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The consequences of FP voters' static understanding of national identity in contemporary multicultural society

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Summary

On March 15, 2017, 13.33% of the Dutch electorate voted for the Freedom Party (FP) of Geert Wilders, making his party the second largest party represented in our countries national parliament. Wilders is a much-contested politician, who stands out mostly because of his crude language about Muslims and Dutch Moroccans. His victory emphasizes an increasingly hostile political divide in the Netherlands about the position of (im)migrants. This divide - and its hostility - urges for an understanding of the position of FP voters, so as to sustain a peaceful society.

In this research, an attempt is made to understand the concerns of the people who vote for the FP, led by the research question: How do FP voters construct the ‘Self’ via the ‘Other’?

In order to answer this research question, the discourse of the respondents in the book *KWAAD* (ANGRY) by Joost Niemöller, is analyzed. *KWAAD* consists of extensive interviews about immigrants with a diverse group of 31 ‘angry’ Dutch people who (plan to) vote for the Freedom Party.

The analysis establishes that the sense of ‘Self’ of the FP voters in *KWAAD* is derived from a notion of national identity that treats culture as a possession instead of a process. This binary understanding of culture means that the Dutch identity is in a zero-sum conflict with outside influences, resulting in intolerance for other cultures. Furthermore, we see that Muslims – who are the ultimate ‘Other’ – are painted as intolerant, disrespectful, backwards, aggressive, inferior, criminal and oversexualized, which conversely renders the ‘Self’ as an innocent, feminized victim of the presence of this invasive ‘Other’. The accumulation of these characterizations is seen in the fact that respondents consider themselves to be oppressed. The interviewees report being marginalized and excluded from the public debate by the dominant mainstream, and feel silenced when expressing their opinions about Muslims.

When accepting the foundational understanding of national identity as static and incompatible with outside influences, it becomes self-evident that ‘our’ culture should be defended against outside influences, most notably against Muslims. It subsequently becomes *understandable* that a vote for Wilders and his radical views is the only alternative.

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Introduction

On March 15, 2017, 13.33% of the Dutch electorate voted for the Freedom Party (FP) of Geert Wilders, making his party the second largest party represented in our countries national parliament (“Kiesraad”).¹ In this research I aim to develop an understanding for the people who voted for him.

Wilders was – until recently – an exception to the norm in the Dutch and European political landscape. He stands out in particular because of his crude language, in which he claims to ‘tell it like it is’. Under the moniker of telling the truth, he relentlessly and repeatedly insults Muslims by characterizing their religion as ‘pure evil’ and as a “fascist ideology” (HP/DeTijd; De Telegraaf). The enumeration of his ideas about Islam and the language he uses to express them, can be found in his political program for the last national elections. Using solely one A4 of positions – compared to whole booklets of sometimes hundreds of pages by other parties – he explains his plans for the Netherlands. The introduction of the program – called ‘The Netherlands ours again’ – is two sentences long, reading: “Millions of Dutch people are fed up with the islamization of our country. Enough with the mass immigration and asylum, terror, violence and unsafety” (Freedom Party).² The rest of the piece of paper consists of his radical, expensive and even unconstitutional measures, such as “lock up radical Muslims preventively”, “withdraw all the already administered residence permits” and “close all mosques and Islamic schools, ban the Koran” (Freedom Party).

As a Dutch feminist with Jewish roots I have a certain awareness for the dangers of systemic discrimination. My father, having survived a concentration camp, embodied the tragedies that occurred between 1940 and 1945. As a child of this national history, Wilders is pushing all my alarm buttons. But mostly, I am astounded by the huge amount of people that voted for someone with such hateful and excluding rhetoric.

In the past year, with the election of Donald Trump in The United States and the Brexit referendum in Great Britain, we have seen that turning a blind eye to a big part of the

¹ In this thesis, *Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV)* is translated into *Freedom Party (FP)*.

² There are many translations from Dutch to English in this thesis, which are all mine. This quote was translated from: “Miljoenen Nederlanders hebben schoon genoeg van de islamisering van ons land. Genoeg van de massa-immigratie en terreur, geweld, en onveiligheid.”

electorate of any country can have dramatic results. Moreover, these elections show us that the problem of this political division is not going away by just ignoring it; in fact, this divide seems to get increasingly hostile. It is therefore time to start truly understanding each other.

Sociologist Arlie Russel Hochschild uses the term ‘empathy wall’ to describe the psychological barrier that prevents us from empathizing with people that are not in our own circle. It is, according to Hochschild, “an obstacle to deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel indifferent or even hostile to those who hold different beliefs or whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances” (Hochschild 5). Crossing this barrier, or climbing this wall, would ultimately lessen the feelings of hostility and indifference for fellow citizens, and would, in that regard, provide valuable knowledge for our society. Moreover, according to research done by conflict researcher Nimrod Rosler et. al, empathy (and hope) is indicated to be an important contributor to the advancement of peace (Rosler et. al).

A theory which has helped me reach my research question, is Terror Management Theory. This theory, originally founded by social psychologists Jeff Greenberg, Sheldon Solomon and Tom Pyszczynski, argues that human beings have constructed ‘culture’, with all its institutions and concepts (law, school, political institutions, but also values, and worldviews) *as an extension of the self* in order to preserve something of ourselves after we die. Culture is in this sense a way to cheat death, and not merely a way to look at the world. A logical consequence of this train of thought, is that whenever someone feels that their culture is threatened, for instance when worldviews compete with one another – as can be the case in multicultural societies – one experiences this threat as personal; as a threat to the ‘Self’, which results in clinging to the ‘in-group’. Moreover, when there is the threat of death (or according to TMT even when there is merely a reminder of the existence of death) such as after a terrorist attack – the reaction in regards to this self-preservation manifests itself more venomously.

