

**VIEW to the U transcribed**

**Season 6: Adventures in Podcasting; Episode #4**

**Professor Anna Korteweg**  
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[intro music fades in and out]

Anna Korteweg (AK): [sounding out the name] Korteweg

Carla DeMarco (CD): [sounding out the name] Korteweg

AK: It's 2002, and as I'm driving down Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley...

I'm Anna Korteweg and I'm a professor in the department of sociology.

...the four o'clock news comes on and NPR says, "Breaking news, the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn has been shot and killed in the parking lot of a TV studio nine days before the Dutch elections."

I pulled over because I was shocked. In that very moment, I was like, "Okay. I have been avoiding thinking about race, thinking about migration. I can't avoid it if I want to treat myself as a serious researcher, with an interest in citizenship."

[theme music fades in]

CD: Citizenship, stitches, and stories

Hello and welcome to VIEW to the U: An eye on UTM research. I'm Carla DeMarco at Uof T Mississauga. VIEW to the U is a monthly podcast that will feature UTM faculty members from a range of disciplines who will illuminate some of the inner workings of the science labs and enlighten the social sciences and humanities hubs at UTM.

CD: On this edition of *VIEW to the U*, my guest Anna Korteweg talks about the motivations behind her research in immigration integration, policy and practices. She also outlines the work she has done with her long-time collaborator from Humboldt University in Germany: Professor Gökçe Yurdakul - and thanks to Anna I received some coaching on name pronunciations, even with her own name, which I included at the outset, because we talked (offline) about the importance of correct pronunciation of names (or at the very least, making an attempt to correctly pronounce them).

Very much in keeping with this “Adventures in Research” season of the podcast, Anna has a couple of academic anecdotes to share, but she also talks about the influence and importance of stories people tell, as well as the life lessons to be learned from knitting.

[theme music fades out]

Anna Korteweg is a Professor in Sociology at U of T Mississauga. She earned her PhD in Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley in 2004.

Her research focuses on the political debates regarding the integration of Muslim immigrants at the intersections of gender, religion, ethnicity and national origin in Western Europe and Canada. She has analyzed debates surrounding the wearing of the headscarf, “honour-based” violence, and Sharia law.

Anna joined the faculty at UTM in 2004 and served as the Chair of UTM’s Department of Sociology from 2015-20.

AK: Broadly speaking, I look at what I call the politics of immigrant integration. I’m mainly focused on Europe. I’m of Dutch background. So, I build on that connection. I also look

at Canada.

When I say the politics of immigrant integration, what I mean is the way in which those people labeled immigrants do not become part of the societies in which they now live.

Politics there is both formal politics. So, what are the laws and regulations that allow people to move, that enable people to obtain permanent residency or citizenship? But also, the more emotional feeling side of that, where I want to know, do you feel like you belong?

Also, on the other side of that, is the people who think of a place as having always been their home. What is the impact on their sense of belonging, given changes in the composition of the population of the countries that they live in?

CD: I know from reading about some of your work that you talk about these paired comparisons. You sort of touched on that, but I was also curious about the paired comparisons within a country. So, a country like Canada, where people may be treated differently, could you talk a little bit about that?

AK: When I say that I study the politics of immigrant integration, what I look at a lot is the ways in which gender, race, ethnicity and religion interact and are given meaning in relationship to each other, i.e., an intersectional perspective.

To understand how these forces are at play, often, you see how something has worked by holding it up to a contrast. So, when you study gender, the easiest way would be to say, "Okay, I'll compare men to women," but we know that there's a lot of variation within groups of women. So, the other thing you can do is say, "Okay, let's compare Muslim women to non-Muslim women," which is something I would possibly do.

But then again, then you go, "Wait a minute, but Muslim women is not a monolithic category." So then, I compare what I call secular Muslim women to observant Muslim women, to get at the meanings of each of these categories.

That's a big thing that I do, but I don't stop there. I don't say, "Okay. We are now treating the headscarf as an object that identifies something almost akin to race."

AK: I say that, but I also say, "Okay, so what does that mean for policy? What does that mean for law? What does that mean for the way in which we regulate migration, the way which we regulate citizenship acquisition?"

I trace how things are given meaning in my research. So, what is the meaning of the headscarf? What is the meaning of being Muslim? What is the meaning of being a woman? What is the meaning of being a brown Muslim woman, a black Muslim woman? What is the meaning of being white? What is the meaning of being a white Feminist? What is the meaning of being a white middle class or upper middle-class feminist?

