

PERFORMING AUTHORITY: DISCURSIVE POLITICS AFTER THE ASSASSINATION OF THEO VAN GOGH

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In November 2004, the assassination of the filmmaker Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam by an Islamic extremist shocked The Netherlands. Critics of multiculturalism quickly linked the murder to the perceived failure of 'soft' integration policies and questioned the authority and legitimacy of Amsterdam's political leadership. This article studies the response of political leaders to those challenges from a performative perspective. Analysing governance as performance illuminates the importance of actively enacting political leadership in non-parliamentary settings such as talk shows, mosques and other religious meeting places, and improvised mass meetings in times of crisis. The authors distinguish different discursive means of performing authority, make suggestions for dealing with crisis events in ethnically and culturally diverse cities and draw some lessons from this approach as well as for methods of studying public administration.

INTRODUCTION

On 2 November 2004, an Islamic extremist assassinated Theo van Gogh, filmmaker and *bête noir* of Amsterdam's intellectual elite. A year earlier Van Gogh had collaborated with Ayaan Hirsi Ali in making the film *Submission*, which sought to demonstrate that the Qur'an considers women to be fundamentally inferior to men. Ayaan Hirsi Ali – according to *TIME* magazine one of the world's hundred most influential persons of 2005 – is a Somali refugee and former Muslim militating against Islam in the name of women's emancipation. At the time of the assassination he was an MP for the Dutch centre-right liberal party VVD.

The murder was exceptionally violent and shocked the country. The assassin, Mohammed Bouyeri, a 26-year-old Dutch citizen of Moroccan descent, shot Van Gogh seven times before cutting his throat and stabbing a note onto his chest. It contained an extensive death threat to Hirsi Ali, while two other politicians were explicitly mentioned: Jozias van Aartsen, the leader of the VVD party and patron of Hirsi Ali, and Job Cohen, the (Jewish) mayor of Amsterdam. Soon afterwards other politicians were reported to be on a 'death list', among them Ahmed Aboutaleb, the alderman for diversity in Amsterdam (an alderman being one of five executives responsible for running the city), a practicing Muslim of Moroccan descent. In the ten days following the murder a number of mosques were besmirched with racist symbols, an Islamic school was burnt to the ground and churches were vandalized. Even though the number and intensity of incidents decreased soon afterwards, what remained was the sense that there was 'trouble in Paradise' as the *Financial Times* put it on 4 December 2004. The Netherlands was portrayed as a country in moral shock.

The murder added fuel to the already heated debate on the integration of ethnic and religious minorities. Critics framed the murder of Van Gogh as the 'exemplary case' that showed that the Dutch policies and attitudes towards migrants had been too soft; too naïve. In this article we analyse the impact of the murder on the authority of two prominent politicians in Amsterdam's government, Job Cohen and Ahmed Aboutaleb. Both continued to defend the policies that came under heavy attack after the assassination. How did these administrators attempt to express their authority after a murder that, according to

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their critics, had proven, once and for all, that multiculturalism was a 'dead end street'? How and in what terms were they challenged and what helps us explain their relative success in reinstating their authority?

UNDERSTANDING AUTHORITY IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Authority in crisis situations has been the object of study in the literature on crises and crisis management. It has moved beyond the investigation of, and recommendations for, logistic and technocratic responses to crises and is appreciative of the intensified symbolic struggles that define moments of crisis (see, for example, B. Turner and Pidgeon 1997; Dayton 2004; Boin *et al.* 2005). Rosenthal *et al.* (1989) recommend for instance that

public administrators, politicians, and organization leaders would do well to be alert to the Thomas theorem as it relates to crisis: if a situation is defined a crisis by key actors, it is a crisis in its consequences. (...) the vulnerability of 'the normal state of things' derives to a considerable extent from subjectively defined levels of order. (Rosenthal *et al.* 1989, pp. 469–70)

Paul 't Hart defines crisis as 'a breakdown of familiar symbolic frameworks legitimating the pre-existing socio-political order. Crises come to the fore when the everyday dramas of public life are disrupted...' ('t Hart 1993, p. 39). Hence, during crises, standard classifications seem inadequate: there is no authoritative system to routinely differentiate among claims. Indeed, the appropriate classification itself becomes the very stake of politics.

We analyse the work of administrators in terms of the power struggle of different actors trying to impose their view of reality onto others. Our postulate is that if and how a murder shapes politics depends on the struggle over the meaning of the murder. This 'politics of meaning' can be analysed in the immediate aftermath of the event using an interpretive methodology (see Yanow and Schwarz-Shea 2006). We define authority in crisis situations as the capacity to make others conceive of the situation in your preferred way and neutralize or render ineffective critics that question the strategic orientation of the policy-makers.

Issues of classification and interpretation are of course at the core of discourse analysis and frame analysis (see Hajer and Laws 2006). Our discourse-analytical take on authority in times of crisis comprises two dimensions: the discursive (what is said) and the dramaturgical (how it is said and in what setting).

