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# Saying the quiet part out loud: analyzing rationality and whiteness in the Dutch public sphere through the discussion of cultural marxism

## Abstract

Cultural marxism has become subject of debate within the Dutch public sphere. At the same time, western civilization and the public sphere is put at stake in these discussions. Therefore the discussion of cultural marxism is a discussion of the limits to the Dutch public sphere. In this thesis I analyze how the Dutch liberal public sphere is imagined and (re)constructed by and through the discussion of cultural marxism. Habermas imagines the liberal public sphere as a place where well-informed, rational debate takes place about any subject. I show that rationality is still the predominant condition within the Dutch liberal public sphere and I sought to demonstrate that this claim on rationality is one that is characterized and configured by whiteness. Moreover, rationality and whiteness determine the issues discussed within the public sphere, excluding people that do not adhere to the rules of whiteness. Analyzing the discussion of cultural marxism thus helps understand the presuppositions, accessibility and conditions of issue formation in the Dutch public sphere.

Keywords: cultural marxism, free speech, public sphere, rationality, whiteness

## 1. Introduction

On January 11th 2019, Belgian philosopher Maarten Boudry wrote the following about cultural marxism in Dutch newspaper *NRC*:

“What ghost has haunted the daily papers at least 82 times in the past three years, yet only once prior to 2012? The spectre of cultural marxism. (...) Cultural philosopher Sid Lukkassen wrote a whole book about it (*Avondland en identiteit*), and Paul Cliteur compiled a bundle this year (*Cultuurmarxisme*). In ‘sensible’ circles it is said that Cliteur, Lukkassen, Baudet and Bannon see ghosts. *De Groene Amsterdammer* writes about a “delusion from the paranoid right”, going back to propaganda from the national socialist NSB. *Vrij Nederland* also concluded that it is an “obscure conspiracy theory,” a phantom merely ‘existing’ in “rightwing bubbles.” To be honest, the critics do have a point. Conspiracy theories are never too far away when seeing these ghostbusters talk about cultural marxism (more on this later). Yet, critics spoil the debate by, as happened in *De Groene* and *De Volkskrant*, directly dragging Adolf Hitler and Anders Breivik into it” (Boudry, 2019).

Several things stand out from this excerpt. First, the interaction between various people discussing cultural marxism and variety and amount of people involved in this process: Cliteur, Lukkassen, Baudet, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, *Vrij Nederland*, *De Volkskrant*, and Boudry himself, while the national socialist NSB, Anders Breivik and Adolf Hitler are implicated as well. Second, there is a variation in social status and occupation among the people mentioned. Some of them work in academia, some are journalists, and some work in politics. In short, this quote illustrates the multiplicity of actors and conceptions of cultural marxism in Dutch public discourse. The quote also makes clear that the subject of cultural marxism has become the subject of public and political debate. However, Boudry also illustrates and is complicit in *how* cultural marxism is made a subject of public debate. The quote mentions ‘seeing ghosts’, ‘sensible circles’ and ‘conspiracy theories’, and Boudry himself addresses ways in which the debate is supposedly ‘spoiled’.

Why is this relevant to point out? Because through discussing the meaning and validity of cultural marxism, boundaries to the public sphere are reinforced: which theories are allowed to be discussed here and which ones aren’t, and on what terms? Moreover, the concept of cultural

marxism in itself is already a discussion about these boundaries, as it puts western civilization and the public sphere actively at stake in its issue formation (Mirrlees, 2018). Therefore, analyzing the discussion of cultural marxism helps understand the presuppositions, accessibility and conditions of issue formation in the Dutch public sphere.

However, not cultural marxism, but the Dutch public sphere is my object of study. The subject of this thesis is not critical theory and its founders, but the discussion that puts critical theory under scrutiny and the implications this has for the public sphere. In the remainder of the thesis I refer to this discussion when I mention ‘cultural marxism’. Accordingly, I also do not define cultural marxism in my theoretical framework or anywhere else, as defining this notion is not the aim of my research, nor is it relevant. That is to say, I do not examine to what extent a certain discourse is culturally marxist. Instead, I consider the interaction about cultural marxism in light of its implications for the way we might understand a contemporary (Dutch) public sphere (de Vries, 2014; Habermas, 1991). I look at how the public sphere is not a mere empty receptacle for discussions of cultural marxism, but is actively *at stake* in those discussions. I illustrate that struggles over the meaning and/or attribution of cultural marxism are always, also, struggles over who can or should speak in the public sphere and in what ways.

The research question of this thesis is: How does the public sphere become an issue of public concern in discussions of ‘cultural marxism’? I answer this research question by addressing two sub-questions. First, what does the discussion of cultural marxism demonstrate about the ways the Dutch public sphere is imagined and defined? Second, what does the discussion of cultural marxism say about who has agency in the process of imagining and defining the Dutch public sphere?

More concretely, I will demonstrate that the discussion of cultural marxism shows that rationality is the dominating condition for participating in the Dutch public sphere. This claim on rationality is in turn configured and characterized by whiteness. In other words I argue that the Dutch public sphere is demarcated by whiteness through the concept of rationality, which subsequently allows for discussion of issues that reinforce whiteness, such as cultural marxism.

Analyzing the public sphere through the discussion of cultural marxism does therefore not only provide insight in what this discussion means and does for society, but it also adds to a deeper understanding of why certain matters are discussed over others and how to intervene in these forms of issue formation and knowledge production. Analyzing the configurations and

limitations to the current public sphere also adds to critical reflections on how to make this sphere more inclusive to everyone in society. In addition to the social relevance, I also aim to contribute to the body of scholarly work concerning issue formation, knowledge production, social constructivism and philosophical discussions of the public sphere. In the following sections I will first provide the theoretical and methodological background to my analysis. Then, I will address and analyze the first sub-question: what does the discussion of cultural marxism demonstrate about the way the Dutch public sphere is imagined and defined? After that, I discuss who has agency in the process of imagining and defining the Dutch public sphere. In the conclusion I will reflect back on the results of the analysis in relation to the theoretical framework.

## 2. Theory

In order to analyze the parameters of the Dutch public sphere and its issues, it is necessary to provide a theoretical framework of what is meant by these concepts. C. Wright Mills explains issues as matters transcending “ local environments of the individual and the range of his inner life.”(Mills, 2000, p. 8) He continues, “an issue is a public matter: some value cherished by publics is felt to be threatened. Often there is a debate about what that value really is and about what it is that really threatens it”(Mills, 2000, p. 8).

