



## Mobilizing opposition towards Muslim immigrants: National identification and the representation of national history

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This research, conducted in the Netherlands, investigates whether people who do not feel strongly committed to their national in-group (i.e., lower identifiers) can be mobilized against expressive rights of Muslim immigrants when specific historical representations of the nation are made salient. Three experimental studies were conducted to examine whether a national identity presented as rooted in Christianity results in comparable levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights for lower and higher identifiers. Results in all three studies show that higher identifiers were more likely to oppose Muslim rights than lower identifiers when a tolerant or neutral historical national identity was salient. Yet, no differences in levels of opposition between lower and higher identifiers were observed in the Christian condition. These findings underline the importance of historical representations of the nation to understand the relationship between national identification and opposition to ethnic out-groups.

It is five minutes to twelve. If we carry on like this, the continuing Islamisation will sooner or later result in the end of western civilization and the [Jewish-Christian] Dutch culture as we know it. . . . I make a personal appeal to the Prime Minister on behalf of many Dutch people. Stop the Islamisation of the Netherlands . . . Do not allow any new mosques. Close the Islamic schools. Prohibit the burqa. Prohibit the Koran . . . Take your responsibility. Stop the Islamisation. Enough is enough, Mister Balkenende, enough is enough. (*Dutch Parliamentary Debate*, 6 September 2007).

This quote is from Geert Wilders, the political leader of the Dutch far-right Party for Freedom (PVV). According to Wilders, the problems of Dutch multicultural society can be mainly attributed to Islam, which is why his focal political standpoint concerns the 'Islamisation of the Netherlands'. He holds a fiercely negative position on Islam, which he states, is a backward and fascist religion. He has called the prophet Mohammed a barbarian, compared the Koran to Hitler's 'Mein Kampf', has asked for a legal ban of

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this 'fascist book', and has proposed, in parliament, a special tax for wearing a headscarf because 'the polluter pays'.

There are two notable issues about this quote and the PVV. First, Wilders argues that Islam seriously threatens the Judeo-Christian roots of Dutch society and culture. Increasing numbers of Islamic schools, mosques, veiled women, and other visible signs of Islam would undermine the traditional Dutch way of life (Sleegers, 2007). Consequently, Wilders has argued for including the phrase 'the Christian tradition' as defining the nation, in the Dutch constitution. There are similar developments in other countries (Judt, 2005). According to Zolberg and Woon (1999), the focus on Islam in political debates in Europe is related to the fact that the European identity, despite national variations, remains deeply embedded in the Christian tradition in relation to which Muslim immigrants constitute a visible 'other' and Islam a 'bright boundary' (Alba, 2005). Furthermore, research has shown that Christianity is more salient to national identity in European countries with larger Muslim populations (Kunovich, 2006). Likewise, in the USA, the Christian roots and nature of American identity would make Muslims an 'indigestible' minority (Huntington, 2004, p. 188).

The second remarkable issue about Wilders is that, despite his, what some would call, racist views, he is quite successful in mobilizing public support. The PVV was established in early 2006, and gained nine of the 150 parliamentary seats in the national elections of November 2006. In January 2010, the PVV had become the top-scoring party in two leading opinion polls. According to these polls, the party would win around 30 seats in the next national elections, which would make it the largest party in the Netherlands. How is it possible that this party gains so much electoral support?

From a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it can be argued that especially those individuals who strongly identify with their national in-group are likely to show negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants. In the case of Wilders, however, it seems that people who are normally not very concerned about their national identity are also willing to respond to circumstances that are defined as undermining the traditional national way of life. In social psychological terms, this means that not only higher national identifiers, but also lower identifiers, are mobilized against Muslim immigrants.

We will test this idea in three experimental studies, in which opposition of the national majority to rights and opportunities for Muslims to publicly express and confirm their identity is examined in relation to historical representations of the Dutch national identity. The main prediction is that lower identifiers will show comparable levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights to that of higher identifiers, when Dutch identity is defined as rooted in Christianity.

### **Historical continuity**

Temporal and historical narratives are largely ignored in social psychology (see Condor, 1996, 2006; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Spears, 2008), but they provide a sense of collective continuity that is central in national self-understandings (see Sani, 2008). The importance of historical imagery is emphasized in theoretical accounts of nationhood that define the nation as a community that moves together through time (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1990).

Continuity of national identity is not self-evident but constructed, for example, by political elites who try to mobilize the public. Reicher and Hopkins (2001) argue and show that national history is contested between different politicians because historical continuity is an important source of authority (Reicher, 2008). National history is the

story of the creation of an in-group and serves an important function in mobilizing support, for example, for public policies regarding cultural diversity (e.g., Liu, Wilson, McClure, & Higgins, 1999; Sibley, Liu, Duckitt, & Khan, 2008). Although historical continuity refers to the past, the political usage of it is oriented to the future. In the quote above, Wilders defines a particular historical continuity for dismissing a future direction that would imply a rupture with the past, by stating that the continuing 'Islamisation' would mean the end of the Jewish-Christian 'Dutch culture as we know it'.