Firstly, when it comes to authority, discourse matters. Leaders need to comment not only on the crisis event itself (here the murder), they also need to demonstrate that their discourse is more adequate than that of prospective challengers. This is not determined in a 'rational' exchange of arguments. Metaphors, story lines and rhetoric are more likely to dominate the initial moments after the occurrence of a particular event. If leaders fail to frame the event in terms that people see as meaningful, social unrest might be enhanced. On the other hand, if they successfully produce conciliating discourse, crises can even strengthen solidarity or generate it in the first place.

The second dimension is dramaturgical and focuses on the role of the setting. Kenneth Burke and Murray Edelman among others have pointed out how the setting influences the act (Edelman 1964; Burke 1969). Authority is not only dependent on what is said but also on who says it, how, and in what particular context. The role of the setting can be used to amplify the impact of what is said. In that case we can speak of a dramaturgy of authority (see V. Turner 1974). Political authority is, then, analysed in terms of the sequence of 'performances' through which meaning is produced and allocated. In this political

drama we can distinguish ‘protagonists’ (here Cohen and Aboutaleb) and ‘antagonists’ (their critics).

Analysing both the discursive and the dramaturgical dimension allows us to understand the acts of political leaders (or their critics, for that matter) as ways in which authority – and indeed the crisis itself – gets ‘enacted’: political leaders (or their critics) are successful when they impose a particular understanding of the situation and thereby cause a change in the political significance of the event. The concepts we employ are summarized in boxes 1 and 2 and the timeline of the public events and performances we analyse are summarized in table 1.

To talk about governance as performance might easily lead to misunderstanding. After all, in a public administration context the term ‘performance’ mostly relates to effectiveness. It should be clear that we follow a different definition. Performing a ‘situation’ is imposing your definition of reality onto others. Furthermore, governance as performance should not be interpreted to suggest that administrators ‘simply’ play a role. As critics of rational actor theory have pointed out, human beings are neither able nor willing to calculate their interests and adopt a role that serves those interests. In practice, politicians need to act not on the basis of rational calculation but out of a ‘feel for the game’ that they have accumulated over time and in environments both inside and outside politics (Bourdieu 1998). Administrators, in this sense, are similar to the ghetto boxers analysed by Loïc Wacquant (2004): they develop certain discourses and dispositions over the course of many years that help or hinder them to respond tactically when they need to act in highly contingent and stressful situations. Thus we argue that a large part of the behaviour of administrators in the initial phases of crises can be understood as responses that derive from their embodied dispositions and that develop in relation to the forces immanent in the settings in which they operate. We think that the notion of ‘performative habitus’ can help us understand how administrators respond tactically in emotionally loaded exchanges. It highlights the role of dispositions that have been shaped over many years of symbolic labour and that allow politicians

BOX 1 Discourse (refers to markers, structures and patterns in a discussion)

- *Discourse*: an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations through which meaning is allocated to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduces in an identifiable set of practices
- *Metaphor*: understanding and experiencing a particular thing/event in terms of another
- *Story line*: a condensed sort of narrative that links an event to one or more discourses and thus provides the basis of ‘discourse coalitions’

BOX 2 Dramaturgy (analyses of policy-making as a sequence of staged performances)

- *Performance*: the way in which the contextualized interaction itself produces social realities like understandings of the problem at hand, knowledge, new power-relations
- *Setting*: the physical and organizational situation in which the interaction takes place, including the artifacts that are brought to or found in the situation
- *Scripting*: the efforts of protagonists to create a particular political effect by determining the characters in the performance (‘Dramatis Personae’) and to provide cues for appropriate behaviour
- *Counter-scripting*: efforts of antagonists to undo the effect of scripts of protagonists
- *Staging*: the deliberate organization of an interaction, drawing on existing symbols and the invention of new ones, as well as to the distinction between active players and (presumably passive) audiences (‘mis en scene’)

TABLE 1 *Main public events and performances, November 2–11, 2004*

Date	Time and event
2 November	8:50: Van Gogh is murdered 9:30: Arrest – murderer is arrested after a gunfight in which policeman shoots him in the leg 13:00: Press conference by Mayor, Chief of Police and Chief Prosecutor; announcement of ‘Lawaaimanifestatie’ at Dam Square to protest against murder 18:00: NOS Journaal (national television news) reports on murder, press conference, shows the mourning of ‘Friends of Theo’ and brings short interviews with Friends of Theo 19:30: Lawaaimanifestatie (manifestation of noise) at Dam square, with speeches by Mayor Cohen and Minister of Integration Verdonk with thousands of people attending 22:30: Nova – two ‘Friends of Theo’ are main guests in NOVA, a ‘BBC Newsnight’ type information programme
3 November	Speech in Al-Kabir mosque: Alderman Aboutaleb delivers a speech in Al-Kabir mosque and argues: ‘Moroccans should either choose to live here and integrate, or go back’. Address to the City Council: Mayor Cohen addresses the City Council and emphasizes that there is no alternative to ‘keeping things together’ 18:00: Twee Vandaag – Aboutaleb is main guest in news programme <i>Twee Vandaag</i>
5 November	22:30: Talk show Barend and Van Dorp – Theodor Holman (Friends of Theo) as guest; reads ‘open letter’ to Mohammed B.
8 November	22:30: Talk show Barend and Van Dorp – Aboutaleb as guest
9 November	17:00: Cremation – cremation of Theo van Gogh: live broadcast on Dutch television 22:30: Nova – Friends of Theo (Holman, Van de Westelaken) in main news programme NOVA
11 November	22:30: Talk show Barend and Van Dorp: Cohen, as guest; responds to various allegations in newspapers