Within western democracy, there has been a long tradition of thinking about the separation of the public and the private and providing a place for people to discuss public issues. German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas sought to outline the ideal circumstances in which citizens could debate openly about societal issues (Melton, 2001, p. 4). He calls this the liberal/bourgeois public sphere, and defines this sphere by several characteristics. First, the public sphere should be universally accessible: entrance is not defined by one’s position in society. Second, debate within the public sphere ought to be rational, which means that people need to be able to process information from newspapers and literature and qualify it as good or bad. Then, through rational, critical and selfless debate, participants would reach consensus on certain issues. This consensus supposes a certain representativeness for public debate within society. Third, the public sphere is supposed to mediate between the political and the social. Politics and media need to be transparent and free, in order to facilitate the open debate; nothing can be a secret. Fourth, according to Habermas, everything is debatable within the public sphere.

Because of this, the public sphere is always oppositional to the state, and therefore the state should never interfere with the public sphere.

The notion of the public sphere as Habermas proposes, has been contested by many. Political theorist Chantal Mouffe formulated a critique on (neo)liberal politics, which should also be interpreted as a critique on Habermas' notion of a public sphere (Mouffe, 2005). Following the argument of Mouffe, Habermas elevates rationality to a moral principle: his public sphere should ideally be a place for rational debate only. This implies that only consensus deriving from rational debate can be considered good knowledge, whereas emotional arguments are seen as backwards, therefore bad. This is a dominant idea persisting in liberal societies today. After the threat of communism and socialism vanished, Mouffe argues, liberalism triumphed as the dominant ideology in the West. Now, having no real ideological competitors, liberal politics were characterized as 'overcoming conflict.' As a result, a consensual political system emerged that became bureaucratic and solutionist. Because of the need to find solutions for problems, ideological differences between political stances faded and political parties began to gravitate towards a political center

However, according to Mouffe, this system is founded on a misconception of what 'the political' should entail. Inspired by Carl Schmitt, she states that 'the political' is characterized by conflict. Therefore, conflict is what public and political spheres should represent. Moreover, liberals should acknowledge that people are not driven by rationality. They are mobilized and influenced by emotion and conformism, which are both valid. Therefore the public sphere should be place for emotion and different moral values. She proposes a agonistic model in which differences are no longer seen as threatening, as is the case in the current paradigm. According to Mouffe, the public and political sphere should represent societal and individual pluralism.

Other authors dispute the alleged universal accessibility of the liberal public sphere as presented by Habermas. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, for example, argue that access to the bourgeois public sphere has always been limited to people that have the financial means to adapt to changing cultural and economic circumstances (Hohendahl & Silberman, 1979). In their view, the proletariat does not have the (cultural and economic) capital to participate in the public sphere. Additionally, the public sphere becomes ideologically compliant with this inequality because people with access to the liberal public sphere benefit from keeping their privileged positions (Blanning, 2002).

Therefore, critical theorist Nancy Fraser comments on the inherent irony within Habermas' theory: "A discourse of publicity touting accessibility, rationality, and the suspension of status hierarchies is itself deployed as a strategy of distinction" (Fraser, 1990, p. 60). According to her, a multiplicity of public spheres exists, which are called (subaltern) counter publics. These counterpublics have attempted to 'expand discursive space' and 'mean a widening of discursive contestation' (Fraser, 1990, p. 67).

Building on these valid critiques, I argue that it is necessary to look at the debate that takes place within the dominant public sphere, among those who are privileged, to see how status hierarchies are created discursively. In the case of cultural marxism, this raises questions such as: who get to have this debate and what are the stakes in this debate? What exactly is made an issue and what does the discussion facilitate with regards to the position of women and minorities and their emancipation efforts?

Admittedly, Habermas does not consider the current public sphere to be ideal due to the rise of mass media. At the same time, mass media removed barriers to entry and made this sphere more vast and public than ever. Furthermore, Mouffe shows that the ideal of rationality has been incorporated in western liberalism and its public sphere. Within this context it is still relevant to analyze the mechanisms and what they facilitate. To be more precise: why is it that some voices and issues are heard while others are not? And what are the implications of this for social life? In short, this thesis goes back to the original question of what it means to have a public sphere and I study this specifically by analyzing the concept of rationality and what this idea enables with regards to discussing cultural marxism. For this, I use critical discourse analysis.

### 3. Methods

In order to understand critical discourse analysis and its utilization in my research, the concept of discourse must be understood. Philosopher Michel Foucault sees discourse not as a neutral tool for expressing thoughts, but as partaking in structures and systems that determine what we talk about and how (Fairclough, 2010, p. 73). According to Foucault, language is embedded in our social relations and processes. It is both systematically influenced and influential. Discourse, then, entails more than utterances of language. It also crucially pertains to the field of utterances that are *not* possible at any moment. Discourse, in Foucault's terms, have certain 'rules of inclusion'. To make it more clear, political scientist Maarten Hajer defines discourse as "an

ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations,” and describes it as “internally related to the social practices in which it is produced” (Hajer, 1996, p. 44).

Sociologist John Law writes about Foucault: “discourses define conditions of possibility, making some ways of ordering webs of relations easier and others difficult or impossible” (Law, 2009, p. 149). In contrast, Hajer proposes to consider power in terms of agency (Hajer, 1996). This conception of power is fundamentally different from Foucault’s, but Hajer’s interpretation enables operationalization of the concept and provides the tools to analyze discourse around a public issue. In his work about discourse of environmental politics, Hajer explains the dynamics of the public sphere, which is also relevant to my thesis:

“All forms of political organisation have a bias in favour of the exploitation of some kinds of conflict and the suppression of others because organization is the mobilisation of bias. Some issues are organized into politics while others are organized out. Social constructivism would refine this definition of the mobilization of bias, arguing that it is at least as relevant to observe the more subtle process in which some definitions of issues are organized into politics while other definitions are organized out”(Hajer, 1996, p. 42).

In other words, scientists analyzing the public and the political should be attentive to the questions of who talks, how, and why, while also paying close attention to what this makes invisible: who does *not* get to talk, how, and why? Critical discourse analysis should thus entail “some form of systematic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process,” includes “systemic analysis of texts,” and “addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 10).