Research has shown that people tend to pursue collective identities that satisfy a need for self-continuity (Sani, 2008; Vignoles, Regalia, Manzi, Golledge, & Scabini, 2006). This means that people are likely to perceive their national in-group as an entity that endures across time and space (Sani, 2008). A sense of continuity is maintained, for example, by constructing a narrative account of the enduring and essential nature of one's nation. The structure of a historical narrative 'invites those in the present to see themselves as participants in an ongoing drama' (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001, p. 150). Historical continuity provides a sense of timelessness and, in general, people are more likely to invest in a national identity that is defined as continuous (Sani, Bowe, & Herrera, 2008). Therefore, developments that cause a rupture with the national past are likely to be perceived as a threat to the continuity of the national identity. Perceptions of collective continuity threat can develop as a cause of changes that are seen as going against the historically defining features of the nation (Iyer, Jetten, & Tsivrikos, 2008; Sindic & Reicher, 2009). As evident in Wilder's quote, Islam can be presented as threatening the Christian continuity of the Dutch nation. Thus, it can be expected that a relatively large part of the public will express opposition towards Muslim expressive rights when Dutch identity is defined as rooted in Christianity.

### **National identification**

Research within the social identity tradition has shown that, compared to lower identifiers, those with higher levels of in-group identification are more likely to be concerned about their group, especially when the position and value of the group identity is at stake (see Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006). Lower identifiers, on the other hand, are found to psychologically dissociate themselves from their in-group in cases of intergroup conflict, thereby dividing rather than uniting the group (e.g., Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997). However, lower identifiers may be brought 'on board' when conflict is associated with threats to the historical continuity of the in-group.

There are some studies that have shown that not only higher identifiers, but also lower identifiers, can be mobilized against out-groups (e.g., Fosh, 1993). For instance, in a study on the willingness to participate in industrial protest, Veenstra and Haslam (2000) found that in a situation of intergroup conflict lower identifiers were less willing to participate in collective activities. Yet, these participants showed a marked increase in willingness to protect their in-group when the out-group (government) was additionally construed as threatening the welfare of in-group members (union). Moreover, in the context of New Zealand, Sibley *et al.* (2008, Study 3) used extracts adapted from political speeches to experimentally manipulate negation (vs. recognition) of the historical basis of claims for reparation for past injustices suffered by the Maoris. A comparison was made between liberal and conservative voters, and the former have, in general, lower national identification than the latter. It was found that the liberal voters expressed lower levels of opposition towards pro-bicultural policy in the control and historical recognition

condition. However, in the historical negation condition they showed increased levels of opposition, comparable to those of conservative voters. Furthermore, in a representative survey in the Netherlands, Sniderman and Hagendoorn (2007) found that lower national identifiers were equally supportive of immigration restrictions as higher identifiers when their national identity was made salient. This means that 'bringing considerations of collective identity to the fore enlarges the coalition opposed to immigration - above and beyond those already predisposed to oppose it' (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007, p. 120).

We live in a world of nations where most citizens care about their country's national identity and culture, although not on a continuous basis and not necessarily in the form of patriotic or nationalist sentiments. As argued by Billig (1995), nationalism is an endemic condition that is indicated on a daily basis in the lives of its citizenry and deeply ingrained in contemporary consciousness. National solidarity is likely at times of an (inter)national crisis or when a concern about the country's traditional way of life becomes salient. This situation might be perceived by many nationals, also lower identifiers, as necessitating solidarity-based action. Hence, most members of the national community should be willing to respond to circumstances that are defined as undermining the historical continuity of the nation. Islamic schools, mosques, veiled women, Islamic public holidays, and other visible signs of Islam are typically presented as being incompatible with a traditional Christian identity. Thus, the alleged threats that Muslims pose to the continuity of the traditional Dutch identity might also lead lower identifiers to recognize that some form of in-group protection is needed.

The three experimental studies presented here focus on the question whether the relationship between national identification and opposition towards Muslim expressive rights is moderated by different historical representations of the national category. The main prediction is that lower identifiers will express equal levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights as higher identifiers, when national identity is defined as rooted in Christianity.

## STUDY I

Study 1 was designed to examine whether the relationship between national identification and opposition towards Muslim expressive rights is moderated by the representation of national history. We expected a significant positive relationship in a control condition, but not in the context in which Dutch identity is presented as rooted in Christianity.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study was conducted in 2007 among 75 students at Utrecht University. Students participated on a voluntary basis and all of them were native Dutch. The sample consisted of 37.3% men and 62.7% women. The ages ranged between 17 and 28 years ( $M = 19.69$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ). Participants' religiosity was assessed with a five-point scale ranging from 'not religious at all' to 'very religious'. The sample was relatively non-religious ( $M = 2.11$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ).