One would expect, given the supposed universality of the reflex of self-preservation, that there would be a universal response to the same incidents. However, people respond vastly different to (perceived) threats. We live in the same country (albeit in varying circumstances), have the same national history and live through the same (inter)national life events, such as the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center or the attacks on Charlie Hebdo on January 7, 2015. And yet, we explain them very differently. Where I want to open our borders to help refugees, others are increasingly hostile towards them; while I am horrified by the rhetoric of Geert Wilders, others embrace his views. So, what distinguishes these Freedom

Party voters from the non-Freedom Party voters in how they react to tragedy or (cultural) tensions? It is precisely this discrepancy that I am intrigued by, and which leads me to the hypothesis that lies at the foundation of my research question. If it is true that clinging to the in-group in the case of threat is a universally shared survival method, one would expect a uniform response to threat. So why does not everyone vote for the Freedom Party, you might ask? My hypothesis is that the difference lies in how the ‘Self’ is explained by both groups.

How come so many Dutch people find the language used by Wilders alluring? Moreover, who is this ‘us’ that Wilders is referring to? What does it take to belong to this in-group? All these questions led me to the research question: How is the ‘Self’ of FP-voters constructed via the ‘Other’?³ By answering this question, we can hopefully understand the motivations of these voters better, creating the possibility for empathy. Moreover, where most of the work about FP voters (including *KWAAD*) is about understanding *them* and how they see the ‘Other’, I focus on how they understand *themselves* in relation to the ‘Other’.

In order to answer my research question, I analyze the discourse used in the book *KWAAD - Nederlanders over Immigranten*, which translates as ‘ANGRY- Dutch people about immigrants’, by journalist Joost Niemöller, in which a diverse group of Dutch people explain their frustration with immigrants. The respondents make up a wide range of Dutch citizens who are either already FP voters or contemplating becoming one in the (then) upcoming elections. They consist of different ages, sexualities, genders and educational levels. *KWAAD* is, since its very recent publication already in its fourth print and has been praised for its accurate portrayal of the concerns of Dutch citizens about immigration. In fact, Geert Wilders himself is quoted in the beginning of the book, saying that “Joost is one of the few people in the intellectual and journalistic Dutch world who is awake, and does not avoid taboos” (Niemöller preface).⁴ Other prominent right-wing Dutch people quoted are Thierry Baudet, Weirid Duk en Paul Cliteur, who praise the accuracy of the book. The combination of the recent publication date, the wide demographic range of respondents and the endorsements of

³ The ‘Other’ is primarily understood as the other human being in his or her differences. I can be seen as an *alter ego* (The Oxford companion to philosophy). Otherness has emerged as a widely discussed mental construct of pragmatic significance in the humanities and social sciences over the last 3 decades (Encyclopedia of qualitative research methods).

⁴ Translated from: “Joost is een van de weinigen in intellectueel en journalistiek Nederland die wakker is, en het taboe niet mijdt.”

so many prominent right-wing and notoriously xenophobe advocates, makes this book very suited for this analysis.

In *Method and Theoretical Framework*, I explain the concepts I use for the discourse analysis and why they are important for my research question. I start with the importance of the ‘Self/Other distinction’, which is foundational for my research. According to philosopher John Stuart Mill, “Otherness is the condition or quality of being different or “other,” particularly if the differences in question are strange, bizarre, or exotic” (Encyclopedia of qualitative research methods). Next, I clarify ‘national identity’, ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘whiteness’. These concepts are important because they are derived from the ‘Self/Other distinction’ and are useful to show how the elementary distinction of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ takes form (*my/our* national identity/culture/ethnicity as opposed to and constituted by the distinction with *your/their* national identity/culture/ethnicity). Moreover, I argue that these concepts and their varying interpretations lie at the core of the frustrations of the FP voters.

In the subsequent *research analysis*, I explore themes I encountered when reading the interviews in *KWAAD*. These themes play an important part in how the respondents in *KWAAD* construct the ‘Self’. The respondents oftentimes, both implicitly and explicitly, discuss their identity along the lines of (Dutch) ‘past’, ‘ideals’, ‘innocence and unmarkedness’ and ‘oppression’, all of which are related to the notions of national identity, multiculturalism and whiteness. In *The ‘Self’ as past* I discuss how the Dutch sense of ‘Self’ is related to a notion of national identity that is a static possession instead of an ever-changing process. In *The ‘Self’ in ideals* I illustrate how and why this notion of national identity is incompatible with the notion of multiculturalism. In *The ‘Self’ as unmarked and innocent* I describe in what way *whiteness* plays a role in this conflict. In *The ‘Self’ as oppressed* I show how these three previous themes cumulate into the main problem for the respondents; the fear that their identity is disappearing. Taken together, these elements help me paint a picture of how FP voters construct the ‘Self’ via the ‘Other’.

Method and Theoretical Framework

Method

In order to understand how FP voters construct the ‘Self’ via the ‘Other’, I analyze interviews of the respondents in *KWAAD* and link those to the discourse around Muslims and Moroccans. The interviews in *KWAAD* represent a certain discourse, which is linked to the more general discourse around Muslims as practiced by the Freedom party.

Discourse as a concept is made famous by the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault. By ‘discourse’ Foucault meant:

... a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. It is not purely a linguistic concept, but a combination of language and practice. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. (qtd. in Hall 29)

The discourse surrounding Muslims involves different kinds of (representational) texts, such as newspaper articles, statements and images, about any particular topic. As such, this discourse produces and sustains knowledge about this subject. Or, as Professor of Sociology Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber explains in *Feminist Research Practice*, discourses are ways of “referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice” (265). A particular discourse works as a “system of meanings created by a combination of texts and the social practices that inform them” (Hesse-Biber 265).

