The relationship between anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands since 2000

An exploration of the link between anti-Islamic sentiment and right-wing national populism

Jansje Catharina-Tina Visscher
S2528509
Supervisor: dr. E.K. Wilson
Second supervisor: dr. J. Tarusarira
BA Religious Studies
Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies
University of Groningen
The relationship between anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands since 2000

An exploration of the link between anti-Islamic sentiment and right-wing national populism

Vollenhove/Groningen, Juli 1 2016

Contact:
Jansje Catharina-Tina Visscher
Doeveslag 47
8325 AH Vollenhove
The Netherlands
j.c.visscher@student.rug.nl
(+31) 623437175
Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful
# Table of contents

Table of contents 4

Introduction 5

Chapter 1: Theory 8
  - Anti-immigrant sentiment 8
  - Anti-Muslim sentiment 9
  - Populist ideology: right-wing national populism 12

Chapter 2: Historical- and social overview 18
  - History of populism in the Netherlands since 2000 18
    - Pim Fortuyn 18
    - Geert Wilders 21
  - History of anti-Muslim sentiment in the Netherlands since 2000 22
    - 9/11 and consequential incidents 24
    - The murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh 25

Chapter 3: Analysis 28

Conclusion 33

Reference list 36
  - Books and articles 36
  - Internet sources 41
Introduction

According to a survey held by Motivaaction in 2006, half of Dutch citizens can be labeled as 'Islamophobic', because they fear the influence of Muslims in society and reject Islam.¹ Another survey held in March 2008 by het Historisch Nieuwsblad reveals that more than half of Dutch citizens find Islam a threat to Dutch identity.² In December of the same year, Monitor Racisme & Extremisme reported that the 'problem of Islamophobia' has risen significantly in the Netherlands. This referred not only to the 'negative climate of opinion' about Muslims, but also the increased violence against this community and the tolerance of 'targeted expression crimes against Muslims'.³ At the same time, anti-immigrant populist politicians have become increasingly prominent in Dutch politics.

Until now, there has been much research into anti-Muslim sentiment (Cesari 2013, Kaya 2014, Mughan and Paxton 2006) and anti-immigrant populism in Europe (Veenkamp 2011, Akkerman 2005). Right-wing populism is a political ideology that rejects political consensus. The term populism derives from the Latin word 'populus', which means 'people' or 'commons'⁴; therefore, it is considered populism, because of its appeal to the common man as opposed to the elites. However, right-wing populist politicians in the Netherlands are known for their opposition to Muslim immigrants. This issue flared up in 2015 when large numbers of refugees from the Middle East and Africa began arriving in Europe.⁵ Populist parties have done very well in elections and polls since. Prominent opponents of (Muslim) immigration included the assassinated Pim

---


Most scholars view anti-Muslim sentiment as an extension or variation of the general anti-immigrant sentiment that is found in most right-wing populist movements. With this thesis, I want to explore the nature of the relationship between the two trends – are they part of the same phenomenon or are they separate but distinct trends that fuel each other? My hypothesis is that anti-immigrant sentiment is a form of right-wing populism; not separate from it, but part of it. In this case, anti-Muslim sentiment can be seen as a part of anti-immigrant sentiment, since Muslims concern a significant portion of the immigrants at the present time.

This thesis seeks to answer the following research question: ‘What has been the relationship between anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands since 2000?’ The objective of the research is to explore the link between anti-Islamic sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands. Little is known about when an anti-immigrant sentiment can be considered as populist ideology and if, how, and in what form anti-immigrant sentiments are present in the Dutch political/social landscape. The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the ongoing study of anti-Muslim sentiments in general and to enrich our understanding of how populism contributes to these sentiments. It will add a new perspective to the study of anti-Muslim sentiments within Religious Studies, Political Science, and Law.

In answering the subquestions, I will particularly make use of existing literature on right-wing populism and anti-Muslim/anti-immigrant sentiments. On top of that, I will take into account empirical studies on anti-Muslim sentiments among the Dutch population. In addition, I will link the rise of Fortuyn and Wilders in the Dutch political landscape to the fluctuating numbers and

---

percentages on how Dutch citizens feel about Muslims and immigrants in general.

In doing so, I will make use of the concepts ‘anti-Muslim/immigrant sentiments’, ‘populist ideology’, and ‘right-wing populism’ (amongst others Freeden 2003, Steger 2008). I will further elaborate on the definitions of these important concepts in chapter One.

Through the following chapters, I will shed some light on the link between anti-Islamic sentiment and right-wing national populism. In the first chapter, I will set out my theoretical framework and place this thesis in line with other research done on anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing populism. The second chapter will give an historical/social overview of right-wing populism in the Netherlands with examples of anti-immigrant sentiments. The third and last chapter will link both concepts together by analyzing research done by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Social en Cultureel Planbureau, SCP).

In the next chapter, I will provide a short overview of the emerging discussion on anti-Muslim/immigrant sentiments, populist ideology and right-wing populism.
Chapter 1: Theory

This chapter will provide a short overview of the emerging discussion on anti-Muslim sentiments and right-wing national populism in the fields of Religious Studies and Political Science in order to outline the area of research/discourse in which this thesis is positioned and use this as a framework for the rest of my thesis, so it is clear to what field the main argument of this thesis contributes.

Anti-immigrant sentiment

Before exploring the question in-depth it is important to develop an understanding of what exactly is meant by anti-immigrant sentiments. Anti-immigrant sentiment is often referred to as opposition to immigration, which exists in most nation-states with immigration. The principal concerns are amongst others distortion of the national identity of the native population, as the identity is often connected to ethnicity, infringement on indigenous rights, replacement of the national, cultural, and religious unity, higher crime rates among some immigrant populations, and economic arguments such as higher burdens on social welfare systems.\(^7\)

According to an European survey held in the period from 2002 until 2012, higher levels of education lead to a more positive reported attitude towards immigrants, due to weaker economic competition, higher aversion to discrimination, and a greater belief in the positive effects among the higher educated.\(^8\)

In European countries, immigration is one of the central political issues and the anti-immigration perspective is predominantly based on the national, cultural, and economic aspects as mentioned above.