How is critical discourse analysis applicable to the discussion of cultural marxism? As said in the introduction, I approach cultural marxism as a specific case of issue formation within the public sphere. Critical discourse analysis, then, provides the tools to analyze this issue and what it implies for the parameters that exist in the public sphere. Similar to the question central to critical discourse analysis of who does (not) get to speak and why, I ask: how does the discussion of the concept of cultural marxism (re)construct the image of the public sphere and ‘who’ have agency in this process and who do not? And, how is the right to speak in public

mediated through a claim on rationality? And what does this claim on rationality mean for the voices that do and do not get heard?

These methods have to some extent already been applied to the case of cultural marxism. Tanner Mirrlees analyzed cultural marxism in relation to the alt-right and Foucault's theory of discourse (Mirrlees, 2018). To Mirrlees, the alt-right constructed cultural marxism to create transnational consent for fascism. He describes seven discursive mechanisms underlying the concept of cultural marxism and the political implications of this. To him, the alt-right uses this notion to construct the idea of a 'culture war,' in which imaginary boundaries are enforced between those who do and do not belong to the national community (1). This image is then used to construct an image about a 'non-american other' (2), which entails everyone that does not belong to the imagined national community. This 'other' is perceived as a threat to the national community (3), which in turn legitimizes violence against this group (4). The discourse is then used as a tool for populists (5), as 'the people' are victims of a repressing, cultural Marxist elite. Then realities of sexism, racism and classism are denied and are presented as propaganda by the same cultural Marxist elite, to undermine white male authority (6). Finally, this discourse functions as conserving the actual white, male, elite by diverting from actual issues (7).

Mirrlees limited himself to American far right discourse. In the meantime cultural marxism became an issue in Dutch academia, media and politics, and is thus discussed beyond Mirrlees' initial context. Moreover, Mirrlees does not connect his findings to implications for imagining the public sphere. I will take this final step in the analysis: what consequences does the Dutch discussion of cultural marxism have for how 'public debate' is imagined? In other words, how does the discussion of cultural marxism reify an image of what 'public debate' should be?

Finally, before moving on to data collection and operationalization, there is a tension in the choice of theory and methods that still needs addressing. Foucault's ideas about discourse and Habermas' ideas about the public sphere and the role of language within that have vastly different presumptions about what language is and does. Following the hermeneutic tradition, Habermas sees language as something that cannot be seen or analyzed outside of human perception, to him there are only people with various interpretations of language (Lafont, 2015). As a consequence, disagreement in interpretation is what constitutes communication. The public sphere is the metaphysical space to facilitate the exchange of those differing interpretations. In



contrast, critical discourse analysis sees language as constituting a system with its own power dynamics, something that can be studied as an object.

This may seem like an incompatibility between my theory and methods, but I would argue that it is instead illustrative of the problem I am researching. The tensions put forward by these competing schools of thought are also present in contemporary Dutch society and are highlighted by the issue of cultural marxism. Citizens of western democracies generally value the idea of a public sphere and freedom of expression. At the same time, this freedom is finite, exemplified by the limits to free speech and accessibility. In other words, the liberal public sphere is only liberal in so far as its constituents comply by its rules. The issue of cultural marxism puts these rules at stake. Cultural marxism then becomes a discussion of when something should be seen as a different interpretation of language and when it becomes something constituting its own rules that serve certain political systems. In the case of cultural marxism I argue that its discussion reinforces political systems of whiteness.

### **Data collection and operationalization**

In my analysis I limit myself to traditional written media: books, newspapers and magazines. Admittedly, the infrastructure of social media has had an enormous impact on accessing, producing and processing information (within) the public sphere. However, I would argue that it is still predominantly traditional media that instill the discussions taking place on social media. Still, to cope with the lacuna in my analysis with regards to online produced content, I do include digital platforms, provided that these platforms have a fixed board of editors, publish frequently and have a 'serious' tone. With a serious tone I mean that the published content mainly serves to inform, or that opinions are legitimized in a logical and coherent manner. By including these platforms, only the reception and discussion of these articles on social media are omitted from the final analysis.

Because I focus on traditional media within the public domain, I have little to no issues of access. Data collection was done through snowball sampling. I started out with searching for 'cultuurmarxisme' on the websites of *Trouw*, *De Volkskrant*, *VrijNederland*, *NRC*, *De Telegraaf*, *ThePostOnline*, *Joop*, *Het Parool*, *Elsevier Weekblad*, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, *OneWorld*, *Algemeen Dagblad*, *Delpher* and *Vrij Links*. From these results I found references to books and other articles written about the subject, which I would then also include in my collection. This

led to a total of 163 articles and three books. I decided to read at least three articles per platform to get a grasp on political position and arguments. In the end I read 69 articles and three books, which gave me a solid understanding of different positionalities and opinions and how they are legitimized, namely through rationality.

After reading the material, I focused specifically on the role of concepts of rationality and knowledge within public debate. For each of the articles I read I made annotations in Zotero in which I would write down the various arguments, definitions, and historical and academic contexts put forward by the authors. I labeled the arguments as well. This means that I could sort my articles on their labels, for example searching for 'freedom of speech' would give me a result of articles in which this is discussed. In addition to that, I made note of articles the authors referred to. This way I could see the relationality and interaction in the discourse. After reading and processing, I analyzed the implications and consequences of this discussion for the imagination of the Dutch public sphere. Finally, I reflected on this analysis by relating it to the theories of Habermas and Mouffe.