The discourse of Wilders consists of explicit insults towards Muslims, for instance, by using derogatory terms, such as the infamous ‘*kopvoddentax*’, (translates as ‘head rag tax’); the idea to tax Muslim women for wearing head scarves (Trouw). As Professor of anthropology Gloria Wekker states in *White Innocence* (2016), Wilders “effectively ... feeds the mind-set among the white Dutch population that finds Muslims inassimilable in the Netherlands” (110). Moreover, it is hard to forget his “fewer Moroccans” statement of March 12, 2014, when he alluded to ‘arranging’ fewer Moroccans in the Netherlands.

As cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall explains in *Representation* (2013), “knowledge linked to power not only assumes the authority of ‘the truth’, but has the power to *make itself true*” (33). Hence, when Wilders – who is in a position of power because of his public political status – makes truth claims about a group of people, these claims have the possibility to become true for many people.

FP voters have – just like non-FP voters – a particular set of meanings connected to (Dutch) Muslims and Moroccans. In the discourse surrounding this topic, a lot of meanings can be found. I examine the ways in which the respondents in *KWAAD* discuss Muslims and Moroccans in the Netherlands, in order to understand how they use this ‘Other’ to co-construct the ‘Self’. I analyze the discourse in the interviews of the respondents but I also link what they say to the general discourse around the subject of Muslims as used by Wilders and the Freedom Party, as FP voters subscribe to these views by casting votes for Wilders’ party.

The book *KWAAD*, first published in February 2017, contains a selection of extensive interviews with 31 ‘angry’ Dutch people about how they see immigrants. *KWAAD* is made up of thirty-one chapters, followed by a list of names, an epilogue and notes. The chapters are ordered to tell a semi-chronological story, loosely along the lines of some turning point moments, starting with the (reactions to the) assassination of politician Pim Fortuyn, who is often seen as the precursor of Wilders because of his anti-Islam rhetoric.⁵ Subsequently, the interviewees discuss how the Netherlands and Dutch culture has evolved (or deteriorated) since that moment. The book ends with the respondents contemplating to leave the country.

Niemöller introduces the topic of every chapter by sketching the context of the questions he asks, taking the reader by the hand while relaying the interviews. The writing style of *KWAAD* is informal, written in the language used by the respondents and often using direct quotes. Niemöller refrains from analyzing the responses in these chapters, making the interviews highly usable data.

I deduce several themes from the book that are all connected to the Dutch national identity, along which I analyze how the respondents in *KWAAD* construct the ‘Self’ via the ‘Other’. I found that the respondents often imply their identity along the lines of their past, their ideals, the markedness of the ‘Other’ - and thus their own unmarkedness - and being oppressed. These are all themes that cannot be separated from each other entirely, as they all intersect and correlate on multiple levels: past and ideals are connected via the (seeming) linearity of Western culture; being unmarked and whiteness lead to perceived oppression in multicultural society; feeling oppressed is related to the idea of identity as a possession, etc. Since these subjects all intersect, they allow me to paint a clear picture of the standpoints and self-image of FP voters.

⁵ Fortuyn was murdered only a few days before the general elections in 2002. His death augmented the cultural and political tensions within the Netherlands.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis is a combination of theories of representation, nationalism and multiculturalism, and the Dutch sense of self as described by Wekker. I start by explaining the importance of the ‘Self’, on the one hand in terms of the representation of ‘difference’ and on the other hand in the field of psychoanalysis. I then explain the concept of national identity and the role this plays in *KWAAD*. I continue by explaining multiculturalism and the conflicts that arise when juxtaposing the two notions of nationalism and multiculturalism. I end this theoretical framework by explaining the notion of whiteness and how this plays a role in the Dutch sense of self, nationalism and multiculturalism.

Self/Other distinction

In order to understand why the ‘Self’ is important in the context of FP-voters, I borrow from cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall, who describes different accounts on ‘representing difference’ and ‘Otherness’ in *Representation* (2013). The first account stems from linguistics, with linguist De Saussure as the main theorist, who, in short, argues that ‘difference matters because it is essential to meaning; without it, meaning could not exist’ (Hall 224). Meaning, according to this linguistic approach, is relational. The example used by Hall is that of *white/black*. The word *black* in itself carries no meaning, but we know what *black* means because we can relate it to *white*. It is the ‘*difference*’ between the two colors, which carries meaning (Hall 224). In other words, ‘meaning depends on the difference between opposites’ (Hall 225). Or, to use the example of *Self/Other*, the meaning of ‘self’ depends on the contrast between ‘Self’ and Other. ‘Self’, just like ‘Other’, does not carry independent meaning. However, while these binary oppositions on the one hand have the capacity to capture the diversity of the world within their extremes, on the other hand, this diversity is reduced into to a two-part system and in that process, over-simplifies said meaning (Hall 225).⁶ The differences between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ become amplified and essentialized for the purpose of the production of a clear and ‘fixed’ meaning, leaving all

⁶ For the purpose of this thesis, I constructed a similarly binary category of FP voters versus *non*, or *anti-FP* voters. I am aware of the essentializing character of this dichotomy, and that there are many shades of political affiliation in between these two poles. I believe, however, that this sharp distinction is necessary to make my argument.