---

\(^7\) S. Gunew, *Haunted nations, the colonial dimensions of multiculturalisms* (1st press; London/New York 2004) 33-50.

This opposition to immigration has been associated with right-wing national parties.

Anti-immigrant sentiment is often taken together with anti-Muslim sentiment; it supplements anti-immigrant sentiment with Islamophobic discourse.  

**Anti-Muslim sentiment**

Anti-Muslim sentiment is often referred to as Islamophobia, the fear of anything that has to do with Islam. This term is often linked to hatred or prejudice against, or discrimination against Muslims. Gardell defines it as socially reproduced prejudices and aversion to Islam and Muslims, as well as actions and practices that attack, exclude or discriminate against persons on the basis that they are [or are perceived to be] Muslim and associated with Islam.  

The Islamophobia Research & Documentation Project from Berkeley University defined Islamophobia as a contrived fear or prejudice fomented by existing Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structures. It is directed at a perceived or real Muslim threat through the maintenance and extension of existing disparities in economic, political, social, and cultural relations, while rationalizing the necessity to deploy violence as a tool to achieve ‘civilizational rehabilitation’ of the targeted communities. Islamophobia reintroduces and reaffirms a global racial structure through which resource distribution disparities are maintained and extended.  

In recent years, the word Islamophobia has gained wider currency, although scholars are still discussing the definition. Phillips, Chair of the Runnymede Trust, established the Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia in 1996. A report was produced in which Islamophobia was defined as an outlook or

---

11 University of California, Berkeley, center for race & gender, 'Defining "Islamophobia"', [http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia](http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia) accessed April 2, 2016.
world-view involving an unfounded dread and dislike of Muslims, which results in practices of exclusion and discrimination.\textsuperscript{12} The report also stated that Islamophobia is the dread or hatred of Islam and therefore fear and dislike of all Muslims.\textsuperscript{13} This also includes discrimination against Muslims through their economic, social, and public exclusion. Other definitions, including that Islam is a violent political ideology rather than a religion and that Islam is inferior to Western cultures, are also part of their definition of Islamophobia according to the report. The Runnymede Trust also stated that Islamophobia should be viewed as a range of Islamophobias, each with its own distinctive features. This definition shows the complexity and historical evolution of Islamophobia; for instance, it also argues that Islamophobia is part of a wider fear of Arabs.\textsuperscript{14}

At a 2009 symposium on Islamophobia and religious discrimination, Richardson said that the disadvantages of the term Islamophobia are significant on several grounds. These disadvantages include that it implies that it is merely a severe mental illness affecting only a minority of people; that this use of the term makes those to whom it is applied defensive and defiant and absolves the user of the term of the responsibility of trying to understand them; that it implies that hostility to Muslims is divorced from factors such as skin color, immigrant status, fear of fundamentalism, or political or economic conflicts; that it conflates prejudice against Muslims in one's own country with dislike of Muslims in countries with which the West is in conflict; that it fails to distinguish between people who are against all religions from people who dislike Islam specifically; and that the actual issue being described is hostility to Muslims, "an ethno-religious identity within European countries", rather than hostility to Islam.\textsuperscript{15} Despite these

\textsuperscript{13} M. Quraishi, \textit{Muslims and crime, a comparative study} (1st press; Burlington 2005) 60.
\textsuperscript{15} R. Richardson, 'Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism - or what?, concepts and terms revisited', 4-5. \url{http://www.insted.co.uk/anti-muslim-racism.pdf} accessed April 2, 2016.
disadvantages, he advocates that it is important to define Islamophobia precisely.\textsuperscript{16} The problem with this definition is that it covers so much that it is still not clear what is meant with anti-Muslim sentiment.

The discussion of the exact definition of Islamophobia continues with various academics who think the term is rather vague and inexact. Allen stated in his article that it lacks a clear definition.\textsuperscript{17} Kandel argued that Islamophobia is a vague term which encompasses every conceivable actual and imagined act of hostility against Muslims.\textsuperscript{18} Murray argued in an article that the term Islamophobia is so inexact that includes insult of and even inquiry into any aspect of Islam, including Muslim scripture.\textsuperscript{19}

According to Bleich, there is a significant variation in the precise formulations of Islamophobia; it connotes a broader set of negative attitudes directed at individuals because of perceived membership in a defined category.\textsuperscript{20} According to Gottschalk and Greenberg, Islamophobia connotes a social anxiety about Islam and Muslims, a definition opposed to Islamophobia as being a psychological or individualistic phobia.\textsuperscript{21} Other social scientists have adopted this definition and argue that Islamophobia should essentially be understood as an effective part of social stigma towards Islam and Muslims, namely fear.\textsuperscript{22}

Several other scholars consider Islamophobia to be a form of racism. Poynting and Mason define Islamophobia as anti-Muslim

\textsuperscript{16} Richardson, ‘Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism - or what?’, 11.
\textsuperscript{17} Ch. Allen, \textit{Islamophobia} (1st press; Burlington 2010) 21.
\textsuperscript{20} E. Bleich, 'Defining and researching Islamophobia', \textit{Review of Middle East Studies} 46 (2012) 180-189, there 181.\textsuperscript{181}
racism. Others question this relationship. For instance, Cesari writes that academics are still debating the legitimacy of the term and questioning how it differs from other terms such as racism, anti-Islamism, anti-Muslimness, and anti-Semitism. Erdenir states that there is no consensus on the scope and content of the term and its relationship with concepts such as racism.

In this thesis, I adopt Gardell’s definition of anti-Muslim sentiment as socially reproduced prejudices and aversion to Islam and Muslims, as well as actions and practices that attack, exclude or discriminate, expanding it with Gottschalk’s idea of Islamophobia being a social anxiety or social stigma of fear towards Muslims and Bleich’s idea of Islamophobia connoting a broader set of negative attitudes towards individuals because of perceived membership.