a level of agency and tactical intelligence in particular settings. With performative habitus we try to transcend the dualism between the model of the politician as a rational actor in pursuit of predefined goals and models of the politician’s actions as being determined by a pre-given ‘personality’ or by the context in which he performs. Using the above analytical framework, we analysed the performance of authority in the ten days following the murder. We examined all recorded public performances and coded the most important television performances using Transana software. We analysed the newspaper coverage using LexisNexis (including the ‘media-echo’ in the months after the event) and we conducted interviews with actors involved in the scripting and staging of the performances.

THE MEANING OF A MURDER

The assassination of Van Gogh took place at 8.50 am. As the news spread, the struggle to capture the meaning of the event started. Initially the debate was preoccupied with the question whether ‘Jihad had now come to The Netherlands’. This framing of the murder was strongly reinforced by television images of a day-long siege of a residential neighbourhood in which members of the terrorist ‘Hofstad’ group (a label introduced to refer to the group to which Mohammed Bouyeri was found out to belong) were hiding.

Yet while the terrorism issue remained a concern of national politics, the Amsterdam government was itself under siege because of its insistence on multicultural policies. In the context of this paper, we use the term ‘multicultural’ to refer to policies that value cultural difference, view integration as a two-way process, and consider intolerance and

discrimination as serious obstacles to the emancipation of minorities. Anti-multiculturalists, in contrast, view the presence of cultural difference primarily as a threat, emphasize the obligations of migrants to integrate into Dutch society, and view 'political correctness' as a serious obstacle to, among other things, policies against terrorism and street crime (see Uitermark 2005). Critics argued that the murder showed, once again, that Amsterdam's policies were naïve and outdated. That criticism put the pressure directly on those public officeholders whose story line had been for years that their task was to 'keep things together' ('de boel bij elkaar houden'): Job Cohen, Amsterdam's mayor, and also Ahmed Aboutaleb, the alderman for diversity. Both had a long-standing reputation as defenders of an approach to ethnic diversity based on mutual adaptation and empathy.

Initially the antagonists were several right-wing MPs and media commentators who argued that the assassination was a final wake up call. The story line of the 'dead end' of multiculturalism and the threat of an 'Islamization' of Dutch society had been rehearsed in preceding years by a range of intellectuals and politicians, most notably by Pim Fortuyn, the populist politician who was himself shot dead in May 2002. The murder of Van Gogh only served to strengthen the conviction of this group.

With the murder of Van Gogh, a new actor emerged: a group that became known as 'the Friends of Theo'. Theo van Gogh was a radical hedonist and he had been part of a group of writers, filmmakers and journalists such as Max Pam, Theodor Holman and Gijs van de Westelaken who operated at the margins of the Dutch cultural elite. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination, they had an extremely high presence in the news media. With utmost determination they continued Van Gogh's battle against 'political correctness' and especially the alleged tendency of multiculturalists to downplay the black side of Islam. In doing this, they targeted Mayor Job Cohen extremely directly. Public performances became a crucial means for protagonists and antagonists to give meaning to the murder. We discuss the five settings that were crucial for the enactment of authority.

Setting one: the press conference

Following the murder, the mayor, the chief of police and the chief prosecutor (the so-called security 'triangle') were immediately called on to coordinate the security policy. Yet the authorities also realized they 'needed to be seen' to be actively and authoritatively working on the case. At the press conference the mayor expressed anger, disgust and shock that this could happen in the city. He announced a 'Lawaaimanifestatie' or manifestation of noise at Dam square to protest against the murder and as a protest for freedom of speech. In response to a journalist's question, Mayor Cohen stated he would be among the speakers. Chief Prosecutor Leo de Wit revealed the background of the suspect and explained the judicial procedure. Chief of Police Bernard Welten described the events of the morning, emphasizing that the suspected murderer had been caught after 'an unprecedented exchange of fire' and after one of his officers had shot the murderer in the leg.

The press conference was improvised, unwittingly underlining the uniqueness of the situation and the fact that everybody was taken by surprise. Yet as Chief Prosecutor Leo de Wit formulated it: 'In times of stress the Triangle is the most trust generating symbol that the city can show' (Schulte 2005, p. 6).

Setting two: the manifestation of noise

On the evening of the murder, more than 20,000 people came to Dam Square in Central Amsterdam, bringing banners, whistles, pots and pans, rattles and sirens. At the centre

of the manifestation was a stage, especially erected earlier that day, on which Mayor Job Cohen, followed by the then Minister for Immigration and Integration, Rita Verdonk, spoke, before a base drummer led the collective making of noise. Cohen spoke sternly and firmly and emphasized the crucial commitment to freedom of speech, arguing that he often disagreed firmly with Van Gogh but 'that this was allowed in this country'. Citing Voltaire, he underlined that he would always fight for the right of opponents to speak out freely. Minister Verdonk, nicknamed 'Iron Rita' and one of the most important proponents of an uncompromising policy towards immigrants, expressed grief but also emphasized that Van Gogh was a supporter of her hard line policies:

I knew Theo. And I learned to know him better and better. Theo was the one who on the one hand said: 'Rita, keep that back straight!' But Theo was also the one that said: 'But think about yourself ... and think about the people'.