nuances aside. Moreover, as philosopher Jacques Derrida argued, there is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition, where one of the poles is usually the dominant one. “We should really write, *white/black, men/women, masculine/feminine, Self/Other* to capture this power dimension in discourse”, argues Hall (qtd. in Hall 225, emphasis original). The second explanation of the importance of ‘difference’ which is necessary for my analysis, comes from the field of psychoanalysis. This account focuses on the role of ‘difference’ in our emotional life. This Freudian argument claims that “the Other is fundamental to the constitution of the self to us as subjects, and to sexual identity” (Hall 227). Although the Freudian ‘sexual identity’-reading is much contested because of the speculative character of it, it has been very influential in psychoanalysis. Different psychoanalysts have built further on these ideas. These psychoanalytical theories have in common that our subjectivities “depend on our unconscious relations with significant others” (Hall 227). Moreover, they assume that there is “no such thing as a given, stable inner core to ‘the self’ or to identity” (Hall 227). In sum, the sense of ‘Self’ is always in relation to the ‘Other’. It is formed via this “troubled, never-completed unconscious dialogue with – this internalization of – the ‘Other’” (Hall 227). Our sense of ‘Self’ is formed in relation to our complementing projection of the ‘Other’.

The ‘Self/Other distinction’ is detectable in multiple categories. In this thesis, I focus mainly on three categories that are all related to identity and migration, namely the national ‘Self’ versus the national ‘Other’; the cultural ‘Self’ versus the cultural ‘Other’ and the (non)-ethnic ‘Self’ versus the ethnic ‘Other’. In the next section I explain the concepts of ‘national identity’, ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘whiteness’ in and how they relate to the construction of the ‘Self’.

National Identity

The theme of ‘national identity’ is omnipresent throughout *KWAAD*, as there are constant comparisons between ‘Dutch’ and ‘non-Dutch’, between ‘us’ and ‘them’, between the national ‘Self’ and the national ‘Other’. This demarcation of, strictly taken, a geographical location, is constructed as a cultural ‘fact’. Sociology Professor Nira Yuval-Davis, argues in *Theorizing Gender and Nation*, that this concept of the ‘nation-state’, which assumes an equivalence between the boundaries of a nation and the boundaries of the inhabitants of said state, is ‘virtually everywhere a fiction’ (11). The idea that there is ‘a people’ that is ‘naturally’ connected by common denominators such as location, is an illusion. In every society, there are people who are not part of the hegemonic nation – by choice or by force.

Besides, there are people who *are* considered to be part of this national collectivity who live in other countries (Yuval-Davis 11). However, Yuval-Davis argues, this fiction is at the basis of nationalist ideologies (11). This fiction is also visible in the ideas about Dutch identity in *KWAAD*. The Dutch are perceived as a homogenous group and newcomers, or immigrants, are seen as a disturbance to that homogeneity. The difference between these groups is perceived to be a self-evident and static demarcation between the national ‘Self’ and the national ‘Other’.

Multiculturalism

The question that arises from this notion of national identity is: how to rhyme it with the notion of multiculturalism? As explained, national identity is constructed from various pillars, such as common language, territory, statehood or shared traditions. In a sense, this notion of national identity is inherently conflictual with the notion of multiculturalism. In a multicultural society, people do not always share the same history, or language even. However, the territory *is* shared. Professor of sociology Tariq Modood argues in *Difference, ‘Multi’ and Equality* that multiculturalism refers to “the struggle, the political mobilization but also the policy and institutional outcomes, to the forms of accommodation in which ‘differences’ are not eliminated, are not washed away, but to some extent recognized” (Modood 39). He makes a clear distinction between ‘assimilation’, ‘integration’ and ‘multiculturalism’: painting assimilation as a one-way process where the minorities adjust to the majority; integration as a two-way social interaction, where both the majority and the minorities need to act; and multiculturalism as an extension of integration; a two-way process, but with the addition that it takes into account the differences of the different groups (Modood 48). In the last thirty years in the Netherlands, according to Wekker, some shifts took place in how people think and speak about ‘integration’. Where we previously thought of this process more as participation in society while holding on to one’s own identity, we have now moved towards policies that ask of migrants not only to know the key values of Dutch society, but also to *internalize* them (Wekker 55). What becomes the baseline position from which the cultural ‘Self’ is demarcated when multiple cultures ‘compete’?

I argue that at the core of the misunderstanding between FP voters and non-FP voters, lies the disagreement about what the (Dutch) national identity is and what role multiculturalism should play in it.

Whiteness

Another important theme closely connected to that of the Dutch national identity and multiculturalism is the notion of whiteness. Wekker describes that whiteness as a racial position is “perceived as invisible, normal, without characteristics, nothingness” (Wekker 150). Being white is seen as the norm, and white people are seen as ‘just people’, which is recognizable in the rhetoric of the respondents in *KWAAD*. Professor of film studies Richard Dyer writes in *The Matter of Whiteness*, that “this assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colors are something else, is endemic to white culture” (Dyer 10). He argues that it is important to recognize that “everyone in this social order has been constructed in our political imagination as a racialized subject’ and thus that we should consider whiteness as well as blackness, in order ‘to make visible what is rendered invisible when viewed as the normative state of existence: the (white) point in space from which we tend to identify difference” (Dyer 11). In exploring the Dutch sense of self, it is important to take into account such a crucial element as whiteness, as it is the starting point from which we identify the ‘Other’. Wekker states that it is Dutch commonsense to speak about ethnicity only when it concerns ‘them’; ‘*allochthonen*’, the ‘Other’ (23). Moreover, as much as race in Dutch culture is denied to be a factor by (white) Dutch people, I argue, along with Wekker, that race is a ‘fundamental organizing grammar in Dutch society’, as Dutch society is structured (partly) by racial dominance (23). Race, and in particular whiteness, thus plays an important role in the construction of the FP-voting ‘Self’ via the construction of the ‘Other’, as I will demonstrate in my research analysis.