**Populist ideology: right-wing national populism**

Populism can be distinguished between left- and right-wing populism, according to which party uses this discourse. The terms “left-wing politics” and “right-wing politics” are used to characterize the political orientation of parties, persons, and organizations in the political spectrum, ranging from extreme left to extreme right. These terms were coined during the French Revolution, referring to the seating arrangements in the Estates General: those on the left generally opposed the monarchy and supported revolution, while those on the right advocated the preservation of the old balance of power. Accents shifted in the late nineteenth century: left was especially applicable to socialist parties, the liberals ended up in the

---

political center, and conservatives occupied the right. Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiments cut across both left and right, although there is no significant link between these subjects and the left branch of populism in the Netherlands.

Steger is arguing that national political ideologies emerged at the time of the American and French Revolutions, or crystallized at this time, and competed with religious doctrines of what ideas and values should guide human communities. On the one hand, ideology offers a ‘secular’ response to these fundamental questions, but it also resembles religion in its attempts to link the various ethical, cultural, and political dimensions of society into a fairly comprehensive belief system. Populism has been associated with a variety of phenomena, although none of these definitions has achieved universal acceptance. Also, in spite of its rhetorical power, Steger argues populism lacks the developed ideational structure that enables comprehensive political belief systems to translate the largely pre reflexive social imaginary into concrete political terms and programs. This is in accordance with Van Rossem’s view, who says populism is rather an attitude than an ideology, since a programmatic definition cannot be given and populism can be both left and right. In my view, populism is certainly a political ideology.

According to Freeden, a (provisional) political ideology is a set of ideas, beliefs, opinions, and values that (1) exhibit a recurring pattern; (2) are held by significant groups; (3) compete over providing and controlling plans for public policy; (4) do so with the aim of justifying, contesting or changing the social and political arrangements and processes of a political community. As we can see throughout the rest of this chapter, populism meets these characteristics.

30 Ibid., 215.
Other scholars see populism as an ideology as well. Mudde regards populism as an ideology, which assumes a society that is divided into two homogeneous opposing groups: the pure people against the corrupt elite. Or, as Laclau argued, populism and democracy refer to virtually synonymous ‘modes of articulation’ that divide the social into two camps: ‘power and the underdog’. 33 34 The populist would claim to represent the will of the pure human being in its fight against the corrupt elite.35 This corresponds to the view of Albertazzi and McDonnell, who argue that populism is an ideology that pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice.36 In this approach, they focus on populism per se, rather than treating populism as an appendage of other ideologies, or in other words, rather than viewing populism in terms of specific social bases, economic programs, issues, and electorates as discussions of right-wing populism have tended to do.

This populist projection of community as a homogenous nation has led to the conclusion that populism was (and remains) inevitably nationalist. Steger states that national-populism narratives indeed still represent potent modes of political communication capable of mobilizing millions.37

Taggart joins these views, but also provides another insight with three other, yet overlapping characteristics: (1) populism opposes representative politics; an aversion against established parties and established political agendas and practices; (2) populism uses what Taggart calls ‘heartland’; a fictitious area, which is inhabited by ‘the people’. This nation is a homogeneous group of people who work hard, are sincere and moralistic, and would suffer under the

---

37 Steger, The rise of the global imaginary, 218.
leadership of the elite. Usually these people are not politically active, but are mobilized by populists; (3) populism is an ideology without core values. Populist style and rhetoric can be used in all positions in the political landscape.38

Right-wing national populism parties have in common that they are movements of exclusion: their conception of ‘the people’ is narrower than for other parties within the respective party system.39 According to Mavelli, this is due to the European social imaginary: European identities are not exceptional, but are emotional formations that articulate solidarities and exclusions like all ‘other’ identities.40 The core frame for most of the radical right-wing populist parties concern stopping or radically reducing immigration, multiculturalism as the principal enemy, and the denouncing of cultural diversity; thus, radical nationalism is presented as a necessary condition for maintaining ethnic diversity on an international scale. However, there are other anti-immigration arguments as well.41

Another characteristic of right-wing populist parties is their anti-establishment populism.42 These parties distinguish themselves from the ‘political class’, wanting to give the power back to the people; this is because they argue that the parties of the elite collude, which contributes to their main objective to keep the people at a distance.43

In his paper, Fennema shares the same conclusion, although he prefers to call them anti-immigrant parties: ‘The founders [of anti-immigrant parties] seemed primarily motivated by anti-establishment sentiments. They may share the latter with extreme right movements, but, the only programmatic issue all radical right parties have in common is their resentment against immigrants and

38 P.A. Taggart, Populism (1st press; Buckingham 2000) 10-22.
40 L. Malvelli, Europe’s encounter with Islam, the secular and the post secular (1st press; Oxon/New York 2012) 116.
43 Ibid., vii.
against the immigration policies of their government. To call these parties extreme right is therefore misleading. We will call them anti-immigrant parties instead.”

Indeed, some right-wing national populist parties can be called anti-immigrant parties, although, as Canovan remarks, the meaning of populism varies from context to context, thus demanding different kinds of analysis. This is why it is important to look specifically at how this has developed in the Netherlands. Also, according to Rydgren, radical right-wing populism parties are characterized by the combination of ethno-nationalist xenophobia and anti-establishment populism.

Fennema further distinguishes three different features that characterize the political identity of anti-immigrant parties in Western Europe. The first one is their alleged lineage from the pre-war fascist movement. Parties with roots in this past are called extreme right. The second feature is contempt for immigrants and resentment against the immigration policy of the government. Fennema calls these parties racist. The last feature is that they celebrate the virtue and wisdom of the common man and pretend to represent ‘the healthy popular sentiment’. These parties are called populist or protest parties. Yet, these categories overlap; therefore, it is hard to distinguish them properly.