Of course, there are analytical limitations. As a white woman, I might not be able to comprehend or pick up on underlying codes the same way a white male would, but the opposite is also true: I may be more equipped to notice forms of oppression a white man would not. At the same time, however, my position in whiteness may also create blind spots for racist themes within the debate. In short, my own subject-positions determine my analysis. Subsequently, the analysis will not be an encompassing narrative, and much more can and must be said about it. Nevertheless it is important to start thinking critically about Dutch public discourse and to create a starting point for that. In addition to that, I am aware of the irony inherent in this research. Am I not contributing to the discussion of cultural marxism myself this way? However, with the chosen focus I am not forced into taking a certain position with regards to cultural marxism. As stated before, not cultural marxism, but the Dutch public sphere is my object of research. I analyze the Dutch public sphere through the discussion of cultural marxism. This way I hope to add something new to the way society and academia think about the public sphere and its issues.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Imagining the Dutch liberal public sphere

In Habermas' imagination of the liberal public sphere people should be able to form well-informed opinions and discuss these with others. Opinions are conceived as valid when they are well-reasoned and based on facts. One effect of this ideal is that it leads to a constant struggle and negotiation about what 'good facts' and 'knowledge' entail, as one's positionality and accessibility to the public sphere depend on the validity of their arguments. In other words, Habermas' public sphere is essentially characterized by a 'power struggle', in Foucauldian terms. To Foucault, discourses contain internal disciplinary rules (Foucault, 1971). They enforce prohibitions: distinctions between what we do and do not talk about, between who does and does not get to talk, and between 'good' and 'bad' discourse. In other words, discourses authorize, categorize, and demarcate knowledge. The public debate on cultural marxism in the Netherlands is also characterized by a negotiation and antagonization between contrasting discourses. In this section I will first look at the discussion of cultural marxism and what this demonstrates about the way the Dutch public sphere is imagined and defined. In order to make this visible, I look at the relationality between different actors discussing the subject.

*De Groene Amsterdammer* wrote a genealogy on the notion of cultural marxism in 2017 (Korving & Tielbeke, 2017). According to the authors, the debate about cultural marxism had at that point moved from obscure blogs to mainstream media. In it, they refer to *The Dialectical Imagination* (1973) from Martin Jay and a documentary that was made about him by a critic of cultural marxism. Besides providing a historical analysis, the authors also reflect on the contribution of the concept of cultural marxism to the public sphere in relation to the essay by Martin Jay:

“As if we are faced with an enrichment to the public debate, instead of a harmful conspiracy theory that doesn't hold water. (...) The point is that these kind of factual refutations have little effect on conspiracy thinkers. (...) 'We are wound up in some kind of a parallel universe in which normal rules of evidence and probability are deterred', Martin Jay already wrote in his essay. The essential characteristic of critics of cultural marxism, the thing connecting and distinguishing them as a group, is that they are

suffering from paranoid delusions that leave them insusceptible to arguments” (Korving & Tielbeke, 2017).

The authors declare that cultural marxism does not constitute an enrichment of the public sphere, and they also explain why. Instead of focusing on the contents of the conspiracy and what they entail, emphasis is put here on the validity of the theory: ‘normal rules of evidence and probability no longer apply,’ and ‘these people are no longer susceptible to arguments’, they argue.

One vocal critic of cultural marxism, Sid Lukkassen, wrote a response to this article in The Post Online. Lukkassen has a PhD in philosophy and writes about the subject of cultural marxism a lot. Lukkassen is regularly praised by party leader of Forum voor Democratie Thierry Baudet, which provides him with a substantial audience. Lukkassen writes the following in response to *De Groene Amsterdammer*:

“Whoever reads the article in *De Groene* will see the same symptoms they accuse their opponents of. (...) Today cultural scientists feel threatened by political philosophers who, through the theme of cultural marxism, find an opening to their domain. Cultural scientists try to close this opening by framing cultural marxism as a conspiracy” (Lukkassen, 2017).

This interaction between Lukkassen and the authors of *De Groene Amsterdammer* shows two things. First, it lays bare the struggle about factual knowledge that is embedded in Habermas’ imagination of the public sphere. Both parties accuse the other either implicitly or explicitly of conspiracy thinking or, in other words, of irrationality. Second, and as a consequence, this interaction illustrates that there is a pre-existing consensus about the role of rationality within the public sphere. The discussion whether the theme of cultural marxism holds any water is tested according to the principles of rationality and factuality. In other words, cultural marxism is discussed in terms of its potential: the issue *could have been* open to discussion if the people addressing it had based themselves on factual knowledge.

This has two consequences. First: the serious analysis of the theory in *De Groene Amsterdammer* already validates the position of the critics of cultural marxism within the public

sphere. Second and subsequently, judging it on rules of validity provides the critics of cultural marxism with an occasion to respond to it, debunk certain claims and strengthen their case according to these rules. This may in turn convince more people of the theory. This interaction thus illustrates the negotiation and consolidation of the critics of cultural marxism within the public sphere. This is further exemplified by another piece of Lukkassen, which is more recent. In this article he responds to the claims that the existence of cultural marxism can not be empirically proven (my italics):

“This is exactly the issue because *access to the data* and *access to the public eye of reason* are at stake in this *existential conflict*. It is the strategy of leftists to frame everything that does not fit their worldview as ‘anecdotal’, while at the same time *gatekeeping the institutions where quantitative research takes place*. After they frame evidence as ‘anecdotal’, the preachers of these facts are formulated as marginal figures that do not deserve a platform with any magnitude” (Lukkassen, 2020b).

Several parts of this citation, marked by the parts in italics, stand out as particularly relevant here. First, he calls the debate about cultural marxism an ‘existential struggle’, which means this struggle is fundamental to ‘our’ being. In the case of the critics, this ‘our’ is narrowly defined as white culture, as this is seen as the thing at stake. He also makes clear what it is that is fundamental to this being: access to data and the public eye of reason, because these are at stake in this struggle. This once again confirms the support for the Habermasian imagination of the liberal public sphere in which facts and rationality are seen to be of the greatest value. In Lukkassen’s argument, ontology and epistemology are connected: the existential conflict is tied with the battle for what is considered to be acceptable knowledge. According to him, the left holds the hegemonic power to determine what facts are, because they hold the keys to quantitative research. Critics of cultural marxism do not have access to scientific methods. In other words, the left has the hegemony of power to declare everything that “does not fit their world view” as “anecdotal”, as their opponents are not represented in the process of knowledge making. This problem of ‘access’ is regularly addressed in other writings of Lukkassen and other critics as well (Baudet, 2013; Bergsma, 2018; Cliteur & Jansen, 2018; Lukkassen, 2019, 2020a). Ironically, this line of reasoning is in line with Gramscian analyses of ideology and power, while

Gramsci is also seen as the founding father of cultural marxism. This irony is nowhere addressed in the analyzed material. Instead, Gramsci is only referred to as a founding father of cultural marxism, theories about hegemonies of power are appropriated and allegations of following Gramscian ways of thinking are deflected (Lukkassen, 2019).

