers, Mira Media suggests that, although some adjustments may be needed, there is actually no need of structural changes.

Conclusion

The analysis above has aimed at exposing the ideological interests involved in the construction of minority audiences in the Netherlands. It has show how Mira Media, like other institutions involved in minority audience research, engages in a highly politicized activity, that of measuring and giving meaning to cultural difference. Ethno-marketing agencies, the ministry of Justice, the Dutch public broadcaster and Mira Media, to

mention some of the actors involved in this process, do not share a common political agenda. However, their actions point more or less in the same (political) direction, because they largely rely on the same well-accepted categories and techniques of measurement. These categories and techniques remain unquestioned not simply for the sake of efficiency, as Gitlin (1983: 53) explains with respect to mainstream television audience research, where '[o]nce managers agree to accept a measure, they act as if it is precise'. The categories and techniques used to study the media behaviour of Dutch minority audiences remain largely unquestioned because they are well-ingrained into an hegemonic definition of what Dutchness means and who qualifies (or not) to be included in this definition.

Institutional audience research in general treats the audience as 'a distinct category of others that stands against itself: "us" versus "them"', explains Ang (1991: 23). Following Edward Said, Ang (1991: 24) describes the discursive strategies through which the audience is turned 'into a durable and factual thing, an object consisting of manipulable people' as a process of orientalism. If audience research generally pursues knowledge in order to manipulate 'the other'; in the case of minority audience research this process goes even further. Manipulating the audience in this case does not refer to strategies to attract people towards specific media products—which in turn could be adjusted to accommodate audience tastes and interests—as much as to efforts aimed at adjusting specific subjects to a normalized media consumption.

On the surface, the business case for diversity, with its displacement of politics in favour of economic concerns, may seem a promising opportunity to advance an alternative representation of disempowered minority groups. It gives the illusion that

minorities, like more privileged audiences, will be able to exercise their consuming power vis-à-vis advertisers and media producers, who will thus support the media that minorities want. Moreover, as explained by one of Mira Media's program managers, 'the moral argument' simply does not fit well in the current political environment (Serkei, March 14, 2008, personal communication). The business case is safer because it is allegedly apolitical, unbiased. However, as exemplified by Mira Media's initiative to present minority groups as unthreatening consumers and as argued earlier in relation to other neoliberal strategies, business arguments do not necessarily coincide with justice-oriented ones, nor do they operate in politically-neutral ways (see Awad, 2008). Limiting the discussion to well-adjusted individuals that have gained their economic right to be attended to by the market is indeed accepting the conditions imposed by assimilationism and thus moving away from calls against it.

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