Populism attaches itself to various host vessels in the form of a ‘persistent yet mutable style of political rhetoric’. Populism performs at least four mutually reinforcing rhetorical maneuvers with great regularity: (1) constructing unbridgeable political differences; the ordinary people versus the elite; (2) attacking enemies from a moralistic high ground rather than facing them on a political level playing field; (3) the evocation of an extreme crisis

---

which requires an immediate and forceful response, and; (4) imagining the people as a homogenous unit welded together.49

Van Rossem states that populism is a political movement with a strong sense of crisis. Populist parties are primarily concerned with the threat of ‘Islamization’ of the national culture.50 Van Rossem says it remains enigmatic how a small minority of the population, who are socio-economically weak and who are discriminated everywhere, could ‘Islamize’ the vast majority who have little interest in the religion of this minority group.51

In conclusion, right-wing national populism is a political ideology on the right side of the political scale which opposes representative politics, has a strong sense of a homogeneous group, and is, above all, an anti-immigration movement. Right-wing national populism opposes the corrupt elite and dangerous ‘others’, most of the time immigrants and multiculturalism, who deprive the people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity, and voice. This projection of community as a homogenous nation leads to the conclusion that populism is inevitably nationalist. The core frame for most right-wing national populist parties is stopping or reducing immigration. In doing so, they make frequent use of rhetorics. Anyhow, as already mentioned, the meaning of populism varies from context to context, thus it is important to look specifically at how this has developed in the Netherlands.

Having set out the theoretical framework in relation to anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism and the terminology that I will utilize in this thesis, it is now important to consider the specific cases of anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands.

49 Ibid, 215-217
50 Van Rossem, Waarom is de burger boos?, 6-7.
51 Ibid, 8.
Chapter 2: Historical- and social overview

This chapter will provide a historical and social overview of anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands since 2000. I will briefly discuss the process of anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism and the shape both has taken in the Netherlands from 2000 until today. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, it is important to look specifically at the development of right-wing national populism and anti-Muslim sentiment.

History of populism in the Netherlands since 2000

In the absence of a charismatic leader, contemporary populism appeared late in the Dutch scene. Such a leader is indispensable; he has to give emotions a political form. Around the turn of the century, the circumstances were favorable. The People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD) had moved to the centre of the political spectrum and left the far right unguarded. In December, the big question was who would become the largest party in the Dutch House of Representatives: the VVD or the Dutch Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA). Either Melkert or Dijkstal would become the new prime minister. But no-one would have thought that both leaders would quietly disappear a few months later.

Pim Fortuyn

Pim Fortuyn was the main cause of the sudden retreat of Melkert and Dijkstal. He was considered a strange sujet, but he was cut for the medialogica. For many years, he was a successful speaker for representatives of medium-sized and small-sized companies and did very well on television during debates, because he had the capacity

52 Van Rossem, Waarom is de burger boos?, 39.
to make an authentic impression. He also had political ambitions for years, but needed a stepping stone that would allow him the opportunity to enter the political system. That was offered to him by the party Livable Netherlands (Leefbaar Nederland, LN), who wanted to fight the bureaucracy and give the voters more influence - typical populists goals.\(^{53}\)

Politically, LN and Fortuyn did not fit together. Fortuyn was much more conservative and determined to make the immigration issue a major point of his campaign, while the board of LN felt nothing for it. The paths of LN and Fortuyn eventually diverged after a major interview in the Volkskrant, published on February 9, in which Fortuyn made two statements that were not acceptable to the board. In this interview, Fortuyn stated that he did not want any more asylum seekers in the Netherlands, and that he wanted to abolish the first article of the Dutch Constitution which prohibits discrimination\(^{54}\), which would allow genuine freedom of expression.\(^{55}\)

The debate on multiculturalism erupted: Fortuyn then turned to Muslims instead of immigrants in general.\(^{56}\) He had compared Muslims and their organization with the communists in the years of the Cold War. Thus, Muslim immigrants were put down as the fifth column of a foreign power, an obvious danger to state security.\(^{57}\) He blamed the failure of Muslims in particular to integrate on the fact that Islam has not yet been through the phase of the Enlightenment.\(^{58}\)

On February 11, he announced to come up with his own party and founded the List Pim Fortuyn (Lijst Pim Fortuyn, LPF) three days

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 40.
\(^{54}\) Ibid., 50.
\(^{57}\) Van Rossem, *Waarom is de burger boos?*, 51.
\(^{58}\) Akkerman, ‘Anti-immigration parties and the defense of liberal values’, 346.
He presented the LPF-program on March 14 with the presentation of a book titled "The ruins of eight years of Purple, a ruthless analysis of the public sector and recommendations for a strong recovery". In this case, Purple is the nickname of a government coalition of social democrats (red) and liberals (blue). According to Fortuyn, the country was ruled by a clique of self-appointed politicians and a technocratic-bureaucratic elite, which did not care for democratic procedures and the wishes of the citizens. Essential in Fortuyn's program was a different, much tougher approach to immigrant issues.

On May 6, 2002, Fortuyn was assassinated by Van der Graaf. Posthumously, Fortuyn became a hero. He was seen as the messiah who was taken from the Dutch society by force; if he had lived, he would have created a paradise on earth. The election on May 15 was spectacular: the LPF gained twenty-six seats. According to some followers of Fortuyn, the LPF would have become the largest party, if he was not killed.

The vast majority of the LPF-voters came from the right and consisted of voters who thought the VVD was too liberal. The hole on the right of the VVD was closed up by Fortuyn: he was against the elite, against immigrants, but especially against Muslim immigrants. Eventually, the success of the LPF has induced the VVD to shift to the right with respect to issues as immigration, integration, and security.

This seems to be a resounding success, but nothing is what it seems in this case. Within the LPF, there was no organizational coherence, no programmatic coherence, and none could give guidance. During the elections in 2003, the party lost 18 seats and in the subsequent elections, the party disappeared from the parliament.