With the emphasis on empirical and rational knowledge, critics of cultural marxism are not judged on the moral implications of their ideology, but on validity of the arguments. As a consequence, these critics can argue that their ideas would be true if they had access to scientific methods. Another illustrating example of the is a debate that took place between (former) parliamentary member for GroenLinks party Zihni Özdil and the same Sid Lukkassen. The following citation is from an article written by Zihni Özdil himself, in a response to him being called a ‘alt-right apologist’ for engaging in this debate (my italics):

“During a hearing in de Tweede Kamer about diversity in science, I had a heated discussion with right-wing pundit Sid Lukkassen. Lukkassen wants to “ideologically parcel out” scientific funds, to break the, in his eyes, “leftist dominance”. I went on about his plan because *it was unclear*. How was this supposed to go concretely with a course like fiscal law, I asked. He didn’t answer and responded *with increasingly woolly stories* about the “benefits of colonialism” (Özdil, 2019).

With language indicating that the ideas were unclear, and his stories woolly-headed, the ideas of cultural marxism are again judged and debunked on their practicability, not on the moral implication of having to ideologically cleanse Dutch scientific institutions to get rid of cultural marxist influences. This suggests that, had the ideas been clear and implementable, they would be seriously considered. This again provides the critics of cultural marxism an opportunity to ‘improve’ their ideas further, according to the laws of rational debate, until they are ready to be implemented.

The tendency to see rationality and factuality as the main criterion for debate is an underlying theme I encountered in the majority of the articles I read, which were all related to either the subject of cultural marxism or related to ideas about how to behave within the public sphere (Februari, 2017; Hertzberger, 2020; Meeus, 2017; NRC, 2017; Özdil, 2020; Trouw, 2019).

The focus on rationality and validity allows for an imagination of a public sphere in which everyone is expected to engage in any discussion provided that an opinion is rational. This allows

an opening for critics of cultural marxism who can plead for their case according to these rules. At the same time, it delineates the public sphere. Anyone refusing or obstructing rational debate are seen as a (potential) threat to democracy, while often also reaffirming the importance of rational arguments. This becomes clear from the responses to activists calling critics of cultural marxism fascists. In an article called “Demoniseer Baudet niet, maar weerleg zijn ideeën zo exact mogelijk” it is argued that Thierry Baudet, who is a critic of cultural marxism, should not be called a fascist (Giesen, 2019). The reason for this is that he does not fit the historical characteristics of fascists. To Giesen, the word ‘fascist’ is no longer convincing because it’s been used too much and has diverted from its ‘original meaning’. Although he acknowledges the fact that Baudet is attacking independent, democratic institutions, for him this is not a sufficient reason to call Baudet fascist. Instead, Baudet should be challenged by arguments:

“They ought to be exact, lay bare Baudet’s boreal intolerance, explain exactly why his attacks on independent institutions such as universities, media and the arts are harmful. With this they have to prevent normalization of these ideas. These ideas are dangerous as is. It’s unnecessary to have Baudet wear a brown shirt” (Giesen, 2019).

In other words, violent ideas should be countered by rational ideas. As he argues later in the article, excluding critics from cultural marxism by calling them ‘fascists’, would supposedly only ‘create an apocalyptic perspective in which our humanist values and traditions of tolerance are threatened’ (Giesen, 2019). This tradition of tolerance is used here to refer to the tolerance for different political opinions, a quality that is implied some people are currently lacking by calling Baudet a fascist.

Tolerance is a recurring theme in the claim on rationality. In both Habermas’ and Mouffe’s public sphere, tolerance is required in order to function, as it is otherwise impossible to have a debate about different opinions. This notion of tolerance is also reflected in Giesen: anyone not willing to engage in a certain debate is portrayed as intolerant and potentially harmful. The accusation of intolerance is a recurring theme in many of the consulted articles (C. de Jong, 2019; Holman, 2018; Pré, 2017; Visscher, 2017). One example of this can be found on *Vrij Links*, a ‘liberal leftist’ platform. Coen De Jong writes:

“Together, the antimodern left and the antimodern right form a two-headed dragon threatening modern thinking. Science and reason are suspect – because ‘biased’. Truth only exists in the fanatic convictions of the own group” (C. de Jong, 2019).

In this quote, rationality and tolerance are connected, and are imagined as important values for the public sphere. According to the author, both the left and the right are lacking the quality to consider opinions that are different from their own, thus threatening modern (Enlightenment) thinking, which is here synonymous for rational thinking.

Thus, anyone obstructing the possibility of rational debate is considered a threat to the functioning of the public sphere. This becomes especially clear in the responses to activist actions against Thierry Baudet. When his door was graffitied by activists, the main reaction was anger because activists had failed to respect the freedom of speech (tolerance) and rational reasoning (rationality). Political reporter of *De Volkskrant* Raoul du Pré wrote: “ ‘Do not bestow Baudet and his cronies any rest!’, the activists wrote in their declaration. That is pure intimidation by people that apparently no longer believe in the power of arguments. They are the ones that do not deserve any rest until they are penalized” (Pré, 2017).

Similarly, *NRC*'s Tom-Jan Meeus wrote: “Activists that really want to counter Baudet, can just start with arguments” (Meeus, 2017). Here, ‘countering’ refers to performing rationality through debate, thus reinforcing the idea of a liberal public sphere in which problems can be solved through talking and thinking critically. The other means of ‘countering,’ such as activism, are subsequently excluded. This is also apparent in the reaction from Nynke de Jong in *Algemeen Dagblad*, who states that those forms of activism only ‘help’ the opponent, providing another reason why this struggle should take place in a rational liberal public sphere: “They only help Baudet and his supporters, who now have another example of how cruel and aggressive leftist activists can be” (N. de Jong, 2017).

As a way of concluding this section, I will summarize what the issue of cultural marxism has unveiled about the imagination of the liberal public sphere in the Netherlands. First and foremost, I established that there is an interaction about cultural marxism between various media outlets with varying political signatures. This interaction is characterized by certain rules and values that are imagined as key conditions for participating in the public sphere. These rules are factuality and rationality. The theme of cultural marxism is subjected to these demands, which means that the theory is judged on the factual/rational potential, and not on its moral



implications. This provides the critics of cultural marxism with an opportunity to come up with a response that does adhere to these rules of rationality, for example by claiming that the critics do not have access to the methods of creating empirical knowledge, which in turn strengthens their case that cultural marxism does in fact exist and is preventing the circulation of factual knowledge. Moreover, the rational debate is valued so highly that anyone refusing or obstructing it is considered a threat to the ideal of the public sphere, regardless of political position. In other words, anyone that does not agree with liberal ideas of rational problem solving is seen as 'violent'. Public responses to activists make clear that (rationally) arguing for the dismantling of democratic institutions is valued higher than (violently) protesting against it. Within this configuration of the public sphere, leftist activists protecting their rights are equally violent as fascists trying to take away these rights.

