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## A patch of green amid growing anti-multiculturalism

Published on : 27 September 2011 - 12:03pm | By [Jacqueline Nolan](#) (Photos - [Stadsdeel Noord, Amsterdam](#))

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**The Dutch summer holidays were just getting underway when Anders Breivik murdered 77 people in Norway. The gruesome details, and the killer's reference to a Dutch MP as a source of inspiration, seemed to form an apocalyptic cloud over the holiday atmosphere.**

**Anti-Muslim MP Geert Wilders, a staunch critic of multiculturalism, had warned of a "tsunami of alien power that increasingly dominates local culture".**

At local level, a district councillor offering a tacit pocket of resistance to anti-multiculturalism is Kees Diepeveen. He doesn't shout to be heard. "Dutch politics nowadays is polarised and tense. People use strong language at a level that just doesn't make sense."

Nor does he push for a spot in the media limelight. A dedicated Green Left politician, he cycles around North Amsterdam, gently manoeuvring his way into the hearts and minds of his voters in a largely mixed-race, low-income district.

"I try to instil in immigrants the importance of being proud both of their origins and of being a member of this society. This is a personal richness in one's life." A richness bequeathed to him in the Calvinist village of his own upbringing and which, Diepeveen argues, makes it easier to cross over any class or social barrier later in life.



Poverty is lack of opportunity: Diepeveen

### Poverty: lack of opportunity

His solemn voice livens up when he talks about a Weekend School, set up to give teenagers from deprived areas a chance to learn about subjects outside the standard curriculum - journalism, philosophy, visual arts - with a view to widening career choices.

"Poverty isn't just lack of income. It's mostly lack of opportunity. If you're not given this opportunity, then you enter a spiral - a bleak outlook and a fear of the future. And fear is enough to vote against the establishment."

In "North", as Diepeveen's part of the city is known as, 21.6 percent of the population voted for Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) in last June's national polls, compared to the Amsterdam average of 9.4 percent.

There's a clear divide between the neat rows of net-curtained ethnic Dutch streets and the blocks of flats lined with satellite dishes, the Moroccan and Turkish districts. Diepeveen reaches both sides, but hasn't brought them together.

His legislation on housing improvement, sports facilities, urban green spaces and energy schemes has left its mark on the whole community.

### Muslim women have double hurdle

To immigrant women's business initiatives, he has lent a generous ear "because, being Muslim and women, they have a double hurdle to cross over. The participation of Muslim women in

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society is crucial to its stability." At his 50th birthday party two years ago, many Muslim women arrived at the steps of the party venue laden with home-cooked dishes.



At a graduation ceremony for women

When it comes to being green, Diepeveen walks the talk. His family doesn't own a car, they've installed solar panels and the heating is never higher than 18 degrees. "There are blankets in the living room for the cold evenings," his English wife, Nicola, told me.

### Progressive left

But how left is Green Left? Wilders' Freedom Party has become synonymous with a 'far-right' tag. Yet – embodying a new definition of what constitutes far-right - it was Wilders' PVV that joined the Socialist Party in opposing the proposals to raise the retirement age to 67 and to send a new mission to Afghanistan for training local police.

Diepeveen pauses as we sit in his basement kitchen, situated on a centuries-old dyke full of charm and solar panels – with no immigrant neighbours. "On many social issues, Wilders is part of the conservative left, the politics of the past. Green Left represents a progressive left."



Building a green bicycle with secondary school pupils

### Revenge movement

In the public debate on Wilders' accountability in the Norway massacre, the word 'responsibility' seems to resound. With his Calvinist roots, Diepeveen understands its meaning. "My parents were active church members, but socially progressive at the same time, aware of their duty in society."

Leaning over to one side, as if pushed by the burden of that responsibility, he laments the turnaround from tolerance to polarisation in the past decade: "Wilders is not responsible for Breivik in a direct cause and effect way. But he's responsible for creating a climate of anxiety. Because he's dependent on it, he feeds it. The PVV is a revenge movement."

The professional future of Kees as a district councillor will be affected by that 'revenge'. The government – with backing from Wilders – has voted to abolish district councils in Amsterdam and Rotterdam.

Perhaps Diepeveen can cycle to The Hague and deliver a compassionate voice to counterbalance the current hardline climate of national politics.



Hope for the future in The Hague?

(jn/rk)

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## DISCUSSION

Anonymous

1 October 2011 - 12:08pm / Netherlands

[reply](#)

I'd like to echo the point made in another comment; it is indeed unfortunate that the district council's have been abolished in A'dam & Rotterdam. I am therefore glad to read that councilor Diepeveen stands committed to working for his cause, none the less. A politician like Diepeveen is needed in the Netherlands now, more than ever. Hopefully now more people will be informed of his message & mission and can stand behind Diepeveen's efforts.

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Frans Haeck

1 October 2011 - 7:14am / Nederland

[reply](#)

Kees,  
schitterend en inspirerend interview opp een geweldig mooi podium.  
Kameraad Frans GroenLinksAmsterdamNoord

GBR

29 September 2011 - 6:37am

[reply](#)

I don't trust politicians at all but people as Mr. Diepeveen unlike Mr. Wilders gives hope. Also I would like to reply to Mr. Peter NY: There is no first and third world, there is only one world. Our planet Earth.