---

59 Van Rossem, Waarom is de burger boos?, 64.
60 Ibid., 69.
61 Ibid., 72.
62 Ibid., 84.
63 Akkerman, 'Anti-immigration parties and the defense of liberal values', 344.
64 Van Rossem, Waarom is de burger boos?, 90.
Pim Fortuyn is often considered as the founding father of modern Dutch populism after his campaign in 2001-2002.\(^65\) Despite this, some scholars are not necessarily convinced that the LPF represents a radical right populism party, although there are similarities. Rydgren and Van Holsteyn argue that although LPF’s political ideas and rhetoric were based clearly on anti-establishment populism and xenophobia, ethno-nationalism as such was not really an issue.\(^66\) However, its electoral success and the fulfillment of more or less the same political and electoral ‘needs’ are reasons to treat LPF as an equivalent to other radical right populism parties.

Geert Wilders

After the elections of 2003, this ideological lead has been taken over by Geert Wilders. According to various Dutch journalists, scientists, and politicians, Geert Wilders and his Party For Freedom are best qualified as populists, although a thorough analysis raises doubts to this qualification.\(^67\) A denunciation of the elite and an inclination towards conspiracy theories are easily discerned, since both elements are present in his “battle” against Islam and the elite; both are connected in an apocalyptic theory of an ongoing Islamization of Europe, ultimately leading to the transformation of Europe into Eurabia.\(^68\) The absence of a glorification of the people, his preference for direct democracy, and his background as a passionate, professional politician conflict with populism. In addition, he is focused on conflict, though not on national conflict, which is the core of populism, but on an international conflict between Islam and a Western society that is weakened by left-wing relativism, which could be seen as the elite in the eyes of Wilders.\(^69\)

---

68 Idem.
69 Ibid., 30.
Before 2003-2004, Wilders merely took a hard-line position against radical Islam. From 2003-2004 onwards, he started to criticize Islam as a totalitarian ideology instead of a religion, which should be placed on the same level as communism and fascism, and which poses a significant threat to the West, hence his usage of the term Islamofascism.⁷⁰

Following Bat Ye’or’s Eurabia theory, Wilders began to typify the immigration of Muslims as an integral part of a deliberate strategy of Islamification. To support his theory, he refers to a whole range of Arabists, political scientists, journalists, and politicians who may boast a reasonably solid reputation (albeit not uncontroversial).⁷¹

Wilders has a list of provocative statements concerning Islam to his name, of which the anti-Islam movie Fitna (2008) is his “most famous” work. Other well-known statements include comparing the Qur’an with Hitler’s Mein Kampf, pleading for a ban on the Qur’an, and comparing the immigration of Muslims to a tsunami wave.

**History of anti-Muslim sentiment in the Netherlands since 2000**

Until 2000, the growth of anti-Muslim sentiment in the Netherlands was very gradual and not very significant. However, this situation began to change after the turn of the century, following the September 2001 attacks on the United States, various incidents and attacks in Europe, and the murder of Theo van Gogh; Islam became the object of criticisms.⁷² Incidents occurred that could be interpreted as a sign that many Muslims were openly or secretly condoning or even supporting terrorism.⁷³

---

⁷⁰ Ibid., 26.
⁷¹ Ibid., 28.
In the 1960s, a period breaks through in Europe that is often referred to as postmodernism.\textsuperscript{74} In the Netherlands, this transition itself in a sharp cultural shift to a post-Christian nation.\textsuperscript{75} Ever since, the dominant culture is characterized by terms such as “secularization” and “religious bricolage” on the level of religion and “liberalization” on the level of morality.\textsuperscript{76} Many Dutch, therefore, were shocked when they realized a large and rapidly growing Muslim community had established in the Netherlands in the late nineties. They did not view its Muslim population as an opportunity for pluralism and democracy, but rather as a threat; an almost unbridgeable gap began to exist.\textsuperscript{77} Muslims are seen as both the internal and external enemy, although there is no empirical evidence from Muslim behaviors in European countries that support this fear.\textsuperscript{78} From an internal standpoint, they are viewed as unwilling to integrate, Islamic beliefs and practices are perceived as incompatible with Western liberal and national values.\textsuperscript{79} From an external standpoint, they are viewed as national security threats and unloyalw to their host countries.\textsuperscript{80} A declining trend emerged in Dutch tolerance towards Muslims in the mid-nineties.\textsuperscript{81} From the feeling of unease, a substantial part of the population began to support politicians and publicists who set out to “fight” Islam. That effort resulted in a growing alienation between Muslims and non-Muslims. The position of Islam only seems to become more controversial in the following years. According to Van Stokkom, negative opinions about Muslims are determined to a great extent by the perceived cultural conflict, rather than negative judgments in


\textsuperscript{75} Houtman and Duyvendak, ‘Boerka’s, boerkinis en belastingcenten’, 103-105.


\textsuperscript{77} Mavelli, \textit{Europe’s encounter with Islam}, 86.

\textsuperscript{78} J. Cesari, \textit{Why the West fears Islam, an exploration of Muslims in liberal democracies} (1st press; New York 2013) 20.

\textsuperscript{79} Cesari, \textit{Why the West fears Islam}, 1.

\textsuperscript{80} \textit{Ibid}, 20.

\textsuperscript{81} Van Stokkom, ‘De islam afgekraakt, het zelfreinigend vermogen van de democratie’, 150.
which prejudice can play a role, although this rejection is greatly increased after the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{82}

The following vignettes will provide a short overview of how anti-Muslim sentiment developed in the same years right-wing national populism arose in the Netherlands. Due to the large numbers of incidents and cases of anti-Muslim sentiment, I will only shed light on the happenings following the September 2001 attacks and the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh. It will show the impact on Dutch society and the corresponding development with right-wing national populism.