I also look at how that then influences the more formal politics. So, I do a lot of reading of parliamentary documents, parliamentary debates, to see how certain ideas about what it means to be a Muslim woman gets activated when people discuss, should we allow Canadian women to become citizens while wearing a niqab, for example?

And then within Canada, concretely, I've done some work on Quebec, implicitly comparing it to the rest of Canada. That was partially also a way for me to understand

more about what it means to be Canadian, since I'm an immigrant here myself. So, I kind of wanted to understand the dynamic of Canada and the rest of Canada, as a way to become more Canadian, I guess.

CD: When did you come to Canada?

AK: When I got the job at UofT! I was Dutch. I had moved to the United States in my early twenties, and then the vagaries of the academic labor market. I got an interview at UTM and got hired. I came in 2004.

CD: What led to your particular area of research? What led you to follow this path?

AK: I went to graduate school in 1995. I was very interested in feminist politics and gender. I was interested in the welfare state. Living in the United States, which has a very weak welfare state, coming from the Netherlands, which has a strong welfare state.

And then in '96, then President Bill Clinton signed the Welfare Reform Act,

Personal, Responsibility, Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

That effectively ended social assistance to single mothers and replaced it with a temporary aid program that basically encouraged women ... and I'm making quotation marks around that word, to obtain employment.

Surprisingly, at the same time, the Netherlands did something similar. So, also emphasizing the shift from supporting motherhood directly through state support, towards supporting mothers to become dependent upon the labor market.

I ended up studying that for my dissertation and focusing on the meaning of citizenship that gets communicated through these programs. So that shift of, we will support mothers to reproduce good citizens, towards we will support mothers being engaged in paid employment.

As I was doing that, I kind of looked a little bit out of the corner of my research eye, towards the debates that were unfolding in the Netherlands and also somewhat in the US, around multiculturalism and immigrants and so on.

AK: I just thought it was a really complicated ball of wax, that I didn't really want to poke at because I was like, I don't even know how to start thinking about it.

And then one day in 2002, I was very pregnant with my daughter, going to the hospital for a checkup. As I'm driving down Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, the four o'clock news comes on and NPR says, "Breaking news, the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn has been shot and killed in the parking lot of a TV studio nine days before the Dutch elections."

I pulled over because I was shocked. In that very moment, I was like, "Okay. I have been avoiding thinking about race, thinking about migration. I can't avoid it if I want to treat myself as a serious researcher, with an interest in citizenship."

So, I finished my dissertation and moved here to University of Toronto, met up with a then graduate student, Gökçe Yurdakul, who was studying citizenship of Turkish immigrants in Germany, and basically asked her, "Will you help me get oriented in this,

for me, new field of research?"

AK: Hired her as a research assistant, and then she came to me and said, "Would you like to write a paper with me on media discussions of honor killing in Dutch and German newspapers?"

That became an article that we wrote, that was published online in '08. And then in '09, that article kind of set us on a trajectory of investigating these intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and religion in the European migration context.

CD: And she's your longtime collaborator now. Right?

AK: Yeah. Gökçe and I have worked together. We kind of joke that we've developed a brain together. It's been really, really rewarding.

We wrote that article. Then, we wrote another article together with a prof at Berkeley, Irene Bloemraad, that was a review piece on immigration and citizenship. So, those are the two pieces.

We sort of thought, "Okay, that was nice." And then we got a phone call from UNRISD, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva.

They had read our honor killing piece and asked if we would write a report, expanding it to some more countries. So, we wrote a four country report for them, and then we sort of looked at each other and we're like, "Okay."

We decided to write the headscarf book. And then we thought, "Okay, we've done that." But then we had a couple article ideas, and we were invited for some talks.

It's like a long-term marriage, like an intellectual academic marriage. We'd do our own projects as well, but we just ... This year, because we had some stuff in drawers that we dusted off, we already have published three articles. So, I think we're now up to about 10 coauthored publications.

CD: I know your book, *The Headscarf Debates: Conflicts of National Belonging* came out in 2014. There seemed to be even more controversy and racial divides post-2016, for several reasons.

We don't really have to get into, but a lot of us acknowledge that there does seem to be something going on racially, globally. So, can you comment though, then, on how things have changed since that book came out?