So far I have only focused on the imagination of the liberal public sphere that currently exists within the Netherlands. I uncovered the underlying rules by analyzing the discussion of cultural marxism and reflected on what this enables. In the next section I will go into this even deeper by reflecting on who gets to make a claim on rationality in the first place.

#### **4.2 What does the claim on rationality do?**

A universal claim on rationality as a condition to have your opinions and stories considered within the liberal public sphere, necessarily excludes irrationality. This aspect is analyzed in depth by Chantal Mouffe, who criticizes the antagonism and solutionism that resulted from this claim. However, the question Mouffe does not address in her analysis is: who is allowed to make a claim on rationality, or who has access to the public sphere to begin with? In the end this comes down to the question of which bodies are accepted within the public sphere and which ones aren't, as the people that cannot make a claim on rationality are excluded. In other words, what does the discussion of cultural marxism say about who has agency in the process of imagining and defining the Dutch public sphere? This is fundamental for understanding the public sphere and why certain issues are addressed whereas others are silenced. In short, in the second part of this section the analysis moves away from cultural marxism to look at configurations of the public sphere and rationality and what these mean for inclusivity. These configurations can be summarized by whiteness. This will (indirectly) explain how the current public sphere reinforces discussions of cultural marxism that maintain whiteness.

#### 4.2.1 Performing the public sphere

Universities are considered institutions aimed at the production of valid knowledge. As a consequence, the university is perceived as a materialization of the ideal public sphere, where everyone should be allowed to speak freely to encourage critical thinking (Korteweg, 2020). Student association Machiavelli for instance organized an event on the University of Amsterdam to discuss political diversity. It wanted to ‘have the heated debate about political diversity in an academic and constructive way’ (Erdogan, 2020). Invited, among others, were Paul Cliteur and Zihni Özdil. Paul Cliteur is a professor of jurisprudence and philosophy. Besides that, he is a senate member for *Forum voor Democratie*. He co-authored a book called *Cultuurmarxisme*, in which the (alleged) manifestations of cultural marxism are analyzed and deconstructed from political, academic and social perspectives (Cliteur & Jansen, 2018), in which cultural marxism is discussed from social and political perspectives. Cliteur is known for wanting to radically reform Dutch democratic and scientific institutions to break with the leftist hegemony. In addition to that, Cliteur thinks that white people are being replaced by migrants. Both ideas stem from the idea of an encompassing cultural marxist elite aiming to destroy the west. In response to the replacement theory, political scientist Armen Hakhverdian commented the following during the event hosted by Machiavelli:

“A politician from Forum voor Democratie like him, that points to the dangers that the original population of the Netherlands is being replaced by people like me [Hakhverdian is born in Iran, red.]. Still we discuss with him today, and am I on the same poster for this gathering” (Erdogan, 2020).

From this citation it does not necessarily become clear if Hakhverdian is happy with this particular situation, but of relevance here is that he is invited to speak on the same stage where people are arguing against ‘people like him’. I will come back to this comment later to analyze it in more detail later. First I want to address a similar occurrence that happened one year before this event.

Like the university, debate centre De Balie attempts to embody the ideal of the rational liberal public sphere. In *De Volkskrant* current director Yoeri Albrecht is described as ‘being

driven by the idea that the open debate, where people feel free to say what they think, is what keeps society together' (Bahara, 2019). Goal of De Balie is thus to unite the left and the right in debate and have open, rational discussions about issues to evoke critical thinking. Considering this is what keeps society together according to Albrecht, a lot is at stake if this debate cannot be held. Bringing this ideal into practice has, however, led to several controversies. One in particular is illustrative of the thing Hakhverdian addressed.

In 2019 Egyptian-American feminist Mona Eltahawy was invited to speak at De Balie to talk about her 'radical feminist activism' (Bahara, 2019). However, leftist activists from the Netherlands notified her that a few months prior to her scheduled visit, a debate had taken place at the same location. During this event, curated by Paul Cliteur, the deportation of Muslims was openly discussed as a necessary measure to decrease the amount of Muslims in the Netherlands, in order to prevent Muslims from 'taking over'. As a result, Eltahawy canceled her visit to De Balie, declaring that "only white people can play the game of 'free debate and discuss-all-ideas'. I am not white. This is not a theoretical affair to me" (Bahara, 2019).

As argued in the previous section, the emphasis on rational debate expects people to talk with anyone about anything. Refusal of having such a debate leads to the accusation of being intolerant towards people with different political views. In the examples of Hakhverdian and Eltahawy, this means having to share a (meta)physical stage with people that put your presence, or even your life, at issue. Hakhverdian and Eltahawy are both aware of their conditional presence within the western public sphere: They are invited to discuss the legitimacy of their own existence within it.

When Eltahawy comments on the fact that 'it is not a theoretical affair' to her, she means that the issue of cultural marxism and the 'rational' discussion thereof is only possible among a privileged group of people sharing a common ground. The people sharing this common ground are never the victims of the realm of possibilities this discussion enables, such as deportation or (political) violence. This common ground is what I analyze here as whiteness, and Eltahawy states this explicitly. With 'whiteness' I refer to the sociological category in which people inhabiting whiteness shape and reproduce dominant norms in western society and derive privileges from this, whereas non-white bodies are seen as 'others' and are exempted from these privileges. (Ahmed, 2004)

As demonstrated by the examples of Hahkverdian and Eltahawy, the claim of tolerant and rational debate is defined, embodied and delineated by whiteness. This is also exemplified by the call to tolerance, that, among others, Giesen made. When Giesen argued that calling Baudet a fascist would create an apocalyptic perspective in which ‘our humanist values and traditions of tolerance are threatened’, he referred to the tolerating of different political opinions, not the extent to which someone is tolerant of non-white people. This becomes clear when he states in the same article: ‘immigration is paired with problems and we should allow an open debate about those issues’ (Giesen, 2019). This implies that it is not a threat to tolerance when the presence of non-white people (migrants) in Dutch society is put at stake, but it is considered a threat to tolerance when one critiques this practice. Stating this differently, it means that an appeal to tolerance within the rational public sphere is also embodied and configured in whiteness.