With their contradictory performances, Verdonk and Cohen, unwittingly, illustrated how the murder could be accommodated in diverging discourses. While Cohen conceptualized the murder as an attack on the shared core values of the country and the capital, Minister Verdonk framed the event as part of an attack against those who supported an uncompromising attitude towards immigrants in general and Muslims in particular.

This 'double take' was not orchestrated. In fact the manifestation of noise was very much a collusion of two different scripts. Immediately after the assassination, the 'Friends of Theo' planned a gathering to express their outrage over the murder. For them, it was out of the question to organize a 'silent march' since this would convey the impression that the murder had silenced Van Gogh's voice. At the press conference, Mayor Cohen had already announced that he would speak at the public ceremony. He felt he needed to do this, he said, referring to his administrative role of, 'being the Mayor' in times of crisis. For obvious reasons he could not claim to share the same outrage as Van Gogh's friends. The 'Friends of Theo' on the other hand wanted to communicate to the public that they were not just grieved but also outraged and determined (using Cohen as the figurehead) to continue Van Gogh's crusade against political correctness. As Cohen had already announced he would speak, they counter-scripted the public gathering, not only as a moment to express grief but also as a public accusation against all those who bowed to the intimidation of Islamic extremists. At the last minute Cohen heard that the 'Friends of Theo' had decided that Verdonk would replace Van Gogh's long-time friend Theodor Holman as second speaker. Behind the scenes, then, representatives of the two opposing camps negotiated a format that accommodated both the possibility for expressing anger and the possibility of channelling the outrage and turning it into a conciliatory discourse (see Alexander 2004).

Setting three: the speech in the Al-Kabir mosque (the 'great mosque')

While Mayor Job Cohen had to devote his time to the emerging security and intelligence issues, alderman Aboutaleb – in charge of integration and welfare policies – had more opportunities to speak in public. What is more, being the city's first alderman of Moroccan descent, many people looked towards him with interest and curiosity. In an emotional address at the Al-Kabir mosque, he argued that 'the Muslim community would be wise to not have their religion hijacked' by radical extremists:

I am a strong supporter of a powerful, diverse city in which there is a place for everyone. Yet a diverse city can only prosper when we have an agreement over the core values that we should all adhere to. For people that do not share these collective core values,

there is no place in an open society like the Dutch. The freedom of religion, the freedom of speech and the principle of anti-discrimination are the most important parts thereof. Whomever does not share those values, should be so wise to draw his conclusions and go. ... Claiming tolerance is only acceptable if people behave tolerant. It is reciprocal.

Aboutaleb claimed that many people must have observed the radicalization process of Mohammed Bouyeri and, hammering with his fist on the table, he said that: 'I should have known that! People should have told me! They should have reported this to me!'. He also underlined that Moroccan parents had the duty to teach 'four, five year-olds' that 'the word is the only weapon to fight with others, not the fists or a weapon'.

I want to say that the Moroccan community is burdened with the extraordinary heavy task to cooperate in restoring quiet and work on the production of 'counter poison' against intolerance.

Insiders were surprised by his statement since the Al-Kabir was well known as a comparatively liberal mosque and a long-time partner of the municipality. Indeed, Moroccans in the audience felt publicly reprimanded and, in interviews with the authors, expressed being flabbergasted by his performance.

While the staging in the mosque suggested that the prime audience was the mosque community, Aboutaleb realized he was communicating with a different, much larger, audience as well. A series of television stations registered the event of the 'Moroccan Alderman speaking to the Moroccan community'. The context (staging) added to the news value of the speech. The focus of the many media reports was Aboutaleb's statement that Moroccans who do not want to comply to the rule of law should 'pack up and go; there are planes leaving for Morocco every day...'. Aboutaleb's performance effectively reconfigured the discourse of 'keeping things together'. While this was argued to be 'soft' by the critics of Cohen, the tough language and stern performance of Aboutaleb gave it a new expression and new meaning.

Setting four: the Mayor's address to the City Council

On 3 November, Mayor Cohen delivered a speech to the Amsterdam City Council in which he sought to give meaning to the situation, using the same 'freedom of speech' frame as at the manifestation of noise at Dam Square:

Dear Council Members,

Yesterday morning Theo van Gogh was murdered. A cowardly deed that arouses anger, horror and dismay. A deed that impacted on the freedom of speech in this country, in our city.

Later, to continue to explicitly defend his credo, he said the following:

I can tell you what I will do and what I am doing. Yes, keeping things together. Everybody knows. One can be cynical about this, I don't mind (...)

Yet if we examine the definition of 'keeping things together' we see that this obtained an entirely new meaning here: it was first of all dialogue about 'tough action'; the dialogue with the city was relegated to second place:

Keeping things together by tough intervention, yes. But not only that. Keeping things together is, in second place, the dialogue with the city.