AK: Gökçe and I, when we started working together, it's not just a book. It's also the work we've done on honor-based violence, work on the headscarf. We've done some work on Masculinity and violence.

We keep, in a way, naively thinking that what we're looking at is as bad as it gets and then it'll get better. And then we write something and then we're like, "Oh God, it got worse." Worse in the sense of the fractures are deepening. The conflicts over these issues are deepening.

AK: One of the things that we have been talking about, that we haven't written up yet, but we're currently designing a small research project to kind of track this because we're seeing something, but we don't have the evidence and data for it yet. The thing we're seeing is that when we wrote our book, headscarf-wearing women were largely positioned as victims. Right?

We looked at France, Germany, the Netherlands and Turkey. The headscarf was largely seen as something women adopted because they were forced to by their religion, by their men. It was a symbol of oppression. States and actors, civil society actors felt a need to intervene and get that headscarf off those women.

Since then, we increasingly see women who choose to wear a headscarf. So in a way, we've, together with a lot of other people, have been sort of successful in saying, "No, no, women choose this." These are deliberate choices, and they have a vast range of meanings for individual women who choose to wear that scarf.

AK: Now we see a tendency to portray women who choose to wear a headscarf as active agents, trying to undermine the values of the societies they live in.

So on the one hand, it's like, okay, women have moved up a step from a hapless victim, passive victim to active agent. But now they're seen, increasingly as threats to the values of a given society.

There's a lot of nuance that you need to put into that. It expresses itself in various ways, but that's sort of a general line that we're seeing, of this idea of the threat of different ways of embodying religion, embodying values for societies in Western Europe, North

America and so on.

CD: I mean, and this is very naive, probably of me to ask and probably ignorant also. But why do you think that it's getting worse though, or as you mentioned, it's deepening? Because we know that we have long-standing systemic problems, but why does it seem to be getting worse?

AK: No, no, no. It's not a naive question. It's a puzzle. I'm thinking of the images we saw yesterday on the Capitol, as a sort of aggressive articulation of a very fragile white masculinity.

When you look at politics, the give and take of politics, so if you have a strong welfare state, politicians will promise support for people. Whether it's healthcare, whether it's unemployment, whether it's good schools, they're resource driven.

With a global political economy that has diminished state control over economic forces, politicians had to find different stakes, different goods to deliver.

AK: They can't deliver financial resources, so they can deliver a story. "Your life has been made difficult because we have immigrants. Your freedom is under threat because of these people having these values. I will make it better."

So, in its own way, simplistic, but what is the give and take of politics? Politics is about

the distribution of scarce resources. When politicians have limited control over economic resources, but they can influence the story, then what's the stories we choose to tell about ourselves and how we live together? What can we do?

Well, we can start by telling the truths. That's something I'm really interested in. What are the stories we tell, based on the facts of life as we see them? How can we understand the world in a way that allows us, in my mind, the maximum openness to live your life, as you see fit, on the one hand and the maximum amount for others to do the same? That's what ultimately kind of motivates my research.

CD: You did mention stories and I love that. This season of the podcast, as I mentioned, is adventures in research, but I'm just wondering, what is your story? Something that sort of sticks out for you during the course of your research.

AK: There's so many, it's almost hard. One of the interviews I did, that really stuck with me, was an interview with ... He was, at the time, I want to say the second or third person in Geert Wilders Party For Freedom, the ultra-right anti-immigrant Dutch party that has been very successful for Dutch electoral politics.

AK: Geert Wilders, as people call him outside of the Netherlands, being a very outspoken anti-Islam politician. So, I went around and talked to each Dutch party and their proportional representation in the Netherlands.

There's usually about 12-13 parties in parliament. I talked to the immigration and integration portfolio holder of each party, in the summer of 2008. He was the guy for the Party for Freedom.

I'd never interviewed somebody that I knew I disagreed with that strongly. He knew I disagreed with him. It was really great to have this persona of the sociological researcher that allowed me to say, "Okay, explain to me, why should we not have immigration? Explain to me why your party is so anti-immigrant."

What I got from interviewing him was just hearing someone again, tell the story, narrate his life experience.

He had worked for the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Services. He had adjudicated refugee claims. He had been involved in granting residency, citizenship, et cetera.

He was firmly convinced that many people came to Netherlands because of a good, strong welfare state and the resources. Had no interest in becoming Dutch as he understood what being Dutch meant, though he could not articulate it.