### **Design and measures**

An experimental between-subjects design was used, in which participants were randomly presented with one of two passages about the Dutch historical identity. One passage emphasized that the Dutch identity is rooted in Christianity and that Christianity continues to define the national identity in present days (see Appendix). In the control version, the participants read an extract of comparable length that argued that water maintenance is a key aspect of Dutch history and identity (see Appendix). Participants were asked to underline the most important sentences of the text and to summarize the text in five words. Subsequently, they were presented with five statements on the importance of history for understanding the present.

Participants then completed a measure of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights. There were seven statements adopted from earlier work (Verkuyten, 2007; Verkuyten & Yildiz, 2009), and four sample items were 'the right to establish Islamic schools should always exist in the Netherlands', 'some Islamic holidays should become official Dutch holidays', 'Dutch TV should broadcast more programmes by and for Muslims', and 'in the Netherlands the wearing of a headscarf should not be forbidden'. Items were measured on scales ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 7 (agree strongly), and Cronbach's alpha was .78. The scores were recoded so that a higher score indicated stronger opposition to Muslim expressive rights.

National identification was subsequently assessed by asking the participants to respond to six items taken from previous studies in the Netherlands (see Verkuyten, 2005). The items were, 'My Dutch identity is an important part of my self', 'I feel a sense of commitment to the Dutch', 'I identify with the Netherlands', 'I am proud to be Dutch', 'being Dutch is a very important part of how I see myself', and 'I have a strong sense of belonging to the Dutch'. The items were measured on seven-point scales, and a higher score indicated stronger national identification. Cronbach's alpha for this six-item scale was .92.

## **Results and discussion**

### **Preliminary analyses**

The opposition towards Muslim rights was not significantly related to religiosity,  $F(1, 73) = 0.01$ ,  $p > .10$ , and there was no significant interaction effect between religiosity and experimental condition,  $F(1, 73) = 0.012$ ,  $p > .10$ .

The mean score of national identification was a little above the neutral mid-point of the scale ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ). National identification was measured after the experimental manipulation and we examined whether identification differed between the two conditions. This was not the case,  $t(73) = .16$ ,  $p > .10$ .

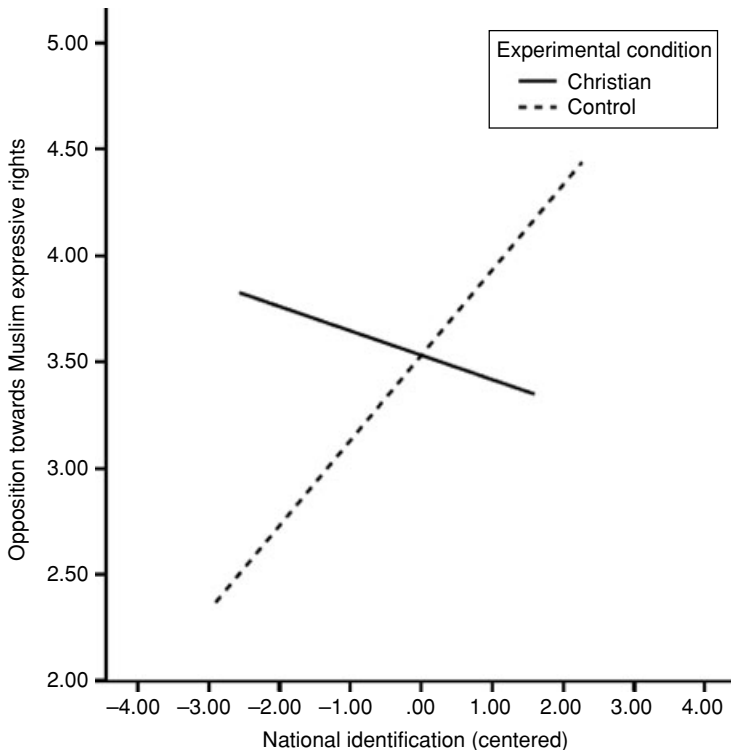
### **Opposition towards Muslim expressive rights**

On a seven-point scale, participants indicated a relatively moderate level of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ). The mean score was significantly below the neutral mid-point of the scale,  $t(74) = -4.22$ ,  $p < .001$ . We predicted that national identification would be positively related to opposition to expressive rights in the control condition, but not in the Christian condition. Considering the experimental design, differences in opposition were examined using the general linear model (GLM) univariate procedure. The GLM is a flexible generalization of

regression analysis and analysis of variance (Rutherford, 2001; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Between-subjects analyses were conducted, in which experimental condition was included as a categorical variable, and national identification a continuous centred variable. Significant interaction effects were further examined by testing the relationship between national identification and opposition to expressive rights within each of the two experimental conditions.

National identification was significantly related to the level of opposition, indicating that higher identifiers were more against Muslim expressive rights than lower identifiers,  $F(1, 74) = 3.27, p = .038$ . The main effect of condition was not significant,  $F(1, 74) = 0.00, p > .10$ , but the predicted interaction with identification was significant,  $F(1, 74) = 8.14, p = .003$ . This interaction is displayed in Figure 1. As expected, analyses within the experimental conditions indicated that the relationship between national identification and opposition to Muslim expressive rights was not significant in the Christian condition ( $\beta = -0.14, t = -0.84, p > .10$ ). However, in the control condition, this relationship was significant, with higher identifiers expressing more opposition than lower identifiers ( $\beta = 0.50, t = 3.39, p = .001$ ).

Thus, as expected, in the control condition, higher identifiers showed more opposition to Muslim expressive rights than lower identifiers, whereas in the Christian condition there was no significant difference in opposition between these groups. These results indicate that lower identifiers can be mobilized against Muslim immigrants when a Christian representation of their national identity is made salient.



**Figure 1.** Mean levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights as a function of national identification and experimental condition, Study 1.

## STUDY 2

We conducted a second study to examine whether these findings were reliable and could be generalized to another sample. Moreover, since no manipulation checks were included in Study 1, we could not assess whether participants interpreted the texts as intended. Therefore, these were included in Study 2. Furthermore, we included an additional experimental condition that emphasizes religious tolerance as historically defining the nation.

We have argued that lower identifiers can be mobilized against Muslim immigrants, because Muslims would be perceived as undermining the historical continuity of the nation. This interpretation implies that lower identifiers should be more positive towards Muslim expressive rights when Muslim practices are not considered a rupture with the national past. National identity can be defined in various ways and different narratives of history can be told. In the Netherlands, there is not only an emphasis on the Christian roots of the country, but also on humanist values and the long tradition of religious tolerance. An emphasis on the national tradition of tolerance implies that expressions of Islam are not threatening the historical continuity of the Dutch identity. Rather, the acceptance of Muslim expressive rights fits and confirms the defining historical narrative of religious tolerance. Thus, when the nation's history of religious tolerance is made salient, lower identifiers should be more supportive of Muslim expressive rights than higher identifiers. In contrast, in the Christian condition, we again expected no difference between higher and lower identifiers.

## Method

### *Participants*

This study was conducted in 2008 among 103 students of Utrecht University. The students participated on a voluntary basis and all participants were native Dutch. The sample consisted of 18.4% men and 81.6% women. The participants were between 19 and 46 years old ( $M = 22.33$ ,  $SD = 3.91$ ).

### *Design and measures*

An experimental between-subjects design was used in which 'tolerance' was added as a third condition. The experimental manipulations were induced in exactly the same way as in Study 1, and the order of the questionnaire was also similar. In the tolerant condition, participants were presented with a passage of comparable length that emphasized religious tolerance as the central aspect of the Dutch history and identity (see Appendix).

Opposition towards Muslim expressive rights ( $\alpha = .73$ ) and national identification ( $\alpha = .90$ ) were measured with the same questions as in Study 1. In addition, to assess whether participants perceived the framing manipulations as intended, they were asked (at the end of the questionnaire) to indicate their level of agreement with two statements (seven-point scales) about Dutch history, namely 'The Netherlands is originally a Christian country', and 'in the Netherlands there has always been room for various religions'.

## Results and discussion

### Preliminary analyses

The main effect of condition on the manipulation checks was significant,  $F(2, 75) = 3.68, p = .003$ . Participants in the Christian condition were more likely to agree with the statement that the Netherlands is originally a Christian country ( $M = 5.53, SD = 0.26$ ), than in the tolerant condition ( $M = 4.66, SD = 0.25$ ),  $F(1, 66) = 7.17, t = 2.68, p = .005$ , and the control condition ( $M = 4.61, SD = 0.21$ ),  $F(1, 67) = 7.04, t = 2.65, p = .005$ . Participants in the tolerant and control condition did not differ in their agreement with this proposition,  $F(1, 70) = 0.015, t = 0.12, p > .10$ . Further, participants in the tolerant condition were more likely to agree with the statement that the Netherlands has always been open to various religions ( $M = 4.94, SD = 0.21$ ), compared to the Christian ( $M = 4.31, SD = 0.28$ ),  $F(1, 66) = 2.69, t = 1.64, p = .053$ , and the control condition ( $M = 4.00, SD = 0.26$ ),  $F(1, 70) = 7.04, t = 2.45, p = .009$ .

The mean score of national identification was similar to Study 1, and a little above the neutral mid-point of the scale ( $M = 4.43, SD = 1.20$ ). The experimental condition had no effect on participants' level of national identification,  $F(2, 102) = 1.71, p > .05$ .

### Opposition towards Muslim expressive rights

Similar to Study 1, participants indicated relatively low opposition towards Muslim expressive rights ( $M = 3.31, SD = 0.85$ ). The mean score was significantly below the neutral mid-point of the scale,  $t(102) = -8.25, p < .001$ .

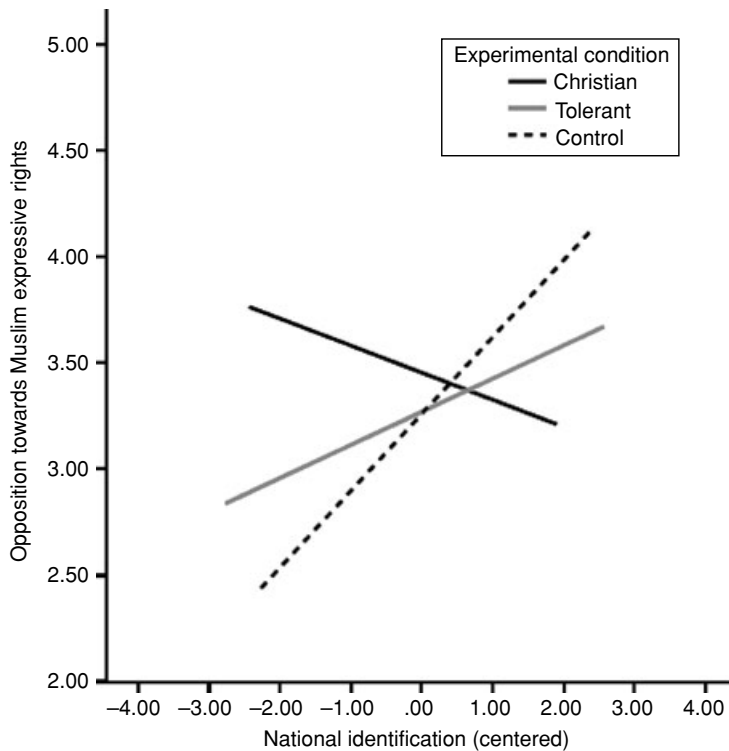
As in Study 1, a two-way analysis of variance (GLM) was performed with experimental condition as a between-subjects factor and national identification as a centred continuous variable. The opposition to Muslim expressive rights served as the dependent variable. National identification was positively associated with opposition towards Muslim expressive rights,  $F(1, 102) = 3.11, p = .041$ . The main effect of experimental condition was not significant,  $F(2, 102) = 0.55, p > .10$ , but the predicted interaction with identification was significant,  $F(2, 102) = 3.04, p = .027$ . This interaction is displayed in Figure 2.

In agreement with Study 1, the within-condition analyses revealed that the relationship between national identification and opposition towards Muslim expressive rights was not significant in the Christian condition ( $\beta = -0.15, t = -0.85, p > .10$ ), whereas in the control condition, there was a significant difference between lower and higher identifiers ( $\beta = 0.44, t = 2.88, p = .004$ ). In addition, the relationship between national identification and opposition was marginally significant in the tolerant condition ( $\beta = 0.26, t = 1.54, p = .067$ ). In the tolerant and control condition, lower identifiers tended to show less opposition towards Muslims expressive rights than higher identifiers.

Thus, similar to Study 1, higher identifiers showed more opposition to Muslim rights than lower identifiers when a tolerant or neutral Dutch historical identity representation was made salient. However, lower identifiers expressed similar levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights as higher identifiers in the Christian condition.

It can also be noted that in contrast to previous social identity research (e.g., Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997; Terry & Hogg, 1996), higher identifiers were not more accepting of Muslim expressive rights when the history of religious tolerance was presented as defining the national in-group. This suggests that historical tolerance does not have a strong normative meaning for high identifiers. However, it is also possible that higher identifiers perceive Muslims themselves as being intolerant (for example, in





**Figure 2.** Mean levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights as a function of national identification and experimental condition, Study 2.

relation to gender issues and sexuality) and thereby as a threat to the liberal, tolerant tradition of the country (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007).

### STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 showed that a historical narrative that defines national identity as rooted in Christianity can trigger opposition towards Muslims among people who ordinarily do not view their national identity as being very important. The likely reason is that Islamic schools, mosques, Islamic public holidays, veiled women, and other public signs of Islam are seen as undermining the historical continuity of the nation. In Study 3, we examine this interpretation further by using an additional mixed condition.

In Studies 1 and 2, a one-sided image of the national history was presented. However, a nation's history can be told in many different ways and often there is a mixture of discourses. For example, debates on European and national identity tend to emphasize not only their Christian, but also their humanist roots. In Study 3, we included an experimental condition in which Dutch identity was presented as a debatable issue, whereby some people argue that it is rooted in Christianity whereas others claim that religious tolerance forms the historical essence of Dutch nationhood.

We reasoned that for lower identifiers Islam poses less of a threat to the collective continuity of their national identity, when not only the Christian but also the religious

tolerant aspects of their national history are introduced. Namely, when different, and contrasting, interpretations of their national past are made salient at the same time it is less clear what defines their national identity, and which aspects of this identity are continuous over time. Hence, it is also less apparent in this condition whether the increasing visibility of Islam would imply a rupture with the national past. Therefore, in this condition, we expected lower identifiers to show less resistance towards Muslim expressive rights than higher identifiers.

Another reason for including the mixed condition in Study 3 is that it could be argued that the opposition of lower identifiers in the Christian condition (Studies 1 and 2) is not so much due to the feeling that national continuity is undermined, but rather to the increased salience of the intergroup context (Christianity vs. Islam). By including the mixed condition, we can (partly) examine this possibility, because Christian aspects of Dutch national history are also, and firstly, made salient in this condition. When the salience of the intergroup context is driving the effect in the Christian condition, we would also expect a difference in levels of opposition between lower and higher identifiers in the mixed condition. Yet, when this mobilization effect only occurs within the Christian and not in the mixed condition, this would be more supportive of the collective continuity interpretation.

## Method

### Participants

This study was conducted in 2008 among 173 native Dutch high school pupils from a pre-university secondary education school in the city of Alkmaar. The students participated on a voluntary basis. The sample consisted of 53% men and 47% women. Ages ranged between 14 and 19 ( $M = 16.15$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ).

### Design and measures

A similar between-subjects design with the same measures as in Studies 1 and 2 was used. The tolerant condition was not examined, because in Study 2 no significant differences in opposition towards Muslim expressive rights were observed between the tolerant and the control condition. Thus, the focus was on a mixed condition, next to the Christian and control condition. The new passage emphasized that there is a debate on whether Dutch identity is rooted in Christianity or rather in humanism and religious tolerance (see Appendix). Opposition towards Muslim expressive rights was measured with the same items as in Studies 1 and 2, and Cronbach's alpha was .82. The alpha for national identification was .92.

## Results and discussion

### Preliminary analyses

Participants in the Christian condition were more likely to agree with the statement that the Netherlands originally is a Christian country, ( $M = 5.16$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ), than in the control condition ( $M = 4.37$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ),  $F(1, 114) = 7.54$ ,  $t = 2.75$ ,  $p = .004$ , and the mixed condition ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.66$ ),  $F(1, 114) = 8.25$ ,  $t = 2.87$ ,  $p = .003$ . Participants in the mixed and in the control condition did not differ in their agreement with this proposition,  $F(1, 113) = 0.003$ ,  $t = -0.055$ ,  $p > .10$ . Moreover, for the proposition that the Netherlands has always been open to various religions, responses

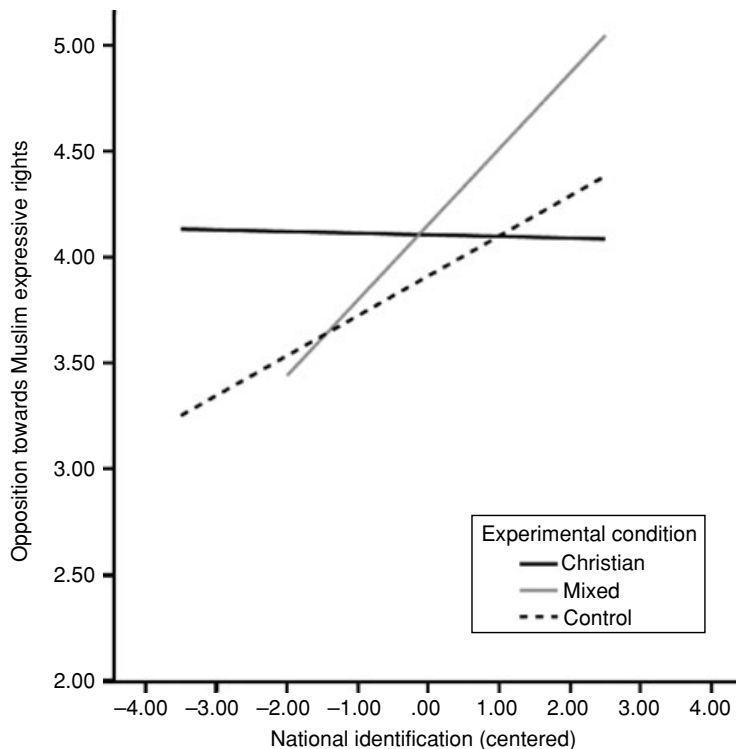
of participants in the mixed ( $M = 4.74$ ,  $SD = 1.56$ ), and in the control condition ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ), also did not differ,  $F(1, 113) = 0.945$ ,  $t = 0.97$ ,  $p > .10$ . The fact that participants in the mixed condition did not differ in their response to the Christian and tolerant manipulation questions, compared to the control condition, indicates that they interpreted the framing manipulation as intended.

The mean score for national identification was similar to Studies 1 and 2, and a little above the neutral mid-point of the scale ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ). Again, there was no significant effect of the experimental condition on national identification,  $F(2, 172) = 1.63$ ,  $p = .10$ .

### Opposition towards Muslim expressive rights

Participants were relatively neutral towards Muslim expressive rights ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ). The GLM analysis showed that higher levels of national identification were associated with more opposition,  $F(1, 172) = 7.24$ ,  $p = .004$ . The main effect of condition was not significant,  $F(2, 172) = 0.765$ ,  $p > .10$ . More importantly, and as predicted, the interaction between condition and national identification was significant,  $F(2, 172) = 2.50$ ,  $p = .043$ . This interaction is displayed in Figure 3.

In agreement with Studies 1 and 2, the within-condition analyses indicated that the relationship between national identification and opposition towards Muslim expressive rights was significant in the control condition ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $t = 1.74$ ,  $p = .044$ ), but not in the Christian condition ( $\beta = -0.01$ ,  $t = -0.07$ ,  $p > .10$ ). In addition, a significant effect of



**Figure 3.** Mean levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights as a function of national identification and experimental condition, Study 3.

national identification was found in the mixed condition ( $\beta = 0.36$ ,  $t = 2.88$ ,  $p = .003$ ). In this condition, lower identifiers expressed less opposition than higher identifiers.

We again found that lower identifiers enhanced their opposition towards Muslim expressive rights when Dutch national identity was presented as historically ingrained in Christianity. Moreover, the results confirmed that, compared to higher identifiers, lower identifiers expressed significantly less resistance in the mixed, and in the control condition. Hence, the equal resistance to Muslim rights of lower and higher identifiers was restricted to the condition in which a one-sided Christian historical representation of the Netherlands was provided.

This pattern of results suggests that it is not so much the salience of the intergroup context (Christianity vs. Islam) that drives the mobilizing effect in the Christian condition, but rather the threat to national continuity. In the debatable condition, the focus was also on the Christian roots of the Netherlands, but in this condition lower identifiers displayed lower levels of opposition to Muslim expressive rights than higher identifiers. In addition, compared to the Christian condition, participants in the debatable condition agreed less with the statement that the Netherlands is originally a Christian country. Thus, in this condition, Muslim expressive rights and practices are probably less threatening to the historical continuity of the nation.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Taken together, these three studies highlight the important role of representations of national history for intergroup relations. They illustrate that the association between national identification and opposition towards Muslim immigrants' expressive rights, is contingent on how national history is represented. The findings demonstrate that a historical narrative which emphasizes the Christian roots of the Netherlands can mobilize people without a strong commitment to their national identity to increase their opposition towards the right of Muslims to publicly confirm and express their identity.

Typically, in social psychology it is argued and shown that, compared to lower identifiers, higher identifiers tend to be more concerned about their in-group and react more negatively to outsiders that are perceived as threatening or undermining one's own way of life (see Riek *et al.*, 2006). Politics, however, is about enlarging the portion of the public in support of a particular viewpoint. Some politicians are trying to broaden the circle of opposition to immigrants above and beyond those who already identify strongly with the nation. This means that those who have a low commitment to their national identity should also be persuaded to become opposed to this particular issue (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007), and our findings show that historical narratives are useful for doing so. Expressions of Muslim identity, like veiled women, mosques, Islamic schools, and Islamic public holidays, are typically seen as undermining the Christian traditions of the nation (Sleegers, 2007). Furthermore, most citizens care about their country's national identity and culture, and also those who do not think that their national identity is important will probably have an underlying concern and sense of solidarity with their nation (Billig, 1995). In addition, historical narratives make all nationals part of an ongoing national drama (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). Thus, it is understandable that also lower identifiers are willing to respond to circumstances that are defined as undermining the continuity of the nation's traditional way of life.

A few other studies have also found that lower identifiers can be mobilized to assert the in-group, particularly when there is out-group threat (e.g., Fosh, 1993; Veenstra &

Haslam, 2000). Hence, bringing considerations of national continuity to the fore can enlarge the coalition opposed to immigration (see also Sibley *et al.*, 2008; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). However, the fact that lower identifiers are responsive to particular historical representations of their national identity may also sway them in an opposite direction. Lower identifiers, for example, may be persuaded to show higher acceptance of minority rights when past injustices towards these groups are made salient. Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, and Manstead (1998) found that, compared to higher identifiers, lower national identifiers are more likely to acknowledge the negative aspects of their own nation's history, and experience more feelings of group-based guilt about their collective past (see also Swim & Miller, 1999).

National history can be formulated in different ways and various traditions can be presented as self-defining. In the Netherlands, the emphasis is not only on Christianity, but also on the long liberal tradition of religious tolerance. Study 2 showed that lower identifiers displayed less opposition towards Muslim expressive rights than higher identifiers, when religious tolerance was presented as historically defining the nation. This indicates that lower identifiers ordinarily tend to think about the issue of Muslim immigrants from a more tolerant perspective. Furthermore, in Study 3, lower identifiers also expressed lower levels of opposition than higher identifiers, when the history of the nation was presented as a debatable issue. Thus, only when the Christian roots of the nation were emphasized lower identifiers expressed similar levels of opposition towards Muslim expressive rights as higher identifiers. In this condition, Muslim practices most clearly undermine the ongoing Christian nature of the nation.

However, we did not examine whether the representation of Dutch identity as rooted in Christianity actually threatened or undermined feelings of self-continuity. Some evidence for this comes from a recent survey study in which a positive association was found between the endorsement of the proposition that the historically Christian nature of the Netherlands should be maintained and the opposition towards Muslim expressive rights (Verkuyten & Poppe, 2009). This relationship was similar for higher and lower identifiers and was fully mediated by the perception that Muslim practices threaten the continuation of the national identity and culture. In addition, in several studies, Sani *et al.* (2008) have found that an in-group that is perceived as enduring, satisfies the need for self-continuity. However, future studies should examine these underlying psychological processes more closely. In doing so, the need for self-continuity can be investigated in relation to other identity motives, like existential meaning, group efficacy, and belongingness (see Sani, 2008). In addition, future studies could examine the moderating role of the level of religiosity more closely. In Study 1, no evidence for the role of religiosity was found, but it might be the case that those who explicitly define themselves as 'atheist' are not sensitive to the representation of the Christian roots of the nation. Furthermore, future studies could use other experimental procedures, like priming techniques, that reduce the likelihood of demand characteristics (see Bargh & Chartrand, 2000).

In conclusion, we have shown that the relationship between national identification and the opposition towards Muslim expressive rights depends on the way that the national history is defined. A national identity represented as rooted in Christianity leads to similar levels of opposition among higher and lower identifiers. This paper is one of the few that shows that not only those who identify strongly with the national in-group, but also those with low levels of commitment to their national identity, can be mobilized against immigrants (Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007). This might be related to the fact that questions on immigration and diversity are hotly debated in the Netherlands and

public opinion is quite fluid and thereby susceptible to change (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). The findings help us to understand why far-right politicians, who express negative views about immigrants, are sometimes able to attract a relatively broad audience, including those who normally do not find their national identity very important.

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## **Appendix**

The four cover stories about Dutch national history used in the three experiments.

### ***Christian condition***

Historians have convincingly shown that the Netherlands is originally a Christian country. Christian norms and values have been a central part of the Dutch identity since the Middle Ages. The Dutch have always been inspired by Christian traditions. Social scientists have shown that Christian norms and values are still very important, and can still be found everywhere in present Dutch society. Christian inheritance has shown to increase social cohesion and remains an important part of the Dutch identity.

### ***Control condition***

Historians have convincingly shown that the Netherlands knows a long tradition of 'battle' against nature. The Netherlands has been conquered on water and water maintenance has been a subject of concern for ages. As a cause of global warming, the attention for water maintenance will increase even more. The Netherlands is one of the most watery countries in the world and the battle against water is part of the traditional Dutch identity. The concern with 'water' can be found in Dutch society in many ways.

### ***Tolerant condition***

Historians have convincingly shown that in the Netherlands, people from different religions have been living together for a very long time. Three hundred years ago the Dutch were already in favour of freedom of religion. People coming from other countries chose the Dutch cities to build up a new life in their own way, with freedom of religion. The acceptance of other religions has always been a central aspect of the Netherlands. This acceptance and openness has shown to increase social cohesion and remains an important part of the Dutch identity.

### ***Mixed condition***

Some people say that the Netherlands is originally a Christian country. They claim Christian norms and values have been a central part of the Dutch identity since the Middle Ages. Christian inheritance is argued to cause social cohesion and is an important part of the Dutch identity. However, others disagree with this view and argue that the Netherlands is originally a country with different religions and various influences from all over the world. They point at tolerance for different religions and humanism as central parts of the Dutch identity.