The dialogue about keeping things together was now first and foremost about toughness – not about softness and understanding as antagonists would claim. Equally significant was the fact that Cohen linked the murder to the need for a tougher stand on delinquent youths and school drop outs.

Interviews with civil servants show that the speech impressed officials and lifted morale. It provided them with a guideline about how to move on at a time when criticisms against policies threatened to undermine support among civil servants and others responsible for promoting and implementing Amsterdam's official ideology of 'keeping things together'. So it served to perform authority within Amsterdam's administration. However, the speech was ignored by the media. The broader public (including the antagonists) thus remained largely unaware of this shift in Cohen's discourse.

Setting five: the talk show *Barend and Van Dorp*

In the ten days that followed the murder, protagonists and antagonists were guests on the Dutch late night talk show *Barend and Van Dorp*. The show was aired at 22.30 hours on an RTL commercial channel. At the time, it had the highest ratings of all programmes that addressed political issues in The Netherlands. It was recognized to be a crucial platform for politics: politicians repeatedly chose *Barend and Van Dorp* as the platform from which to announce their plans or visions, a move that subsequently led to parliamentary (and further media) attention.

The programme was a typical 'infotainment' programme (see Schutz 1997; Ilie 2001), an emotional public sphere (Lunt and Stenner 2005) structured and scripted to stage guests as emotional subjects in a creative process of improvisation. Apart from the two presenters, the programme features a third actor cast especially for the purpose: Jan Mulder, a former soccer star, invariably expresses strong emotions, ranging from (frequent) moral outrage to strong praise (rather less frequent).

On Friday 5 November, 'Friend of Theo' Theodor Holman used the stage to read an open letter to Mohammed B., the murderer:

Dear Mohammed and friends, What a pity that it all came to this. We really had no idea that it was this sensitive. We have learned our lesson. How is your leg? Let's try to keep things a bit together but with a little mutual respect this should work ... Could you give us a few guidelines about what we can say in the future? That this has to happen during the Ramadan! ... We hope that this letter does not contain anything that could hurt you and your fellow-believers. Please forgive us, we are also a little confused ...

Holman connects the terrorist Mohammed B. with the general group of Islamic believers and gives a parody of Amsterdam's ambition to foster understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. The letter was subsequently discussed with the other guests, two of whom were Muslim and one of whom was clearly uncomfortable with the tone and style of the open letter.

Aboutaleb was the guest on Monday 8 November. He was immediately confronted with the 'Friends of Theo' as well. At the start of the programme, Jan Mulder reported on the memorial party for Theo van Gogh. While Mulder described the presence of a flock of goats at that party – with a sign saying 'for those who feel the urge' (Van Gogh frequently referred to Muslims as 'goat fuckers') – the camera was close up on Aboutaleb, supposedly to monitor his reaction. The extraordinary interest in the emotions of Aboutaleb also came out in the way he was introduced:

He came to the Netherlands when he was fifteen and is the first Moroccan, well, Dutch but with a Moroccan background, Ahmed Aboutaleb. He is also protected [i.e. living under protection, in a safe house]; cannot see his daughter. How is it to be [i.e. what is it like to be] alderman of Amsterdam? (author's translation and notes)

Cohen appeared on the *Barend and Van Dorp* programme on Friday 12 November but only after his communications advisors had persuaded him to agree. A major newspaper, *De Telegraaf*, had suggested that morning that he had been weak in his handling of the aftermath of the Van Gogh murder and his goal was to set things straight. The performances of Aboutaleb and Cohen were markedly different. We compared how they tried to defend their policy principle of tolerance and the story line of 'keeping things together'.

In the case of Cohen, the issue came up of whether the Amsterdam government had been 'too tolerant of intolerance'. The Mulder argument is that if a mosque preaches intolerance or if a discotheque discriminates against Moroccans they should be closed immediately. As the former soccer star puts it: 'You administrators are not used to this. Take decisions (...) I mean it!'. Cohen is put on the spot:

Cohen: 'Well it iiiiss, this point of intolerance, this was exactly what we discussed Tuesday in also in the local Cabinet, this point also came up there. I do agree with you. I agree that we did a number of things but if I look back on it now we should have been tougher.'

Mulder, exploding in anger, trying to find words: 'But... there that... that is.... that point is crucial! That is'

(several people talking at once)

Van Dorp: 'Can I ask something?'

Cohen: '... which does not mean that we did not do anything ...'

Mulder: 'But this is dramatic!!'

Cohen: 'But... But... yes one must not pretend as if, I mean, that would close the place down. That wouldn't be a way out.'

Mulder: 'Yes it would! Yes it would!'

While others gesticulated and raised their voices when they interrupted, Cohen remained calm and passive. He waited without interrupting and thus only got time to speak when it was given to him. When he spoke, he employed a pedagogical tone: he explained. Two references to the government were prominent: he started by saying that he and his colleagues talked about 'exactly this issue' and he emphasized that some problems were not easy to solve. Both of these tactics do not seem to work in this setting: Thus Cohen was not given the opportunity to argue his case.