Research Analysis

The 'Self' as Past

When discussing how the 'Self' is constructed by FP voters via the 'Other', a recurring subject in *KWAAD* is that of the 'Self' as *past*. It is the idea that the true Dutch Self is already fleeing since the influx of other cultures, and is closely correlated with the fiction of the nation-state. Niemöller remarks that his respondents often express nostalgia for a country that they no longer recognize as such; a country that once was (43). Respondent Gielah for instance, explains her fear of losing the 'true' Dutch culture. A process which in her opinion, already started.

A wave of Americanization has come over us. I can't say either: what a shame that we don't sing the Dutch music anymore. But yeah. Not much Dutchness remains either. Everything dilutes, dilutes, dilutes. Well and then a culture dilutes. And on top of that you mix that with a growing Muslim population. How many people will know, in fifty years, what the true Dutch culture is? (Niemöller 67) ⁷

In this excerpt, she expresses that her sense of Dutch identity is decreasing with the increasing influences of different cultures. Being Dutch, in other words, means definitely not being American or Muslim. Dutchness, in her reading, is a monoculture that does not benefit from outside influences. More strikingly, however, is the fact that her sense of being Dutch is derived from the past. The future, in her reading, is a place where the Dutch 'Self' does not exist, after being diluted and replaced by this 'Other'.

An important ingredient for the construction of a nation – besides a common language, territory, statehood or shared traditions – is that of 'common destiny', according to Yuval-Davis. Yuval-Davis clarifies that being "oriented towards the future, rather than just the past" can justify a "sense of commitment" from people, and at the same time it can "explain the

⁷ Translated from: "Er is een golf van Amerikanisering over ons gekomen. Ik kan ook niet zeggen: wat jammer dat we de Nederlandse muziek niet meer zingen. Maar ja. Er blijft niet meer zo heel veel Nederlands over. Alles verwatert, verwatert, verwatert. Nou en dan verwatert een cultuur. En dan ga je ook nog eens vermengen met een steeds maar groeiende moslimbevolking. Hoeveel mensen zullen er over vijftig jaar nog weten wat de echte Nederlandse cultuur is?"

dynamic nature of any national collectivity” (19). Apparently, the destiny Gielah and other respondents have in mind for the Netherlands is not one of multiple cultures, whereas the reality is that Dutch politics has been producing policies to accommodate multiculturalism. In that regard, in our current nation, we cannot – completely – speak of a ‘common destiny’, because some of our citizens do not like the multicultural direction this country has taken. Modood argues that

Rather than derive a concept of multicultural politics from a concept of culture, it is better to build it up from the specific claims, implicit and explicit, of the postwar extra-European/non-white immigration ... to achieve some form of acceptance and equal membership. (Modood 40)

Modood claims that multiculturalism is not about cultural rights, but about recognizing the fact that post-immigration groups *exist* in western societies (39). The mere existence of people of non-Dutch cultures is reason for the respondents to de-identify with the Dutch sense of self. This reasoning is constantly present in the discourse of the *KWAAD*-respondents. They seem to believe that immigrants should assimilate, to them (the majority), but that the effect of their presence is a forced *integration*, where the majority has to adjust to the minorities just as well. This adjustment brings with it the (fear for) the loss of their own identity.

Respondent Alexander believes it is ‘stupid’ to think that cultures can be mixed. “You can’t mix cultures at all. Cultures are evolved and conservative. It is inherent to culture that it doesn’t simply mix and transform” (Niemöller 216).⁸ Moreover, according to Harm, a nation state can “only function properly when its mono-ethnic” (Niemöller 217).⁹

In the example of Gielah (and others in *KWAAD*), the ‘Self’ is *past*, and the ‘Other’ is *present*. The Self is slowly dying as the ‘new cultures’ disrupt and replace the old. I argue that thinking about identity as something that can be replaced by newcomers is linked to a specific understanding of identity. In *Thinking through the lens of translocational positionality: An*

⁸ Translated from: “Je kunt culturen helemaal niet mengen. Culturen zijn geëvolueerd, en behoudend. Het is inherent aan een cultuur dat die zich niet zomaar laat mengen en omvormen.”

⁹ Translated from: “Een natiestaat kan bovendien alleen goed functioneren als die mono-etnisch is.”

intersectionality frame for understanding identity and belonging, professor of sociology Floya Anthias reflects on the concepts of belonging and identity in the modern era. She argues that “identity is a key concept in contemporary discussions of migration” (Anthias 6). She strikingly states that “there is a tendency to treat [identity] as a possessive attribute of individuals or groups rather than a process” (Anthias 7). Dutch identity is seen, by the respondents in *KWAAD*, as a static - and thus timeless - *possession* instead of a process - with an uncertain future. Dutch Identity is something that they *own*. As such, Dutch identity can be stolen from them. In their perspective, this theft is happening because of the influx of different cultures.

Moreover, this binary understanding of culture means that the Dutch identity is in a zero-sum conflict with outside influences, which can only lead to the conclusion that the Dutch culture should be hermetically closed off, instead of acknowledging that Dutch (or any, for that matter) identity has – at a minimum – a porous border where exchange takes place. Since this is a foundation on which the ‘Self’ is built for FP voters, it echoes in the other elements that make up the ‘Self’.

The ‘Self’ in ideals

In the explanation of the ‘Self’ in ideals we find a similar reading of the role of migrants as invaders of the true Dutch ‘Self’. The respondents paint a clear picture of what they believe to be their values and how Muslims are unable to abide by them.