#### *4.2.2 The exclusionist configuration of rationality*

To go even further, people of color are often excluded from making a claim on rationality. This is not to say that non-white people are irrational, but that they cannot make the same claim to rationality white people do unless they adhere to the rules of whiteness. In *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, Denise Ferreira da Silva argues that the current emphasis on rationality and liberty and a striving towards ‘truth finding’ came from the Enlightenment. This period of scientific progress coincided with a period of imperialism and colonialism. Colonial projects were often legitimized through this discourse of rationality. To some extent this configuration is reflected in analyses of orientalism, which deconstructs the dynamics of dividing between the western ‘self’ and the orient ‘other.’ McLeod gives an overview of tropes used in orientalist discourse: ‘The other’ was often equated to being uncivilized, stuck in time, irrational and part of nature (McLeod, 2000). The western ‘self’ was concurrently presented as the harbinger of progress, rationality and civilization. This fueled the idea of a ‘white man’s burden,’ the presumed necessity to bring enlightenment to ‘the other’ through imperialist politics (McLeod, 2000). Silva adds to this analysis that the configuration of the rational self in western thought is inherently exclusionist and racist. Not only to the outside world, but also with regards to the infrastructures within a state. She argues that the idea of a rational, ‘transparent I’ both legitimized and constructed liberal politics and scientific positivism, which are the values that the western public sphere is

still trying to uphold. However, to Silva this configuration would always lead to the obliteration of 'others':

“(…) the physical attributes of Indians, blacks, and Asian immigrants became, as the text of race relations captures, signifiers of threatening but affectable consciousnesses that were either irrelevant (Indians and blacks), or would certainly perish, as U.S. (European/white) Americans fulfilled their historical destiny, that is, the building of a social configuration governed by universality and freedom (as individual self - determination)”(Silva, 2007, p. 202).

In her book, Silva shows how white Anglo-Saxon Americans became the embodiment of individual self-determination and universal rationality. As a consequence, the claim on rationality has always been inaccessible to non-white people. Moreover, this claim on rationality was possible precisely because of the racial segregation of whiteness and blackness that equaled whiteness to rationality. Patricia Hill Collins for example writes about how people of color have long been excluded from the process of knowledge making:

“Black women have long produced knowledge claims that contested those advanced by elite White men. But because Black women have been denied positions of authority, they often relied on alternative knowledge validation processes to generate competing knowledge claims. As a consequence, academic disciplines typically rejected such claims. Moreover, any credentials controlled by White male academicians could then be denied to Black women who used alternative standards on the grounds that Black women’s work did not constitute credible research” (Collins, 2008, p. 254).

In short, people of color are not only subjected to racist discourse within the white liberal public sphere, they are also prevented from accessing it and contesting these claims. As Collins explains the experiences of black people are framed as emotional or anecdotal, in other words unfounded and irrational.

What this means is that white people do not only have the privilege to discuss certain issues within the public sphere, they also constructed and preserve the exclusionist dynamics

that provided them with this privilege in the first place. In short, whiteness determines what is discussed within the public sphere and on what terms. Only those that adhere to the terms are included in this public sphere. Therefore, it is often argued that the subaltern cannot actually speak (Spivak, 2010). The subaltern can only speak if they use the language that is approved and recognized by the dominant culture, which is a language of white western superiority (Maggio, 2007). What this means for the issue of cultural marxism is that only in a public sphere dominated by whiteness the issue can be brought up. Such a narrative can only exist in a context in which non-white people have always been seen as a threat. In a way, the critics of cultural marxism are just saying ‘the quiet part out loud’ when they express a fear to lose the cultural hegemony.

Instead of reflecting on the limitations and exclusions inherent in the rational liberal public sphere, the people bringing up these limitations are attacked by the same mechanics of rationality.. In the case of De Balie, Albrecht ‘fell victim to’ identity politics: “Supporters of identity politics judge opinions not on their merits, but on the sexual or ethnic background of the person saying it. De Balie is a victim of this too, Albrecht thinks” (Bahara, 2019). This quote shows that claims on rationality are used to shield Albrecht from critical introspection. Through this, attention centers back to the white subject and the effects they experience from racism, instead of focusing on the actual victims of racism and the shortcomings of the public sphere to combat racism.

The claim on rationality also shield white people from acknowledging the violent potential of certain issues, like cultural marxism. Instead, the cloak of rationality actually allows for a denial of the severity and dangers of this ideology. Generally speaking, the belief in rationality provides a very optimistic view on human behavior. It allows for a firm believe that in the end common sense will triumph. For example, when European elections were lost by populists, historian Han van der Horst exclaimed that ‘common sense (or ratio) had triumphed’ (Han van der Horst, 2019). There are at least two implications to such statements. First, that ‘common sense’ apparently always coincides with the neoliberal status quo. And second it denies anyone supporting racist or populist ideologies a ‘common sense’.

Consequently, when racist ‘incidents’ take place, these are presented as exceptions to the norm. When Thierry Baudet talks to members of the American alt-right party, talks about cultural marxism or shares videos from neonazi groups (Tonies, 2020), people affiliated with Forum voor

Democratie are asked to distance themselves from him, because no one in his right mind could support such actions (Louwerens, 2020; Meeus, 2018). This thought often goes hand in hand with a kind of wishful thinking that the electorate will stop voting for someone when that person is being explicitly racist (Louwerens, 2019).

Instead of acknowledging that overt racism is a reason for support, the electorate is seen as naive. Racism is seen as something irrational, something that can be overcome through education. As long as humans possess the skill of rational reasoning, 'we' as society do not have a lot to fear as long as 'we' keep presenting factual truths. As a consequence, people incapable of changing their racist views and those resorting to violence are seen as socially deviant. Lone wolves, exceptions to the rule. Often they are declared crazy or psychotic, or paranoid, as in the first example in *De Groene Amsterdammer*. By declaring someone crazy, his opinions can be disregarded and critical self reflection on the breeding grounds for overt racism can be avoided.