Four days earlier, Aboutaleb was asked whether Cohen has been too soft. The approach of 'keeping things together' was pitted against the deputy Prime Minister Gerrit Zalm who had argued that we are 'at war':

Barend: 'Cohen says for example: we have got to keep it all together. Well, the journalists and columnists of certain papers are struggling to be the first to call Job Cohen a weakling, or something like that... uh... uh... an a**h*le (*klootzak*), if you know what I mean. (...)'

Aboutaleb (sternly): 'There is, let me restate this to this platform, no alternative to the line of Cohen, we have got to keep ...'

Barend: 'no...?'

Aboutaleb: '... it together, it is a constitutional duty of the Mayor to keep it all together'

Barend: 'but you also read how people react to him'

Aboutaleb (determined): 'it is complete nonsense to assume that there is an alternative. This is what you need for a world city like Amsterdam. A multitude of measures: and, and, and, and... The big picture is keeping that large group of the well-meaning people together in order to isolate and make visible the ill-meaning and control those. But the majority must be kept together by the Mayor, it is his constitutional duty, assisted by us as his Aldermen. There is no alternative, so I would say let's stop moaning about "keeping things together" because this really is the only way.'

Aboutaleb here naturalizes what was, in fact, a highly controversial and contested approach. He is very uncompromising ('there is no alternative'; 'it is complete nonsense'). For Aboutaleb, 'Keeping things together' has nothing to do with sloppiness or naivety. At one point he makes an argument that was also made by Cohen ('a multitude of measures') but Aboutaleb does not give us any details. Aboutaleb actively reframes the discussion introducing the distinction between well-meaning and ill-meaning groups. He provides an alternative for the dualism, Muslim or Moroccans versus the Dutch, by driving his wedge between the 'large group of well-meaning' and the 'small group' that needs to be isolated and dealt with.

Aboutaleb presents the new meaning to 'Keeping things together' to the broader public: it is no longer soft. He is now authoritatively setting the terms of the discourse. He surprises, employing rhetorical strategies – to appeal to the rule of law and to argue for tough action against deviants – that were seemingly reserved for his antagonists. But Aboutaleb succeeds in using the same signifiers for entirely different purposes: to defend the position of Cohen and the story line of 'keeping things together'.

ANALYSIS

During the crisis it was Aboutaleb who got positive feedback for his performance, but two years later we know that both Aboutaleb and Cohen received praise. Cohen was chosen as one of the personalities of 2005 by *TIME* magazine, Aboutaleb was elected Best Alderman in Amsterdam. The question here is whether there is a pattern in the way these two administrators responded to challenges and what could explain their relative success in reinstating their authority. In answering these questions we follow our analytical framework, differentiating between a discursive dimension and a dramaturgical dimension in governmental efforts to maintain or restore their authority and introducing the notion of performative habitus to mark the limits to the possibility of individual adjustment in performing authority.

The discursive dimension

The analysis reveals that Cohen and Aboutaleb substantially reframed their discourse. The political leadership kept its commitment to the story line of 'keeping things together' but changed its meaning. After the murder, 'keeping things together' was primarily about

tough action, not understanding or dialogue. What is more, the speech of Cohen reveals how he discursively linked the issue of terrorist violence to the obnoxious behaviour of youth groups in Amsterdam neighbourhoods, which was then a hot issue in the media. This is very much akin to the connection of 'terrorism' to 'street terrorism' that is often employed by anti-immigration politicians. Implicitly, Cohen also, *post hoc*, accepted the critique of Van Gogh himself, who kept arguing that Cohen's approach to street gangs showed that his whole take on integration was utterly inadequate. This radical discursive shift, then and now, has largely gone unnoticed.

The discourse analysis reveals a repertoire of three distinct means to enact authority on the part of political leaders. The first is what we call 'procedural assurance'. It aims to show that the event has not impacted on the routine-based functioning of existing institutions. Cohen consistently employed this style, performing as Mayor, staying calm, and emphasizing both that established parliamentary institutions were fit to deal with the present situation and that policies were appropriate. The prime stage for this performance was the City Council but, under pressure from his communications advisors, he later took to the stage in the *Barend the Van Dorp* talk show, a setting in which this approach was less successful.

A second means is what we call 'emotive rerouting'. This approach was employed primarily by Aboutaleb. Here, authority is established by a combination of (quasi-)spontaneous and strong expression of emotions and the subsequent rerouting of these emotions to strong, unifying symbols. The emotions of the debate are expressed by the political leadership but are subsequently 'rerouted' and transformed by tactically referring to unifying symbols, public policy commitments and governmental institutions. In the literature on moral shocks, it is argued that those who discuss a crisis event in public are expected to, and will feel the need to, channel feelings of outrage and despair by appealing to 'condensing symbols'. Rather than 'referential symbols', which have a relatively straightforward meaning, a 'condensing symbol' 'strikes deeper roots in the unconscious and diffuses its emotional quality to types of behaviour or situations apparently far removed from the original meaning of the symbol' (Sapir, cited in Jasper 1997, p. 160). An appeal to such symbols can provide a compensation for the loss of the senses of belonging, attachment and familiarity that typically occur during dislocations (see also Dixon and Durrheim 2004).