Fascinatingly, between the explanation of these ideals and the practice of them, there is often a paradox present. When describing the Dutch ideals, people use words like ‘tolerance’, ‘respect’ and ‘freedom’, while simultaneously expressing intolerance, disrespect and the will to constrict certain freedoms towards those who they consider to be ‘Other’. For instance, in the next excerpt psychotherapist Jaap declares the following about Dutch people:

I love that this tiny people are kind of mild. No death penalty, that sort of things. And respect for others. We are paying the price for that though, because now all of a sudden, we have to have respect for that fucking Islam. (Niemöller 71)¹⁰

¹⁰ Translated from: “Ik hou wel van dat volkje dat een beetje mild is. Geen doodstraf, zulke dingen. En respect voor anderen. Daar krijgen we nu wel de rekening voor betaald, want nu moeten we ineens respect hebben voor die kut-islam.”

A claim to the title of a ‘respectful people’ is made, while in the same breath a whole religion (Islam) is disrespected. This is another example of how the influx of this ‘Other’ is seen as a disturbance of the great thing we had going on before, reminiscent of the ‘Self as *past*’-theme. Yvonne states:

The Dutch are a people that are tolerant and don’t give a shit about the rest of the world. ... Because we are very tolerant towards minorities. Something that has now gotten completely out of hand, obviously. ... And gay marriage, we were the first country to do this. ... Until the Muslims came and ruined everything we were a nice country anyway. (Niemöller 70) ¹¹

To be tolerant or respectful is, according to these respondents, limited to the people they agree or identify with, which is a contradiction in terms. Moreover, it carries an important clue as to how Muslims are perceived. Apparently, ‘they’ are unable to assimilate to the Dutch standards, such as approving of gay marriage and the women’s liberation, which have become, as Wekker effectively put it, the ‘litmus test for modernity’ (110). This discourse of Islam as a backward culture has been voraciously used by PVV, for instance, in the parties’ electoral program of 2012, when they explicitly stated that they would “defend our gays against advancing Islam” (Wekker 110). This typically homonationalist argument - that exploits the LGBTQI communities to defend nationalist and mostly anti-Islam ideologies - is applied a lot as a way to describe the unassimilability of Muslims in the ‘West’. ‘We’ are progressive and have built certain infrastructures where our women and gays can be ‘free’, but because of the presence of Muslims in our country, those values are jeopardized. This carries a similar contradiction of double standards for different cultures; it withholds the fact that it was until very recent that gay people did not have equal rights, and it implies that ‘our people’ are not prejudiced towards gays, despite the many incidents against gay people. Moreover, it suggests that their ‘Muslim culture’ is unable to change. Again, we see how this

¹¹ Translated from: “Nederland is een volk van mensen die tolerant zijn en schijt hebben aan de rest van de wereld. ... Omdat we heel tolerant zijn tegenover minderheden. Wat nu natuurlijk compleet uit de hand is gelopen. ... En de gay marriage, daar waren wij ook het eerste land mee. ... Tot de moslims alles kwamen verzieken waren we toch een leuk land.”

notion of culture as a static *property* results in feelings of hostility, whereas treating it as a process would allow for much more leniency.

The question that surfaces is: What do the paradoxes, or contradictions in the descriptions of the ‘Self’ say *about* this supposed ‘Self’? I would argue that there is at least a lack of self-reflexivity. It is a ‘Self’ that wants nothing of the ‘Other’ except for its absence. The ‘Self’ is progressive, pro-gay, respectful, tolerant, mono-cultural and jeopardized, all of which should be self-evident. It is an unmerited position, that exempts from all responsibilities of cohabitation. Which relates back to the subject of whiteness; one cannot improve what one cannot see.

As will become clear in the following sections, the combination of being exempt from responsibility and regarding culture as ‘their’ property, *while* living in a multicultural society, results in toxicity.

The ‘Self’ as Unmarked and Innocent

The subjects of ethnicity, race and religion are perhaps the most arduous, because these are the areas where we recognize most of the PVV discourse, and where most explicitly the category of ‘Other’ is outlined, and hierarchized. Moreover, there are so many derogatory things said about Muslims, that it is hard to summarize. Therefore, I tried to sketch out some major themes.

Fascinatingly, the words ‘culture’ and ‘ethnicity’ or ‘race’ are continuously merged when discussing Muslims and Dutch Moroccans. It is, as philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti and Gender Studies Professor Gabriele Griffin called it in *Whiteness and European Situatedness*, the ‘racialization of culture’, which turns cultural attributes into biological arguments (Braidotti and Griffin 228). The ‘Muslim culture’ is naturalized and thus seen as unchangeable; reminiscent, again, of culture as possession instead of process. An idea exists of a uniform group of Moroccans, sometimes coalesced with ‘Muslims’ or ‘the Arab world’, and this ‘group’ is seen as the ‘true allochthones’¹². Harm sums up this sentiment in the following statement about allochthones in the workforce: “There were a couple of Surinamese and Antilleans. I don’t even consider them as

¹² I use the word ‘allochthone’, because it is used so often in *KWAAD*. I know that this word is – at the least – contestable.

allochthones, really. These are not Muslims” (Niemöller 166).¹³ This categorizing of allochthones is a phenomenon that Gloria Wekker also describes in *White Innocence*: “The culturally inferior has increasingly come to be embodied Muslim men and women, while Surinamese and southern Europeans ... have, ... worked their way out of the category of allochthonous people” (55). Muslims have become, in line with Wilders’ discourse, the least Dutch of all the non-white Dutch people. They are the furthest away from the ‘Self’ of the FP voters.