---

9/11 and consequential incidents

Societal discrimination against the Muslim population was most prominent following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in Autumn 2001. The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and other reporting bodies made mention of significant incidents of harassment and verbal abuse and aggression towards Muslims.\textsuperscript{83} Various scandals and potential threats caused public fury and rendered substantial damage to the image of Muslims in the Netherlands. For instance, newspapers reported about a group of nine youngsters of Moroccan descent loudly “celebrating” the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers, holding a picture of Osama bin Laden, on the evening of September 11, 2001 in the city of Ede.\textsuperscript{84} This incident provoked criticism and is considered one of the starting points for journalists to hunt such “scoops” by searching all kinds of worrisome developments within Muslim communities.\textsuperscript{85} Besides, the media exposed many scandals and potential threats, such as terrorism-propaganda in Islamic schools which quoted

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 152.
\item \textsuperscript{83} K. Murphy, \textit{State security regimes and the right to freedom of religion and belief, changes in Europe since 2001} (1st press; New York 2013) 137-138.
\item \textsuperscript{85} Bakker, ‘Islamism, radicalisation and jihadism in the Netherlands’, 170.
\end{itemize}
radical anti-Western Salafi imams. Although the reports later turned out to be misinterpreted or based on unreliable sources, the damage had already been done to the image of Muslim communities in the Netherlands; the events of September 11 and these following incidents resulted in a harsher tone of debate.

This is also reflected in the opinion polls. Opinion polls following these attacks revealed strong anti-Muslim sentiment and a fear of Islam. One survey indicated that three-quarters of the Dutch population were in favor of providing military support to the United States, however; 60 percent also feared that this might lead to terrorist attacks in the Netherlands.86

The murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh

In spring 2004, the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service issued a warning in its report “Background of Jihad Recruits in the Netherlands”, which warned about a growing number of Muslims who feel [that they are] treated disrespectfully by opinion-makers and opinion-leaders.87 One of them was Theo van Gogh, who had a reputation as an outspoken provocateur. His film Submission (2004) challenged the abuse of women in the Islamic world based on verses from the Qur’an.

On November 2, 2004, Van Gogh was assassinated by Muhammad Bouyeri, a young man of Moroccan descent who had become radicalized for no precise reason. In a letter, which he stabbed with a knife to Van Gogh’s body, he expressed anger and disgust against Western societies and their governments’ foreign policies. He accused the VVD of being anti-Islamic and accused Ayaan Hirsi Ali of terrorizing Islam.88

87 Veldhuis and Bakker, 'Muslims in the Netherlands', 19.
88 Ibid., 20.
The Dutch society was shocked, not only by the crime itself, but also by the manner in which the basic principles of the Dutch democratic constitutional state had been so brutally attacked.\(^9^9\) It became clear that extreme ideologies and radical terrorist organizations had gained ground in the Netherlands, even among those born and raised in the country, since Bouyeri claimed to have acted independently.\(^9^0\) Many also sought violent revenge against these Muslims. As Benschop elaborates, “the Islam-inspired murder of Van Gogh was grist to the political mill of extremely nationalist and racist groups [who] seized the event to give vent to their violent and venomous opinions”.\(^9^1\)

The current alderman of Rotterdam, Aboutaleb, gave a clear speech the day after the murder on Van Gogh in the Al-Kabir mosque: “There is no place in an open society like the Dutch for people who do not share the fundamental values of our society. Anyone who does not share these truths would be wise to draw his conclusions and leave. There is no way that someone demands us to respect his views while he is not willing to respect the view of others at the same time”.\(^9^2\)

Consequently, the Netherlands has witnessed growing anti-Muslim sentiment. Vossen finds it reasonable to attribute the ongoing radicalization of Muslims to the assassination of Van Gogh.\(^9^3\) Inflamed racial tensions and incidents followed the Van Gogh murder. Since March 2006, the Terrorist Threat Assessments Netherlands issued by the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism have reported that resistance among Dutch Muslims to radicalization and extremism is on the rise. The leading Islamic organizations realize that violence and polarization among

---

\(^9^9\) Bakker and Berger, ‘Europe, Netherlands’, 489.
\(^9^0\) Veldhuis and Bakker, ‘Muslims in the Netherlands’, 20.
\(^9^1\) Bakker and Berger, ‘Europe, Netherlands’, 489.
ethnic and religious lines will fuel existing anti-Islamic sentiments in the Netherlands.⁹⁴

Through this short overview of the development of right-wing national populism and anti-Muslim sentiment I have portrayed the particular context of both processes in the Netherlands and illustrated the corresponding development. Both simultaneously emerged in the Dutch milieu and it can be said both trends are interconnected. In the next chapter, I will link both concepts together by analyzing research done by The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Social en Cultureel Planbureau, SCP).

Chapter 3: Analysis

This chapter will provide an analysis of the ongoing research done by the SCP. By doing so, and providing additional research, I will confirm my hypothesis that anti-immigrant sentiment, and thus anti-Muslim sentiment, is a form of right-wing populism and cannot be seen as separate from it.

The growth of populist feelings of dissatisfaction and discomfort is probably not a plausible explanation for the growing anti-Muslim sentiment in the Netherlands according to Van Stokkom. He argues that this populist discontent seems to have developed more in other West-European countries such as Belgium and France, in which the ethnic distance seems to be further developed.\textsuperscript{95} However, Van Stokkom published this article in 2009, the year which is often called “the year of Geert Wilders” and his Party for Freedom. On top of that, widespread societal resentment towards growing numbers of Muslims in the Netherlands, as well as their culture, already became apparent in 2001. Fortuyn received broad support for his characterization of Islam as a “backward culture” that is intolerant toward women and homosexuals and that allows practices from the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{96} At the time, this resentment fueled social tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities. The incidents targeting Muslims had largely subsided by the end of 2001, but Muslims continued, to a lesser degree, to face harassment and threats, as well as criticism for such perceived problems as poor integration and criminal activity. According to some observers, verbal abuse against Muslims has become the rule rather than the exception.\textsuperscript{97}

Every two years, SCP publishes “The social state of the Netherlands” at the request of the Dutch House of Representatives.

\textsuperscript{95} Van Stokkom, ‘De islam afgekraakt’, 155.
\textsuperscript{96} Murphy, \textit{State security regimes and the right to freedom of religion and belief}, 137-138.
\textsuperscript{97} Van Stokkom, ‘De islam afgekraakt’, 150.
Striking about these expenditures it that there is a fluctuating trend in how Dutch society views immigrants and in particular Muslims.