The third means is 'bridging and wedging' (see Lakoff 2004). It was employed by both politicians as well as by the antagonists Rita Verdonk and 'Friends of Theo'. It attempts to show precisely where the differentiation ('wedge') lies between 'friend' and 'enemy', while also trying to reach out to the 'good' elements ('bridging'). In crisis situations, the politics of meaning is often about who is 'in' and who is 'out'. Bridging and wedging allows, in principle, for a redefinition of categories to facilitate the inclusion of some groups. Employing a new term ('the well meaning') can serve to build a bridge between groups that would otherwise be considered to be mutually exclusive (that is, the Dutch and the Muslims, the Dutch and foreigners, and so on).

The antagonist 'Friends of Theo' primarily employed the discursive tool of satirical cynicism which ridiculed the efforts of the political leadership as utterly inadequate. Moreover, it invoked its own discursive categorizations that created markedly different divisions between friends and foes, 'us' and 'them'. This not only concerned the differentiation between the Friends of Theo and the others, but particularly linked the murderer Mohammed Bouyeri to Islamic believers in general (as in the 'open letter'). They framed the discourse of Cohen and Aboutaleb as betrayal of Theo van Gogh since, in

their view, a discourse of reconciliation was inappropriate after such a horrendous attack. While Aboutaleb and Cohen tried to 'naturalize' Amsterdam's integration policies as the only plausible policy option, the Friends denaturalized this approach, suggesting it amounted to complicity with extremists. With their challenges they in fact joined the camp of anti-multicultural parliamentarians such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders.

The dramaturgical dimension

We might distinguish two different types of platforms in the ten days after the murder. On the one hand the 'constitutional platforms', such as the press conference of the Triangle [i.e. the Mayor, Chief of Police and Chief Prosecutor] or the City Council, on the other hand 'non-constitutional platforms' such as the public manifestation, the mosque or the talk show.

Herbst (2003) has argued that authority can be 'media-derived'. In that case authority is acquired not by formal status but by the type and amount of media attention someone receives. The analysis of the six major Dutch newspapers in terms of the media resonances of the various performances shows us that alderman Aboutaleb especially profited from media-derived authority. In the months of November and December 2004, Aboutaleb received praise on 26 occasions (as against 15 occasions for Cohen) and was criticized 18 times (as against 32 times for Cohen). Here, his speech in the Al-Kabir mosque played a central role. The text of his speech was immediately transformed in a single story line: 'if you don't like it here, leave!', or even more crisply as: 'koffers pakken!' (literally: 'pack your suitcases!').

On 4 November, the day after Aboutaleb's speech, he featured prominently on the front pages of two newspapers (*Het Parool* and *De Volkskrant*). These reports emphasized the clarity of his message ('koffers pakken!'), and featured him in photographs that showed him surrounded by bodyguards (this was not as a result of his speech but from the fact that he had been found to be on a death list of the 'Hofstad Group'). It reinforced the image of a bold political leader, speaking out and standing firm under siege. In the following week two other leading newspapers (*NRC* and *De Telegraaf*) published page long feature articles on Aboutaleb in which he was celebrated for his clarity and boldness. His performance was sometimes explicitly compared to that of Cohen, as when the newspaper *Het Parool* stated that: 'the toughness of Aboutaleb is just a little tougher, and his softness is just a little softer', than that of Job Cohen (Wiegman 2004).

We can also analyse performing authority in terms of its dramaturgical dynamics. We distinguish three effects. Firstly, due to media reporting, performing authority nearly always becomes a matter of speaking to several audiences at the same time. The Al-Kabir speech is a case in point. Aboutaleb alienated the Moroccans of the Al-Kabir mosque that he addressed, but gained authority as, through the media reports of his speech, he reassured the native Dutch communities.

Secondly, due to media influence, administrators are constantly pitted against antagonists. Constantly searching for differences of opinion, the media made the 'Friends of Theo' into the antagonist in this drama. So prime time news on the day of the murder brought Cohen's effort to perform authority at the press conference together with Heleen van Rooyen, a writer and friend of Theo van Gogh, saying: 'I do not hear anger from Cohen, I want to hear anger!'

Thirdly, the role of the media in performing authority emerges from the fact that the most obvious means of restoring authority, procedural assurance, was either ignored by the media (Cohen's speech to City Council) or rendered ineffective (in the talk show). The 'emotive rerouting' and 'bridging and wedging' fitted the ruling media-format much

better. In the case of the murder of Theo van Gogh, then, emotive rerouting proved to be a central means to take the heat out of the debate on such topics as radicalization, terrorism and religion-based violence and restore the public authority.

Dramaturgy is also evident in the division of labour between Aboutaleb and Cohen. Cohen is the administrator who pulls the strings, and who conveys a sense of calmness and administrative authority when he appears in public. This performance is well received in some quarters but does not provide an answer to the immense public anxiety over Islamic extremism in the immediate aftermath of the assassination. Aboutaleb performs on many non-constitutional platforms, such as talk shows, discussions in several places in the city, and in radio interviews. This division of labour was not planned either by the politicians or by their advisors: it emerged. However, as soon as their advisors noticed that both politicians had 'grown into' their respective roles, they agreed to stick to this division of labour and arranged the performances of both politicians accordingly.