When discussing race and ethnicity, another interesting paradox emerges. This is the paradox, reminiscent of the paradoxes described in *‘The ‘Self’ in ideals’*, where Dutch people claim to not be racist, but making racist statements simultaneously. Cees for instance, explains:

How should I say this politely. I am definitely not racist. But they always blame the others. With those Surinamese, you could talk nicely about food and just work really hard. But those Moroccans; they are very easily offended. Very typical. It’s always someone else’s fault. Total lack of self-reflection. Very short fuses. (Niemöller 167)¹⁴

The Moroccans are seen as a uniform category with certain *innate* characteristics. Not only are they contrasted with the (assumedly white) Dutch ‘Self’, but they are contrasted with these other ‘Other’s’; the Surinamese. This double juxtaposition highlights the hierarchy behind the categorization. The ‘true’ Dutch Self is at the top of the chain since they are very self-reflexive and tolerant, followed by the Surinamese who are at least hardworking, but Moroccans are the lowest of the low.

Wekker poignantly argues that this paradox lies at the heart of our nation: race elicits a passionate, forceful and even aggressive response from the white population, while simultaneously “denial, disavowal and elusiveness reign supreme” (2016, 1). In the

¹³ Translated from: “Die beschouw ik eigenlijk niet eens als allochtoon. Dat zijn namelijk geen moslims.”

¹⁴ Translated from: “Hoe moet ik dat nu netjes zeggen. Ik ben absoluut geen racist. Maar de schuld ligt steeds bij de ander. Met die Surinamers kon je gezellig over eten praten en gewoon keihard werken. Maar met Marokkanen; ze hebben zulke lange tenen. Heel typisch. Het ligt altijd aan iemand anders. Totaal geen zelfreflectie. Heel korte lontjes.”

description of Muslims, explicit language is used, while this ‘race paradox’ is constantly present. Jaap describes that his antipathy towards Muslims is almost physical: “I find it a shitty mentality. Not because they’re Muslim, it’s just a shitty mentality. Compulsive, tedious. Disrespectful. Coarse. Backwards. Egoistic. *Kutvolk!*” (Niemöller 241).¹⁵ Similarly, when asked about the possibility of a moderate Islam, Chantal (1973) responds negatively: “That moderate Muslim will hold your ankles when an extremist cuts your head off” (Niemöller 242).¹⁶ No distinction is made between extremists and ‘regular’ Muslims, emphasizing the distinction between Muslim and non-Muslim; between ‘Self’ and ‘Other’.

Chapter eight of *KWAAD* is devoted to sexual atrocities that Muslims (allegedly) commit. Nathalie explains: “I found that the Moroccan boys treated the girls disrespectfully. ... Because I’m Western, I am thus a prostitute.” (Niemöller 79).¹⁷ Wekker deduces three frequently appearing patterns of racism: sexualization, general inferiorization and criminalization (39). All of these patterns are visible in the examples above. Wekker reads these configurations in light of patterns in the Dutch *cultural archive*, stemming from our colonial past (39). I would argue that these descriptions are, besides a derivative of our colonial past, directly traceable to the discourse used by Wilders. Painting the ‘Other’ as savage, criminal and oversexualized, allows for the ‘Self’ to be civilized, innocent and modest; the ‘Self’ is unmarked, where the ‘Other’ is marked.

Innocence is a keyword in this analysis, as hidden in these sets of words lies an overlapping masculinization of the ‘Other’, where the ‘Self’ is described with words that are correlated with femininity. The ‘Self’ is painted as a frail woman that needs protection from this masculine savage ‘Other’. This aspect of the sense of self from the FP voters is clearly visible in the following chapter, where I explain how the respondents feel oppressed.

¹⁵ Translated from: “Ik vind het een kutmentaliteit. Niet omdat ze moslims zijn, het is gewoon een rotmentaliteit. Dwingend, drammerig. Respectloos. Lomp. Achterlijk. Egoïstisch. *Kutvolk!*”

¹⁶ Translated from: “Die gematigde moslim houdt je enkels vast als een extremist je kop eraf hakt.”

¹⁷ Translated From: “Ik vond dat de Marokkaanse jongens respectloos met de meisjes omgingen. ... Omdat ik westers ben, ben ik dus een hoer.”

The 'Self' as oppressed

So far, we have established that the sense of 'Self' of the FP voters in *KWAAD* is derived from a notion of national identity that treats culture as a possession instead of a process, which leads to intolerance for different cultures. Furthermore, we have seen that Muslims, who are the ultimate 'Other', are painted as intolerant, disrespectful, backwards, aggressive, inferior, criminal and oversexualized, which leaves the 'Self' as an innocent, feminized victim of the presence of the invasive 'Other'. The accumulation of these characterizations is seen in the way the respondents label themselves as oppressed.

Many respondents report being marginalized and excluded from the public debate by the dominant mainstream. They are suspicious of the educational system, politics and politicians and the media, who are – in their eyes – oblivious to the dangers and “instead of inform” us, they “tell us how to think” (Niemöller 11). They feel, in other words, like the mainstream media already capitulated under the 'Muslim' command.

Economy student Amber, experiences the 'politically correct mechanisms' – which can also be explained as the voices of those who were previously unheard because of their marginalized position – as a huge problem too. She envisions a future where no one can express their opinion anymore.