The edition of 2003 shows that Dutch citizens claim too many foreigners live in the Netherlands and that the general conception of foreigners has become more negative between 1995 and 2002.\textsuperscript{98} In the latter part of this period, Fortuyn entered Dutch politics and migrants came under increased level of discussion. The 2007 edition showed that this rate dropped from 51% to 40%.\textsuperscript{99} The general impression is that the Dutch are more relaxed, although less accommodating. This can be explained by the relatively quiet period on immigration in Dutch politics between Fortuyn and Wilders. This changed, however, in the 2011 edition. Anti-discrimination offices show more reports of discrimination: there were 3589 reports in 1999, while there were 5931 reports in 2009, of which the most reports were directed against Muslims.\textsuperscript{100}

However, the 2013 edition shows a large part of Dutch society is not more negative about immigrants than in the period before 2008, although they are more negative about the amount of immigrants in the Netherlands - also called ethnic resistance. Now only one third thinks there were too many immigrants in the Netherlands.\textsuperscript{101} Another striking trend is that the image of Muslims in the Netherlands has improved compared to 2008. International research has repeatedly shown that differences in views on migrants have to do with levels of education. In 2012-2013, for example, citizens with lower education show more resistance to the presence of migrants in the Netherlands than citizens with higher education. Also, more citizens with lower education believe that the Western way of life does not go together with the Muslim way of life compared to those

with higher education.\textsuperscript{102} Previous research has shown, however, that the views of lower- and higher educated people grow together. In addition, political orientation plays a independent role; even when one takes into account the level of education, right-wing orientated people are less tolerant towards migrants than left-wing orientated people. Finally, there is a negative correlation between satisfaction with people’s own lives on the one hand and ethnic resistance and distance on the other.\textsuperscript{103}

The 2015 edition elaborates on the previous edition: contrary to what one would probably expect based on the various problems and conflicts, the image of Muslims has improved greatly over the past decade. However, there is no downward trend in the notion that the lifestyles of West-Europeans and Muslims are incompatible. We have seen that the view that too many people of foreign origin living in the Netherlands decreased in popularity between 2004 and 2006 and between 2010 and 2013. In 2014-2015, there is a modest increase, but over the whole period, there is a marked decrease from 47% to 36%. This decline is reflected in all three education levels. Higher educated people appreciate the multicultural society more than lower educated people.\textsuperscript{104} Although the findings of the second half of 2015 and 2016 is not yet available, I predict that the percentage of Dutch citizens who have negative feelings towards Muslims has increased, just as was the case in 2001-2002. Wilders made use of the refugee crisis the same way Fortuyn made use of the events on September 11 to convert Muslims in a negative light.

Another publication of SCP states that the image of Muslims that prevails among the Dutch population deteriorated significantly between 1995 and 2005.\textsuperscript{105} The 2009 report on integration shows that a significant part of the native Dutch thinks that the Netherlands should not admit anyone to their country. Approximately one out of

\textsuperscript{102} Den Ridder and Schyns, ‘Publieke opinie’, 73.
\textsuperscript{103} Idem.
seven thinks that it is better to refuse people from different ethnicities, and about the same proportion believes that people from poorer countries outside Europe should not be allowed to enter this continent.\textsuperscript{106} For quite some time, approximately half of the Dutch population thinks that there are too many people from different nationalities in the Netherlands. This resistance reached its level in 2000 with 53\%, which continued until 2004. There was a strong decline in 2006 and 2008 to 39\% in 2008, about the same level as in the mid-nineties.\textsuperscript{107}

The rates of anti-Muslim sentiment fluctuate, however, so does the rise of right-wing national populism parties. As told in detail in the previous chapter, these parties only arose in 2002 and 2009, about the same periods when anti-Muslim sentiment increased according to above mentioned studies. According to Fennema, the perception of high rates of particular types of immigrants, such as Muslims, is the principal cause of the rise of anti-immigrant parties. This explanation points to the economic interests as a fundamental and independent variable; immigrants are competitors in the labour market, the housing market, and even the marriage market.\textsuperscript{108} This is also seen in research of SCP. Lower educated citizens are more negative about immigrants and Muslims, whereas higher educated citizens appreciate the multicultural society more.\textsuperscript{109} This idea is also shared by other scholars, such as Koopmans and Muis. According to them, Fortuyn’s viewpoints on the issues of immigration and integration tapped into the fears of ordinary Dutch people and matched their lived experiences of minority-related crime and segregation in cities and schools. Fortuyn’s rhetoric, which largely focused on the number of immigrants in the country and their supposed lack of respect for the Dutch way of life, struck a chord.

\textsuperscript{107} Gijsberts and Lubbers, ‘Wederzijdse beeldvorming’, 258.
\textsuperscript{109} Dekker and Den Ridder, ‘Publieke opinie’, 80-81.
with some sections of the population. In the Netherlands, as a general trend, the anti-immigrant parties more recently attract an average electorate, but low educated male voters remain over-represented. There is clearly some evidence for an explanation of anti-immigrant voting in terms of ethnic competition. The root cause for the success of populist anti-immigrant parties is in the permanent migration towards Europe and the perceived integration problems that arise from it.

Radical-secular beliefs are quickly accepted on the marketplace of political ideas. As well as the middle classes, who seem to have adopted an anti-Islam agenda. Equal citizenship and pluralism are therefore coming under pressure. One is allowed to speak up more in the Dutch political debate than was the case in the nineties. It is problematic, because hate mongers have also gained more freedom to express themselves. Muslims and non-Muslims can thus get into a self-reinforcing spiral of mutual mistrust and hostility.

This last chapter has shown that anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism can thus not be seen separated from each other. Research done by the SCP show a fluctuating trend concerning anti-Muslim sentiment in the Netherlands, but yet, it is in correspondence with the arrival of right-wing national populism parties in Dutch politics and the associated perception of high rates of immigrants, in particular Muslims. Other scholars show as well that these sentiments are fueled by these political parties.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I investigated the relationship between anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands since 2000. Although most scholars view anti-Muslim sentiment as an extension or variation, I argued in this thesis that anti-immigrant sentiment is a form of right-wing populism, in which anti-Muslim sentiment can be seen as a part of anti-immigrant sentiment, since Muslims are perceived to concern a significant portion of the immigrants.