The claim on rationality then also functions as a way of sustaining plausible deniability. When violent racist incidents take place as a result from discussing, validating and normalizing ideas about cultural marxism within the public sphere, the majority of the people will distance themselves from the violence. Within a public sphere based on rationality, it is seldom acknowledged that the discussion of a certain subject is more than just an exchange of hypothetical ideas. The emotional and mobilizing effects of such an exchange are disregarded.

Recent example of the potential violence that cultural marxism enables was provided on May 9th 2020. Private correspondence from Lukkassen leaked to the media. In this correspondence Lukkassen openly fantasizes about resorting to violence in order to "free up some spaces" within western institutions ("FvD-ideoloog droomt van geweld tegen andersdenkenden," 2020). In the same article, screenshots are provided from an earlier moment. Here, Lukkassen predicts (and glorifies) extreme violence to protect western society from corrupting influences of feminism and/or Islam.

However, the responses to this news showed no sign of critical self-reflection about what caused this 'radicalization'. The possibility that violence is a rational and logical step for someone who intrinsically believes to be under threat, was not even considered. Nor the realization that the theory of cultural marxism is an excess of white supremacist systemic structures carefully constructed by the west.

In sum, after having analyzed the rules of the public sphere, I analyzed who gets to make up these rules. As argued, the liberal public sphere is demarcated by whiteness, and the universal claim on rationality is construed in such a way that people that do not inhabit whiteness cannot appeal to it without agreeing to their own oppression. This is the context that provides the breeding ground for issues like cultural marxism in which whiteness is reinforced. Instead of taking responsibility for this, (violent) racism is denied on the same claim on rationality that co-constructed it.



## 5. Conclusion

In this thesis I analyzed how the Dutch liberal public sphere is imagined and (re)constructed by and through the discussion of cultural marxism. Habermas imagines the liberal public sphere as a place where well-informed, rational debate could take place about any subject. Mouffe demonstrates that this ideal has been incorporated in western liberalism, creating antagonist tensions between the participants of the public sphere as they have to prove that their arguments are reasonable. This focus on rationality is also visible in the debate about cultural marxism. I established first of all that there is a negotiation about the meaning of cultural marxism between various media outlets with varying political signatures. This negotiation follows the rules of rationality and factuality. The theory of cultural marxism is judged on the factual and rational potential, and not on its moral implications. This allows for critics of cultural marxism to come up with a response that adheres to these rules of rationality, consolidating their position in the public sphere in which they put the public sphere at stake. Moreover, I have sought to demonstrate that the ideal of reason is valued so highly that anyone refusing or obstructing it is considered a threat to the ideal of the public sphere, regardless of political position.

Neither Habermas or Mouffe addresses the question of who is allowed to make a claim on rationality in the first place. This is fundamental for understanding the liberal public sphere and why certain issues such as cultural marxism are addressed, whereas others are silenced. Ideas on liberalism and rationalism were configured simultaneously. When looking at these ideas in detail, it becomes clear that they are characterized and configured by whiteness. The universal claim on rationality is even construed in such a way that non-white people cannot appeal to it without agreeing to their own oppression, thus making the public sphere to some extent inaccessible to them. Within this context of a white public sphere, ideas such as cultural marxism can circulate. Believing that western society is threatened by external and internal 'others', which is the main argument put forward by critics of cultural marxism, is not that alien when one considers the historical contexts of a liberal system that has always and continues to treat non-white people as potential threats. In a way, the articulation of cultural marxism is thus a matter of 'saying the quiet part out loud'. However, instead of acknowledging and reflecting on the structures and configurations enabling exclusionism, the claim on rationality allows liberals to distance themselves from overt racism and violent incidents by declaring them irrational.

Although she is critical of antagonism within the public sphere, Mouffe does not denounce liberalism. Instead, she proposes a democratic system based on the consensus of accepting liberty and equality as its fundamental principles. However, as I have shown through the analysis of the discussion of cultural marxism, liberalism will always provide the setting in which antagonistic discussions can take place. Her model is insensitive to the processes responsible for creating exclusionist antagonistic public spheres in the first place, and as a result it does not offer a satisfying solution to these challenges. In other words, although her critiques on liberalism are very valid, the proposed alternative by Mouffe is still inadequate. Therefore, Fraser and other critics are right when claiming the “inclusive” liberal public sphere is necessarily exclusionist and inadequate for currently existing democracy. In order to make the public sphere truly inclusive to all, we first of all need to reconsider the claim on rationality, and non-white methods of knowledge production as outlined in the critique of Collins need to be acknowledged as valid. Third, opinions should not merely be judged on their factuality but on the (implicit) moral consequences they convey. Until this happens, it is, as Fraser argues, necessary for subaltern counter publics to exist, to provide safe spaces for people ordinarily facing exclusion.

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## CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

### INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website ([http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page\\_id=17](http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17)). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

### PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title:	Saying the quiet part out loud: analyzing rationality and whiteness in the Dutch public sphere through the discussion of cultural marxism
Name, email of student:	Romy van Dijk, <a href="mailto:contact@romyvandijk.nl">contact@romyvandijk.nl</a>
Name, email of supervisor:	Willem Schinkel, <a href="mailto:schinkel@essb.eur.nl">schinkel@essb.eur.nl</a>
Start date and duration:	2019-2020

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES** - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?  
(e.g. internship organization)

## PART II: TYPE OF RESEARCH STUDY

Please indicate the type of research study by circling the appropriate answer:

1. Research involving human participants. YES - **NO**  
If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research? YES - NO  
*Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).*
2. Field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants. YES - **NO**
3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary data that has been anonymized by someone else). YES - **NO**

## PART III: PARTICIPANTS

**(Complete this section only if your study involves human participants)**

Where will you collect your data?

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*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

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*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

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*Note: indicate for separate data sources.*

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? YES - NO
2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? YES - NO
3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? YES - NO
4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? YES - NO  
*Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to*



*think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).*

5. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants? YES - NO
6. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning mental or physical health, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)? YES - NO
7. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? YES - NO
8. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? YES - NO
9. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? YES - NO
10. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? YES - NO

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

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What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

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Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

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*Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.*

#### Part IV: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Zotero database on my server, for the duration of my research.

*Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.*

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Me

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

I work in an encrypted cloud, so, continuously. I will also save my data to a local hard drive weekly, to be on the safe side.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

n/a

*Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.*

#### PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Romy van Dijk

Name (EUR) supervisor: Willem Schinkel

Date: 14 maart 2020

Date:

