

### Case 1

The following quote is taken for a book "Generous Betrayal. Politics of Culture in the New Europe", which is written by the Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan who works on issues of immigrants and refugees in Norway.

*As a culture expert – an anthropologist – I receive frequent calls from people who are dealing with immigrants and refugees. One type of questions is of this nature: "He has beaten his wife (or children), but he says it is his culture. What are we to do?" The callers are social workers. A different type of question comes from a lawyer who phones and says: "I have this client. He has beaten his wife (or murdered a man or something), but I think it's his culture... Would you please appear in court as an expert witness for the defence and say that?"*

Unni Wikan continues....

*And when I say I will not, this is not a matter of culture, the lawyer then proceeds: "But do you think we can find somebody else who will say this is his culture?" To which my answer is "Certainly!"*

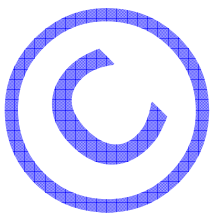
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### Discussion points

We have previously discussed culture and cultural differences. We will now ask you to discuss whether the concept of culture can explain violence (e.g. against women) or not, and if not which other factors can explain it.

If you have more time you can....

- Relate the discussion to similar cases where forced marriages, circumcision of women, or abuse of the social welfare system is excused with culture.
- Discuss whether explaining with culture can disempower people.



## Case 2

The following quote has been taken from Pim Fortuyn (a Dutch politician on the extreme right). An environmentalist has killed this politician because of his radical statements.

*The Netherlands is a multicultural country, and that is a fact. The problem we face is that of integration and then especially the Islamic culture. When we look at the difference in values and beliefs between our cultures, I see a gap that is hard to bridge. Look at the countries where Islam is the main religion; all non-democratic countries with a little lack of a clear and just justice system. And what about the separation of religion and politics there? But also when we look closer home we see the differences. How else come that eighty percent of the juvenile delinquents in our prisons are Moroccans and Turkish?*

*To start a truly multicultural society we first need to close our borders to the South and deal with the problems of integrating others in our society. Then we will have time to integrate them and make them understand that we have different norms and values here in the Dutch culture.*

A reply to this statement was to be expected and came one day later, from another politician. He said:

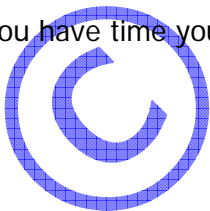
*It is true that there are gaps; it is true that we maybe should restrict immigration; it is true that there are mostly Moroccans and Turkish youngsters in our prisons, but can we also have a look at how many youngsters with the same origin we see at the universities? How often they are perceived as criminals? How often they are made jokes of, of a level that is beyond disgusting? There are two sides of the story, and mentioning one alone, is dangerous.*

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### Discussion points

We have previously discussed culture and cultural differences. We will now ask you to discuss whether the concept of culture can explain the lack of democracy in certain countries and delinquency of immigrant youngsters or not, and if not which other factors can explain it.

If you have time you can relate the discussion to the recent troubles in the suburbs of Paris.



### Case 3

The following case has been taken from a large Danish newspaper: Berlingske Tidende from November 2005. It is a comment written by a member of the parliament for the labor party (former social minister and minister of internal affairs).

*The theme Islam and terrorism has recently dominated the media. One big case has been the finding of a group of young Muslims in Denmark suspected of planning a terrorist attack....*

*Many voices have tried to explain violent and terrorist tendencies among some Muslims by saying that it is the fault of the Danish society... It is for instance claimed that it is not appropriate to see threats, violence and terrorism as cultural or ideological problems. The same tendency is found in broader discussions on integration, where it is often claimed that the problems are social and nothing has to do with culture.*

*This claim has no basis in reality... The fact is that terrorism arises out of problems in the Muslim countries themselves. Those who promote terrorism are convinced that Islam is above all other religions and cultures. They despise the Western world and its values. Therefore they feel powerless when the Muslim countries generally are economically and politically inferior. They do not want to face the fact that the Muslim countries have to go through a cultural change process, which enables them to develop modern societies.*

*Moreover cultural barriers often go together with social problems...When many immigrant women live isolated from the society it has to do with the female role in the cultures they come from, and when they want a spouse from home through an arranged marriage, it has to do with their culture.*

*The above tendency to blame the Danish society is contrasted by the Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali (Somali origin, declared non-Muslim, co-producer of the controversial movie "Submission" about the suppression of women in Islam, and currently member of the liberal party). Ayaan Hirsi Ali claims that we in the Western are underestimating how strong a barrier Islam and the culture in the Muslim countries are to the Western values (e.g. freedom of speech, human rights). Many politicians in The Netherlands do not think that the killing of Theo van Gogh (the moviemaker of "Submission") has anything to do with his Islamic background, even though he has declared in court that he is willing to cut the throat of anybody who offends Allah or his prophets.*

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### Discussion points

We have previously discussed culture and cultural differences. We will now ask you to discuss whether the concept of culture can explain terrorism and political killings, and if not which other factors can explain it.

Discuss furthermore the difference between explaining/understanding and accepting behavior and relate this to the case.

#### Case 4

The following case is a comment writing in a large Danish newspaper: Berlingske Tidende.

*There is a clear tendency in Danish journalism to describe different groups in society according to very different approaches.*

*Muslims or "immigrants" are typically described as members of a group, where others are described as individuals. A comparison between two cases, which have received quite some media coverage and which both show the worst sides of humans, can illustrate this; namely the killing of the Dutch movie-maker Theo van Gogh and the torture in the Iraqi prison Abu Ghraib.*

*Van Gogh's murderer was Muslim, and this is how he has been described in the Danish press. In two large newspaper he was called "extremist Moroccan Muslim and a "Moroccan who thought that van Gogh had offended Islam". In one article in another (left-wing) newspaper he was described a bit more nuanced: The murderer had previously been to prison, had been rehabilitated and got a job at a newspaper, but the conclusion is similar to other newspapers: He had started reading the Koran, intensively. And then he killed a man. The message from the Danish press is very clear: Mohammed Bouyeri became a murderer because he was a Muslim. Other aspects were simply not relevant to describe.*

*This simplified approach does not apply to other atrocities. When pictures of American prison guards in Iraq, torturing prisoners were published last year, the guards, Charles Graner and his previous girlfriend Lynndie England were described in detail. Graner had a past as a prison guard with quite some complaints about his behaviour, he was divorced because of wife battering. Lynndie grew up in a trailer at the end of an earth-track, and had had mental troubles as well as learning disabilities since she was a child. It can be assumed that Graner and England's social background is considered relevant for the understanding of their crimes. They were described as individuals.*

*The consequence is that you describe an individual's act as an expression of a group identity when it comes to Muslims but not to others. Mohammed Bouyeri's acts thus become a Muslim phenomenon, and then you have ascribed these negative tendencies to all Muslims.*

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#### Discussion points

We have previously discussed culture and cultural differences. We will now ask you to discuss whether the concept of culture can explain killings and torture, and if not which other factors can explain it.

If you have more time try to think of other examples, where immigrants' behavior is explained with their culture, when the same behavior is explained by other means, when it is shown by the majority.