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Peter NY

28 September 2011 - 7:21pm / USA

[reply](#)

Unfortunately the work done by Mr. Diepeveen is statistically meaningless. As shown by the CBS and CPB there is a critical mass of third world immigrants who will never catch up to the first world. Consequently this will create more and more tension and put pressure on the welfare state in the coming decades. Also, RNW has a tendency to always showcase the "underprivileged" but does not go on record to actually showcase the macroeconomic pressure put on European societies by immigrant communities. This is very unfortunate because instead of opening up the dialogue for meaningful solutions to real problems it just makes most native Dutch people feel ignored when it comes to their feeling of injustice and unequal treatment.



**JoopMul**

29 September 2011 - 3:17am / Australië

[reply](#)

Peter, I'm sure that you're aware that it's claimed that statistics can be represented to sometimes prove completely opposite points of view and it's good when statistics are used rather than "gut feelings", "spin" etc., to clarify a situation.

I wish you'd expressed it as pressure put on by the migration process (which has ALWAYS gone on), rather than writing "immigrant communities".

The term "Dutch community" is used here, in New south Wales, in Australia, too. But we're having such great trouble, as "Dutch-Australians" doing ANYTHING together. We're proud of the events we organise; the societies we've maintained, etc., but we're nothing like ONE community, with ONE voice, here.

The media then often urge "leaders" of communities to make things happen, like dialogue.

I do not understand the statement: "third world immigrants who will never catch up to the first world".

Seems to me that, here, in Australia, no matter where the immigrants came from, they (we) have caught up with the Australian way of life, or "standards", while some may have retained ethnic identity more than others.



**JoopMul**

28 September 2011 - 4:20pm

[reply](#)

So good to read about Kees Diepeveen's efforts after reading about those of Mr Wilders. I worry a little about the perceived need to "instil" pride in the immigrants origins.

(Quote: "I try to instil in immigrants the importance of being proud both of their origins and of being a member of this society. This is a personal richness in one's life.")

It's perfectly plain to me! I am proud of being a "Cheesehead" (born in Gouda). I shall never be a dinky-di 100% -"Skippy" (Australian) but would not want to live anywhere else. (Just a few visits - back - to Gouda suffices.) (12 years in the Netherlands. 55, so far, in Australia).

Apart from being a two-year-trained primary teacher, my other tertiary qualification is a Graduate Diploma in Educational Studies (Multicultural Education).

Of course, therefore, I believe in multiculturalism, unlike many other immigrants, from the Netherlands who believe(d) that they assimilated and became 100% Australian (Like the descendants of the migrants from Great Britain).

The 'labelling' in this report worries me a little, "green", "left", "far-right". It feels, to me a bit like putting guernseys on opposing teams.

" .....clear divide between the "NEAT" rows of net-curtained ethnic Dutch streets....."Moroccan and Turkish districts"..... I realise these descriptions are accurate but I remember being struck by how "dull" those streets seemed to me, when I returned to Gouda, on my first trip back. (Curtains open to show mirror images of the neighbours' lounge-rooms, with almost identical furniture.)

There is no easy solution and I admit that when I have been back to the Netherlands (five times) I have wanted it to be like when my parents took me to Australia.

But, like Willem, above, I too say, Hartelijk dank, Kees. Blijf er voor vechten!

Joop ("Ozcloggie")

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Anonymous

28 September 2011 - 10:43am

[reply](#)

Thanks RNW for giving visibility to the ones that bring hope, i am sure in NL there are much more people like him that deserve recognition for their silent but constant work

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Anonymous

28 September 2011 - 10:42am

[reply](#)

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**Awesome Ted**

28 September 2011 - 9:24am

[reply](#)

This guy is my hero.

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Emma

28 September 2011 - 12:52am / Netherlands

[reply](#)

A good article about a councillor who is obviously making a difference. The government's decision to abolish the district councils in Amsterdam and Rotterdam seems incredibly short sighted, certainly when it could mean the loss of a councillor like

Kees Diepeveen. I wish we could hear more about the work of councillors like Diepeveen instead of the constant scare mongering from politicians like the enormous self publicist Geert Wilders.

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Emma [reply](#)  
28 September 2011 - 12:52am / Netherlands  
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willem rabbeljee [reply](#)  
27 September 2011 - 8:21pm / Brazil  
Keep up the good work Kees. I deeply respect your mentality, energy and strong commitment.  
As a Dutchman, emigrated to Brazil, I know that racial tensions are everywhere, not only in the Netherlands. I have a strong confidence that Dutch humanist tradition will be able to face a too strong increase in racism, anti-multiculturalism and other evils. But then we will have to fight ignorance, which is the root of much intolerance and incomprehension .  
I'm happy therefore that persons like Kees are there, just to safeguard this tradition. And yes...de tranen springen me in de ogen als ik lees dat de wijkraden de prullemand ingaan. Diep triest.  
Thank you Kees. Keep on fighting.  
Willem

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Anonymous [reply](#)  
27 September 2011 - 6:59pm  
Anti-multiculturalism has always existed in the Netherlands; sometimes latent and dormant, but now more open and evident.

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