You used to be able to say; 'oh come on, don't be so crazy, can't I just make a joke about a weak person? Am I not allowed to portray an African who dances funny? It's all forbidden now. Everything is connected to intentions. ... And to be able to honestly say what you think, is no longer a given. (Niemöller 13)¹⁸

She clarifies that freedoms that they used to have are taken away, and does not understand why they are no longer 'allowed' to do certain things, since there are no bad intentions. This appeal to 'intentions' is something Wekker writes about too. She describes the Dutch, white, sense of self in the following manner: “We are a small nation, innocent; we are inherently antiracist; we do not have bad intentions” (80). Again, this innocence leaves no room for

¹⁸ Translated from: “Vroeger kon je nog zeggen: ‘Ach doe toch niet zo gek, ik kan toch gewoon een grapje maken over een zwak iemand? Ik mag toch een Afrikaan neerzetten die grappig danst, of zo?’ Mag allemaal niet meer. Dat wordt allemaal met intenties verbonden. ... En eerlijk zeggen wat je denkt, is niet meer vanzelfsprekend.”

responsibility in social interactions, and whiteness has prevented from feeling this responsibility before.

I argue that the feelings of loss and oppression that the FP voters experience, is connected to whiteness. Where whiteness as a racial position has – for most white people – been invisible (Dyer 10), the emancipation of different minorities and the presence of many non-white citizen has awoken a sense of resentment. Suddenly they are made aware of the fact that they have a skin color and that they are just as much a factor in the social atmosphere. Or, to use Wekkers' words, naming 'whiteness' displaces them from the unmarked status (24).

The anxiety concerning the loss of dominance from the white 'race' is stark in the discourse of the *KWAAD* respondents. There is even suspicion about the plans to destroy the white 'race' as a whole: 'The *white genocide* is really going on', says Anne (Niemöller 217).¹⁹ The presence of the Islamic 'Other', with its' characterization as aggressive and dominant, combined with this narrow, conservative idea of nation-state, is such a threat to the 'Self' that there is a fear of losing this 'Self' altogether. The culture, as an *extension of the 'Self'*, is dying.

However dangerous and unfounded Wilders' rhetoric is (and I, for one, are of the opinion that he and his rhetoric are very dangerous), within the context described above and accepting the foundational understanding of national identity as static and incompatible with outside influences, it becomes self-evident that 'our' culture should be defended against outside influences, most notably against Muslims. Accepting this fallacy, it makes sense that all moderate voices are a menace and a vote for Wilders and his radical views is the only alternative, as he does not let himself be silenced by the dominant mainstream media. When one departs from the understanding of national identity as a cherished possession, he becomes - instead of a hate mongering despot - a self-sacrificing, heroic activist who is 'our' last and best hope.

¹⁹ Translated from: "De *white genocide* is echt gaande".

Conclusion

With this research, I wanted to understand the position of FP voters, and why they find Wilder's language appealing. In order to achieve this goal, I analyzed the discourse around Muslims and Moroccans of the respondents in *KWAAD*, to understand how they construct their sense of 'Self' in relation to this 'Other'. I used the concepts 'national identity' and 'multiculturalism' to outline the national and cultural 'Self'. I used the concept of 'whiteness' to examine what role the Dutch 'Self' has in this changing society.

Subsequently, in *The 'Self' as past* I explained how this idea of identity as possession is expressed via a nostalgia for the past. The country they used to 'have' has ceased to exist since the migrants came. In *The 'Self in ideals* we see the same reasoning when the ideals of the (past) 'Self' are under attack because of the newcomers, who have, similarly, identities that are just as static and unchangeable. 'Their' culture and the ideals that belong to this culture are just as immobile as 'ours', and as such it is not a negotiation of ideas, i.e. a struggle for a new balance, but more a zero-sum war of ideas, where there is only the dichotomy of winners and losers with the 'Self' at stake. In *The 'Self as unmarked*, the 'Other' is painted as a savage; aggressive, masculine and oversexualized. This demarcation functions as a way to contrast the 'Self' as civilized, innocent and feminized. Consequently, in *The 'Self as oppressed* this savage 'Other' oppresses this poor feminine and frail 'Self'. Based on this research, I argue that at the core of the frustration of the FP voters lies the disagreement about what (Dutch national) identity is and how it relates to multiculturalism.

The fundamental disagreement is about the 'entity' of (national) identity. FP voters see their national identity as an inherently static *possession* instead of a process. This perspective lies at the basis of the themes that I found in *KWAAD*. The consequence of treating national identity as a possession is that it can be taken away, which renders the ('Self' and culture of these) citizens vulnerable in the light of change. Newcomers consequently are seen as identity thieves instead of partakers in the process of multiculturalism and ever evolving culture.

Further research can be done on how to apply these findings about varying understandings of national identity. Education and/or extensive media campaigns can play important roles in the process of communicating and negotiating an understanding that can help bridge the gap between both sides of the debate about national identity.

Nevertheless, by doing this research I found a way to understand the position of FP voters. When accepting the (in my conviction erroneous) foundational understanding of national identity as static and incompatible with outside influences, it makes sense that all

moderate voices are a menace and a vote for Wilders and his radical views is the only alternative, as he does not let himself be silenced by the dominant mainstream media. It would, indeed, be frightening, to believe that your culture and the people you consider to be part of it, are in the process of being erased by an aggressive invader, while those who express these ‘facts’ are silenced by the majority that does not see the imminent danger. Wilders becomes - instead of a hate mongering despot - a self-sacrificing, heroic activist who is ‘our’ last and best hope.

Therefore, instead of *KWAAD*, the book by Niemöller might as well be called *BANG (AFRAID)*, as it is mostly fear that dominates their discourse. Understanding their position, allows for the public debate to take a different direction. Accepting that the debate is dominated by polarizing opinions about ‘more or less’ refugees or migrants is only treating the symptoms of the disease. What *should* be discussed is the future of our country as a ‘multicultural society’ and the inevitability of (ex)change. This would take the sting out of the debate and away from Muslims, and moreover, would make way for discussions about policies instead of people.

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