AK: That narrative of scheming immigrants, I hadn't heard somebody so bluntly articulate that. It helped me kind of see how, if you start at point A, how you can go to point B and C and D and get to the place where Wilders and his colleagues say intensely racist things against Dutch citizens of Moroccan descent, for example, where Wilders got a whole

crowd to jeer that they should leave the country.

AK: Also, that this was someone who was smart. It's so easy to think, "Oh, these are dumb people." No, no. This was someone who was both smart and savvy. He knew exactly what he was doing in telling the story. He knew exactly how to trigger this sense of discomfort, unease, fear, and how to mobilize it for political gain.

So, that interview kind of set me up, I think, to better understand how people can come to have conversations with each other, to promote a worldview in which whiteness is under threat, masculinity is under threat.

My craft as a researcher, what I realized in that interview, was that I felt much more comfortable actually being a bit more confrontational. Because I was able to really question him, we got quite deep into his way of thinking and his understanding of politics and migration and so on.

CD: I know that a lot of people are impacted by the current COVID situation. So, I'm just wondering, how has your research ... You did mention a little bit about how you and your collaborator have to work separately, but-

AK: Thinking about this again, the way gender shapes the work we do, when I moved to Toronto in 2004, I had a two-year-old. And then two years later, I had another child.

AK: What that meant was, that the kind of ethnographic interview-based research I'd done for my dissertation was off the table. I always joke that I did what tenure track mothers in this kind of research do, as I turned to what was available online. So, I became much more focused on media research and so on.

So, in a way, the shift to working from home, I already use a lot of data that is publicly available online. So, that wasn't a big shift.

But what has shifted for me is actually two things, that have been honestly positive.

One is the meetings online. It's normalized, where before I might've had RA meetings with my RAs here in Toronto, and then Gokce, I would maybe talk to her afterwards.

Now, we all just meet online. We meet on Fridays. It's five for her. It's 11 for me. It's 10 in Winnipeg, where one of my RAs is. It's totally normalized that we do this.

The other thing is, a group of colleagues and I, small group, but it was like, do we want to try having an online writing group? So, we started an online writing group. First, we met three times a week over the summer. And then we went to five times a week during term, because we all had different schedules, so that most of us come three or four times.

For all of us, we've been so productive, including people with small children, because carving out an hour and a half every morning is possible even with smaller children.

It turns out that an hour and a half of focused work nets you a lot. Hence, my three articles. My colleagues, similarly, have put out papers that now are in our decisions. So, there is, in a weird way, more community building happening.

CD: I just wondered if there's something that you've been doing either ... I know you are a very prolific knitter, that you've been doing while we have been sort of silent. I know,

again, you're very busy, but are there books or movies or podcasts or something that you'd want to give a shout out to, that you've really been enjoying?

AK: For me, and it is somewhat idiosyncratic, a lot of my time is spent knitting and sewing. I'm loving that.

Anybody who wants to know about knitting can reach out to me. And increasingly, I know more about sewing too. But if you want to know a good starter pattern or the best book to get to learn how to knit or the best videos, or even if you want me to show you how to do a stitch, I could do that.

Yes. I was actually thinking, I should count how much I've knit because I think it's quite a bit, but I always knit a lot because I knit and read at the same time.

I would say Hot Docs in Toronto, they have gone online. So, if you're interested in sort of moving beyond Netflix and supporting a more local institution, if you become a member, you get some of the movies for free. Even if you don't become a member, for' about \$5 or so, you can stream their documentaries. I recommend that.

Yeah. And then one of my all-time favorite books of the last years is called *The Goblin Emperor*, which is in that genre of fantasy. I just think it's a really well done one. Again, it's very much sort of a fairy tale. Yeah. And then I started sewing more and more. So, I have a goal of making all my own clothes.

CD: That's amazing.

AK: I made my first jeans. That was really fun.

CD: That's very cool, but I'm thinking this might be the next thing that people start to run out of. Now, maybe people are going to turn to sewing and then you won't be able to find thread or something.

AK: Yes. Although, I tend to buy too much.

CD: You're well-stocked.

AK: Yeah. My knitting stash, I'm trying to knit from my stash. I don't know if you know about stash, but there's this saying that people have stashed beyond their lifetime, where you have more yarn than you can knit up in the years you have left.

CD: Okay.

AK: I think if I knit up all my yarn, I think I actually have about five, six years of yarn for knitting at my speed.