The role of the performative *habitus*

Performing authority depends on more than the rhetorical skills of political leaders alone. The authority of a politician is in fact co-produced by his performative habitus and the setting in which he operates. For instance, Aboutaleb, in his Al-Kabir speech, was hailed for his authoritative voice. But this capacity to use the occasion had been cultivated over the years spent in his role as alderman for diversity, someone who continuously had to keep an eye out for the concerns of the general (native) Dutch public in his daily interactions with religious and ethnic minorities. Before coming to Amsterdam, Aboutaleb was director of FORUM, a government-subsidized institute for multicultural development. In other words, it was his performative habitus that allowed him to quickly switch register and to authoritatively perform a role that was in great demand during the days after the murder. Cohen, on the other hand, could not take up the role of an outraged yet determined administrator. 'There is just no way that Job will ever lose his temper', according to one of his associates. Thus they consciously did not script Cohen in this role because he would not have been able to perform an unnatural role even if he had wanted to. Ironically, it is the Muslim and Moroccan alderman who voices the concerns of large parts of the native Dutch population when he grows into his role as a fierce critic of the passivity of Muslims with respect to tendencies towards radicalism and extremism. Yet while Aboutaleb's stance resonated with those who thought a firmer stance was required, Cohen's performance resonated with those who felt Islamophobia was a bigger problem than Muslim extremism. As one of our Islamic informants put it: 'I only know one person in my environment who likes Aboutaleb. Nobody likes him, really'. At bit later he added, with an enthusiastic smile: 'Cohen is cool – a cool Jew!'. Ultimately, both Aboutaleb and Cohen were important for the performance of authority in their own right since, between them, they reached different (and larger) audiences.

CONCLUSION

In situations of crisis, the routine execution of authority comes to a sudden and abrupt end. When confronted with a crisis situation, simply appealing to the position of power does not work: 'de jure' authority is temporarily separated from 'de facto' authority. In this article we analysed political administrators in crisis situations as performers in an ongoing political drama. We tried to connect the discursive struggles that took place on different 'stages' against the background of ongoing and deep controversies over integration policies in The Netherlands. The performance perspective led to an appreciation of

the many different stages on which the crisis was enacted. It confirms the findings of Wagner-Pacifici in her description of the Moro kidnapping where she concluded that: 'there was no *one* ritual center in the Moro social drama (...), the picture was one of (albeit unequal) competition among several centers of symbolic discourse' (Wagner-Pacifici 1986, p. 275).

Crucial to our understanding of the performance of authority was the role of the media. Here, the political actors were shown to actively influence the meaning of the event, selecting their most effective story lines for further use in media performances. Furthermore, the agency of actors is not captured by a model of politicians as rational actors who decide with sober calculation which step to take next. We observed how they are limited by their 'performative habitus' and how the authority of the Amsterdam leadership was helped by a division of labour between mayor and alderman. However, this division of labour 'emerged'; it was not scripted.

We think this analysis has implications for the management of crisis events in ethnically and culturally diverse cities. We already know about the fact that crisis management requires anticipation (B. Turner and Pidgeon 1997). Nevertheless, given the fundamental uncertainties that surround crises, it is almost impossible to prepare a script. It is possible, however, to cultivate those personal qualities and structural relationships that help politicians to deal effectively with an unanticipated event. In the present case, both Aboutaleb's biography and his previous experiences – as with the municipality's institutional ties with partners such as mosques – proved crucial in mitigating crisis tendencies. Thus governments will prove more resilient in crisis situations when they possess well maintained partnership networks across society.

Finally, improvisation and emotions have no positive connotation in the administrative work of the everyday. We have shown that in times of crisis, improvisation does not necessarily jeopardize the authority of the administration. Likewise, to show that the leadership is emotionally affected does not have to cause damage so long as the power of these emotions gets 'rerouted' to the support for an understandable line of action.

The perspective and methods we employ contain lessons for the study of public administration more generally. If the acts of political leaders are scanned for meaning by a variety of audiences, we need to provide insights into the ways in which this affects their work. Administrators need to be made aware that they operate in situations in which people might understand their messages in very different terms than originally intended. Good governance, then, becomes a matter of being aware of the many different discourses that people might employ to give meaning to what administrators do. The discourse-analytical approach is a proven method of analysing this politics of meaning. It insists on micro-analysis of how meaning gets produced and keeps an eye open for the various misunderstandings that may occur (see Hajer and Laws 2006). One of the virtues we see in this approach is that it can combine the investigation of micro-powers with research on the challenges that are implicit in the sometimes grandiose dichotomies that emerge in political discussions such as those on the confrontation between 'Islam' and 'The West'. Whereas such dichotomies undoubtedly do have political effect as soon as they are acted upon, discourse-analysis nearly always shows us that the political conflict is in fact much more varied, much more layered, than suggested. We think the discourse-analytical investigation opens up the possibility of much more sensitive and subtle, and hence potentially much more effective, ways of dealing with the tensions inherent in governing fragmented societies.

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