

Wilders and the Counter Movie

While the world is expecting Wilders' movie 'Fitna' any moment now, there is already a counter movie presented on Youtube.com and Mtnl.nl. The name is 'Tegenfilm', which means 'Counter Movie'. The movie is produced for the MTNL (Multicultural Television in the Netherlands). On their website they state about their movie that: 'The movie is seeking for the borders of freedom of expression and is attacking Wilders with his own weapons'. The makers of the movie are Ersin Kiris, a Dutch Muslim of Turkish origin, together with Vincent van der Lem, an atheist who is Dutch by origin.

In Venlo, the place where the politician Geert Wilders grew up as a child, the makers of the movie go in search of the young Wilders. They do this with the idea that there must have happened something in Geert's early youth so that he became an Islamophobic person later in his life. Additionally, Mtnl.nl argues that: "The counter movie' is the report of a travel along point of views of Wilders concerning the freedom of expression, democracy and Muslims." Unfortunately their movie is not available with English or Arabic subtitles, but the producers are working on this issue. We interviewed one of the makers of the movie: Vincent van der Lem.

IOL: What was your motivation to make the counter movie?

Van der Lem: *"Well, I was brainstorming with Ersin Kiris about new projects, and this idea to make a film arose. The polls in December 2007 showed that Rita Verdonk (also a rightwing politician) would receive 20 per cent of the Dutch votes if there would be elections, and Wilders 15 per cent. This meant 35 per cent in total. Meanwhile, there was also an 'Islam Debate' in the Dutch House of Commons, where Wilders presented his critique on Islam in the Netherlands. And again polls showed that his Islam critique was also shared by large groups of other party voters. Those factors led to the strong believe on our side that we could no longer stay silent and had to react, because we feared future changes in the democracy, which we both care so much about. Consequently, we thought that if Wilders can make a movie, then we can also make one with our point of views in the name of democracy/(of): about th threat of Wilders changing our democracy. Actually,I think by being that radical, Wilders puts himself in the same place as radical Islamists."*

IOL: Do you think that Muslims are withstanding sufficiently against Wilders?

Van der Lem: *“Muslims of course are withstanding more and more. But I also think we can solve our problems in the Netherlands all together, Muslims and non-Muslims. But it isn't only Muslims withstanding Wilders' points; there are also a lot of Dutch natives who disagree with him. People should understand that our democracy is strong enough and we can solve our own problems internally, through debate, without the unjust interference of Muslim countries.”*

IOL: Do you think that there is a need for more 'Muslim Media'?

Van der Lem: *“Not necessarily, there are already two Muslim broadcasters. But to have more Muslims on TV in general without their religion being the main reason for their appearance, would be good. This would show Dutch natives that Muslims are individuals and that you can't speak of 'the Muslim' in general. Everybody can have points of view about Islam and Muslims; it shouldn't be only the Muslim Media who is representing the Muslims.”*

IOL: What is your opinion about the media coverage of Muslims in the Netherlands?

Van der Lem: *“The media coverage sometimes presents one sided stories. The conflict in Israel and the coverage in Dutch media shows good examples.(je kunt je afvragen in hoeverre de eerste zin aansluit bij de vraag...) Also when Wilders claims something, it is being published directly, because it is news. But almost none of the journalists ask him or get the opportunity to ask him 'how' he wants to implement those ideas in the society. For instance Wilders' wish to eliminate the equality principle from our constitution is almost impossible to realize, due to the rules that are set for changing the constitution. Above all, the words that Wilders use, generalize: e.g. using the word 'street terrorists', while talking about Moroccan youngsters when actually he is referring to a small part of the Moroccan youngsters, who are a nuisance in the poor neighbourhoods. Media should more often construe his tactics. Another example is the word 'allochtoon' (word used for non-native Dutch citizens) that is being mixed up a lot with the word 'Muslims'. Some journalists stigmatise this way.”*

IOL: What do you advise the Muslims in the Netherlands when the movie of Wilders is launched?

Van der Lem: *“First of all, as mentioned before, ‘the Muslim’ does not exist. There are all kinds of Muslims. But I expect and can understand that there will be frustration among Muslims. Especially young people should prepare themselves for his film. They must not react to the provocation of Wilders. Because that is what his film is to me. I think Wilders hopes to see Muslims burning flags and young Muslim starting riots after his film appears, because this would partly prove his point, being: Muslims can’t cope with freedom of speech. Young people should prove him wrong.*

One could organize debates or other kind of meetings, but of course it is debatable how many young Muslims that are prepared to start riots you will reach at this point with such meetings. I would like to add that it is also inappropriate that Muslim countries think that Dutch Muslims cant handle their own issues and that they need help from Muslims abroad. If a film is discriminating or hateful, it will be forbidden but not in advance, because, and I’m glad, we don’t have a state censorship. This is an internal Dutch issue, and I think we should consider to organize a petition with the names of all the important Dutch Muslims in the Netherlands who are claiming that we can solve our own problems – we can handle Wilders no worry - in the Netherlands and that the rest of the Muslim countries shouldn’t interfere in Dutch matters.”.

IOL: Do you have plans for the future regarding this issue we discussed?

Van der Lem: *“We set up a website in order to let people meet each other who want to debate further about the Counter Movie. The name of the website is www.tegenfilm.hyves.nl. We are bearing in mind to more strongly counter act his political arguments in the media, because we are being criticized by some Dutch media that the film is good, but it doesn’t contain sufficient arguments against Wilders’ political ideas’.”*

You can watch the Counter Movie in Dutch:

http://www.mtnl.nl/read/tegenfilm_start?dostart=1