CD: That's amazing.

AK: Nah, maybe three, actually, come to think of it. But that would be about 30 sweaters and a lot of hats.

CD: Okay. How much would you say that you knit in a month's time? Would you say that you make at least a sweater and a hat a month?

AK: Depends a little bit on what I'm making. A basic sweater, like this cardigan, took four weeks, I would say. But then, I also knit a couple of hats while I was doing that and knit on a few other things.

AK: I think I knit about a sweater a month and then an assortment of hats, Knitwell hats. I'm a hat knitter. I love hats. They're very forgiving. They're bite-sized projects. I can knit a simple hat in an evening and a more complicated hat in two evenings. So, fun.

CD: Well, I'm a very rudimentary knitter. I can knit scarves and that's about it.

AK: No, that means that you can knit anything because you have the basics.

CD: Yeah.

AK: I also think there's something about knitting ... At some point, I started knitting very seriously, sort of a year into my chairship. Being chair is really hard, in many, many different ways, like organizationally, but also emotionally, interpersonally. It's really rewarding.

AK: But what knitting taught me was that you can make mistakes, some of which you can fix, some of which you can't. Sometimes you need to do it over. Sometimes you adjust. I have a wonderful yarn store. So, for a long time, I would go in basically once a week going, "What did I do wrong?"

AK: I would look over, now my friend's, the yarn shop owner's shoulder and see how she fixed it. And then I would learn how to fix it.

A lot of that practice of learning a skill, making mistakes, fixing some mistakes, not fixing ... Certain things, I'm just not as good at. So then, I pick patterns where that's not a necessary skill, something I need to knit.

I'm not a very even knitter because of how I knit. So, I don't knit patterns where it's really important, or I don't use ... This yarn here is a little bit an uneven yarn. It's perfect for me, because my uneven stitches and the uneven yarn sort of work together to make it a lovely fabric.

So, part of what I love about knitting and now sewing, which really translates into writing and teaching, is that it's skill and it's process. If you allow yourself to see it as a skill and through engagement with the process of making something you can improve upon, there's so much learning that can happen.

I now look back at cardigans that I wore, my first garments. I look at them now and I'm like, "Oh, terrible mistake there. They're horrible." But I love that I'd made them myself and proudly wore them.

I wouldn't wear them now, necessarily. Maybe I'll wear them again. That's also okay because I knit better now. But had I not allowed myself to wear that cardigan proudly, had I not allowed myself to enjoy that I crafted a garment, I would have probably stop knitting, but I wouldn't have allowed myself the experience of learning. Right?

CD: Oh, yeah. A hundred percent. The can be made for the research area as well.

AK: Yeah. Yeah. Like if we dropped a stitch, we're going to try and pick it up. This idea that we can make small mistakes and then you learn how to acknowledge them, and then you translate that to other parts of your life. The power of saying, "I made a mistake," and owning it and then working to fix it. Because you can't leave that drop stitch. Your whole garment will eventually unravel.

CD: Look at that. Life lessons from just stitches.

AK: Yeah. From drop stitches. Stephanie Pearl-McPhee has actually written books like this, where she talks about her knitting, the life lessons learned. She's very funny. It's a blog site called the "Yarn Harlot."

CD: Okay.

AK: This was fun.

CD: It's been so lovely being able to chat with you, but I just so appreciate the time.

AK: Yeah, no same here. This was great because normally I'm the interviewer. So, being on the other side was awesome and you're great.

CD: Well, thank you so much, Anna. It's really great.

AK: You're so welcome.

[theme music fades in]

CD: I would like to thank everyone for listening to today's show. I would especially like to thank my guest Professor Anna Korteweg from the Department of Sociology at UTM for being so generous with her time to tell me about her work and research stores, and inspiration! Thanks to her I have signed up for some HotDocs streaming and their podcast festival this month. And I am likely getting out the knitting needles again. Her book, viewing and knitting recommendations will be on our website as well as the SoundCloud page.

I would like to thank the Office of the Vice-Principal, Research for their support.

For any UTM researchers who have a story to tell and would like to be featured on the podcast, please get in touch with me. I would love to hear your story.

Also, if you can take the time to rate the podcast in iTunes, it helps others find the show and hear more from our great UTM researchers.

Lastly, and as always, thank you to Tim Terrific for his tunes and support.

Thank you!

[theme music fades out]