This thesis seeks to answer the following research question: ‘What has been the relationship between anti-Muslim sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands since 2000?’ The objective of the research is to explore the link between anti-Islamic sentiment and right-wing national populism in the Netherlands.

First, I explored the phenomena anti-immigrant sentiment, anti-Muslim sentiment, and right-wing national populism. Anti-Muslim sentiment, or Islamophobia, is merely a section or part of anti-immigrant sentiments. As noted by many scholars, it is socially reproduced and fomented by Eurocentric and Orientalist global power structure; Muslims are a threat to the economic, social, and cultural aspects of life. The discussion of the exact definition of Islamophobia continues with various academics, although one can say there is a significant variation in the precise formulations of Islamophobia; it connotes a broader set of negative attitudes directed at individuals because of perceived membership in a defined category. Above all, it can be said anti-Muslim sentiment connotes a social anxiety about Islam and Muslims and should be understood as an effective part of social stigma towards Islam and Muslims, namely fear.

Right-wing national populism is a political ideology; however, it is difficult to give a comprehensive definition of this kind of populism, because it takes many forms. Yet, various characteristics are identifiable. First, right-wing populism opposes representative
politics and its established parties; the so-called elite. Secondly, they argue the national culture and identity is blurred or erased by the arrival of people of other nationalities or ethnicities; reversed assimilation; it is a movement of exclusion. Above all, anti-immigrant sentiment is an important and inseparable characteristic. Various other features are conceivable. In any case, the meaning of populism varies from context to context; therefore, it is important to look specifically at how this has developed in the Netherlands.

In the 1960s, the Netherlands transitioned to a dominant culture characterized by terms such as “secularization” and “liberalization”. In the meantime, a large and rapidly growing Muslim community had established in the Netherlands, which created a feeling of unease among Dutch citizens. This feeling of unease together with various attacks and incidents in and outside the Netherlands, such as the terrorist attack led by (fundamentalist) Muslims and/or jihadist on the Twin Towers and the murder of Theo van Gogh, induced a negative view towards Muslims and thus anti-Muslim sentiments. Although the major incidents have diminished the past years, Muslims continue to feel these unpleasant sentiments. Now Islamic State is in control in Syria and Iraq and many refugees flee to Europe and thus to the Netherlands, however, Islamophobia has increased and Muslims suffer more disruption in their daily lives.

Around the same time, with the turn of the century, the political landscape of the Netherlands became different; populism presented itself on the right side of the spectrum. Politicians like Fortuyn and Wilders entered the political arena. After the murder of Fortuyn, his party LPF became the second largest party in the Netherlands. In 2009, after a period of relative “peace”, Wilders entered the battlefield with his PVV. Since then, and especially the last year, he claims with giant strides in the polls. Both politicians are reputed for their aversion to immigrants, but in particular to Muslims.

Research done by the SCP show a fluctuating trend concerning anti-Muslim sentiment in the Netherlands, but yet, it is in correspondence with the arrival of right-wing national populism.
parties in Dutch politics and the associated perception of high rates of immigrants, in particular Muslims. Also, research by the SCP and articles from scholars show that it certainly has to do with level of education. Lower educated people are more attracted by populists, since they appoint a “scapegoat” for their social and economic situation.

The main point in this thesis that I want to make is that anti-Muslim sentiment is not only relevant for discussions of religion, but that anti-Muslim sentiment is also a category in its own right with implications for politics and law. The Dutch social- and political milieu is an example of how political ideologies can influence how people think about certain ethnicities and religions. Therefore, this case is significant for the study of Religious Studies, but also Politics and Law because it highlights that anti-immigrant sentiment, and thus anti-Muslim sentiment, is a form of right-wing national populism; not separate from it, but part of it.
Reference list

Books and articles
Akkerman, T., 'Anti-immigration parties and the defense of liberal values, the exceptional case of the List Pim Fortuyn', *Journal of political ideologies* 10 (2005) 337-354.


Allen, Ch., *Islamophobia* (1st press; Burlington 2010).


Gunew, S., Haunted nations, the colonial dimensions of multiculturalisms (1st press; London/New York 2004).


Malvelli, L., Europe’s encounter with Islam, the secular and the post secular (1st press; Oxon/New York 2012).


Murphy, K., State security regimes and the right to freedom of religion and belief, changes in Europe since 2001 (1st press; New York 2013).


Quraishi, M., Muslims and crime, a comparative study (1st press; Burlington 2005).


Slomp, H., European politics into the twenty-first century, integration and division (1st press; Westport 2000).

Steger, M.B., The rise of the global imaginary, political ideologies from the French Revolution to the Global War on Terror (1st press; Oxford 2008).


Van Rossem, M., Waarom is de burger boos?, over hedendaags populisme (1st press; Amsterdam 2010).


Internet sources


Note accessed June 7, 2016.
De Telegraaf, ‘Nederlanders: Islam grote bedreiging’,

Forum för levande historia, ‘Islamofobi - definitioner och uttryck’,

Kandel, J., ‘Islamophobia, on the career of a controversial term’,

Murray, D., ‘Forget ‘Islamophobia’, let’s tackle Islamism’,


RTL Nieuws, ‘Wilders: Sleep bootvluchtingen terug’,

University of California, Berkely, center for race & gender, ‘Defining “Islamophobia”’,
http://crg.berkeley.edu/content/islamophobia/defining-islamophobia accessed April 2, 2016.

Woe to every scorners and mocker
Who collects wealth and [continuously] counts it
He thinks that his wealth will make him immortal
No! He will surely be thrown into the crusher
And what can make you know what is the crusher?
It is the fire of Allah, [eternally] fueled
Which mounts directed at the hearts
Indeed, Hellfire will be closed down upon them
In extended columns

Sūrat al-Humazah, The Traducer (Q104)
Translation by Misheer Rashid al-'Afasy