

# OLD AND NEW ANTI-FASCISM

Evolutions of anti-fascist action in the Netherlands,  
1945-1989

Master Thesis RMA History

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## **Abstract**

This master thesis deals with three different periods of anti-fascism activism in the Netherlands between 1945 and 1989. Using Dan Stone's theory of the downfall of the anti-fascist consensus and Nigel Copsey's concept of the anti-fascist minimum, it asks the question what role anti-fascism has played as a structuring force in Dutch politics in the post-war era. Three different waves of anti-fascism are identified, during which ideological components significantly varied, leading to different views of what constituted the fascist threat. The main argument is that anti-fascism provided the left with a discourse to express anxieties about the survival of democracy, was driven by shifting narratives and interpretations of World War II and formed a potential instrument for intra-left cooperation.

*Image used on cover: IISG BG D7/472, De Rooie Prent, 'Geef fascisme geen kans!', Amsterdam 1984.*

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## Preface

Researching the history of anti-fascism in the Netherlands was never only an academic effort. Writing this master thesis also amounted to me trying to make sense of years of disconcerting political developments. Shocked by the sight of authoritarian leaders putting the screws on their fledgling democracies, populist forces gaining traction in long-established ones and the worst-case scenario in the 2016 US elections becoming a reality, I thought back to a question everyone around me seemed to dismiss out of hand back when I was in secondary school: could fascism ever return? Would the West ever again convert to tyrannical governance? Are we already seeing the beginning of this? Or is this idea merely an overblown exaggeration based on fear? In any case, I was not the only one who was struggling with these questions. Especially in the wake of Trump's election, the F-word seemed to be everywhere, as even eminent scholars did not shun comparisons between our modern times and the 1930s. As it happened, by this time I had been working on a research tutorial with dr. Frans-Willem Lantink in which we strove towards a definition of anti-fascism. This is when I learned about the countless ways opposition against "fascism" – however it was defined – continued to shape European politics even after World War II. Even though this research brought up the heinous features of post-war anti-fascism as well, the notion of fearing the prospect of a return to fascism and wanting to do something about it still resonated with me. It might not be far off to say that I wanted to study anti-fascist thought in order to decide whether comparisons to fascism were valid or useful, and if so, what this prospect meant for Western democracies.

However, it has also been a thrill to have taken part in the burgeoning anti-fascist scholarship, which has been revitalized by a surge of public interest in a topic many could not care less about only a few years ago. I had the privilege of experiencing this firsthand at the international conference *Fascism and Antifascism in Our Time: Critical Investigations* in Hamburg and Lüneburg in November 2017. I would like to thank the Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung and Rutgers University for making this event possible. Most of all, I want to extend my gratitude to the many scholars who spent time with a junior researcher, exchanging ideas, providing extraordinary insight into the academical world and generally making the experience a very memorable one.

Nevertheless, this thesis most of all represents the end of the road after years of excellent education at Utrecht University. In 2016, I became part of a small group of prospective scholars that had enrolled in the Research Master History. Immediately bonded by what we jokingly referred to as the “hazing” of the first weeks, we came to enjoy the opportunities, knowledge and contacts that were available. I personally gained much from the close cooperation with many scholars that I admire. I am especially grateful to prof. dr. Ido de Haan for overseeing this thesis. His critical reflections, sense of humor and everlasting patience were paramount in maintaining the pleasure in this research and bringing it to a satisfactory conclusion. The comments, advice and reassurances of Iva Vukušić were also dearly appreciated in this regard. Furthermore, I am deeply indebted to dr. Lantink, whose courses on political ideologies were essential to my professional development and extended into the tutorial that laid the foundation for this thesis. Many thanks also go out to prof. dr. Oscar Gelderblom and dr. Willemijn Ruberg, who coordinated the master’s program and its often-stressed students not with ease, but to much success. Lastly, I have much to thank to my fellow students. Besides jokes about Karl Marx or Hercules’ big stick, they have taught me that research should never be conducted by one’s lonesome. All deserve to be mentioned here: Amir Taha, Annelotte Janse, Eva Zeilstra, Lenna Lammertink, Luuc Ritmeester, Marlon Donck, Marta Montebovi, Sebastiaan van der Bij and Wouter van Leeuwen.

Although the research master sometimes hardly allowed for it, I have enjoyed a life outside of academia as well. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to many dear friends, who kept me sane throughout the past months with their careful listening, thoughtful advice and much-appreciated distractions. Through all my experiences the past year, I have learned how lucky I am to be surrounded by so many caring and inspiring people. Finally, I am truly grateful for the loving support of my parents. Whereas I sometimes felt disappointed or frustrated about my work, their confidence and faith in my abilities never receded. This thesis cannot be dedicated to anybody but them.

## Glossary

|       |   |
|-------|---|
| AFFRA | Anti Fascisties FRont Amsterdam                           |
| AFKU  | Anti-Fascistische Komité Utrecht                          |
| ANJV  | Algemeen Nederlands Jeugd Verbond                         |
| ARP   | Anti-Revolutionaire Partij                                |
| BP    | Boerenpartij  |
| BVD   | Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst                            |
| CD    | Centrum Democraten  |
| CDA   | Christen-Democratisch Àppel                               |
| CNV   | Christelijk Nationaal Verbond                             |
| CP    | Centrumpartij   |
| CPN   | Communistische Partij van Nederland                       |
| D'66  | Democraten '66  |
| EdD   | Eenheid door Democratie                                   |
| EVC   | Eenheids Vakcentrale                                      |
| EVP   | Evangelische Volkspartij                                  |
| FJG   | Federatie van Jongerengroepen van de Partij van de Arbeid |
| GDR   | German Democratic Republic (East Germany)                 |
| JOF   | Jongerenorganisatie tegen Opkomend Fascisme               |
| KVP   | Katholieke Volkspartij                                    |
| KWJ   | Katholieke Werkende Jeugd                                 |
| NATO  | North Atlantic Treaty Organization                        |
| NPD   | Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands                 |
| NSB   | Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging                         |
| NVU   | Nederlandse Volks-Unie                                    |
| NVV   | Nederlands Verbond van Vakbewegingen                      |
| PPR   | Politieke Partij Radikalen                                |
| PSP   | Pacifistisch-Socialistische Partij                        |
| PvdA  | Partij van de Arbeid                                      |
| SJ    | Socialistische Jeugd van Nederland                        |
| SVB   | Studentenvakbeweging                                      |
| SWP   | Socialistische Werkers Partij                             |
| VU    | Vrije Universiteit  |
| VVD   | Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie                   |

## Introduction

In the preface to an April 2017 interview with researcher Willem Huberts, who had recently acquired his doctorate researching fascist organizations in the Netherlands until the end of World War II, the *NRC Handelsblad* noted his promoters had wanted him to investigate similar groups past 1945. Huberts argued against this pursuit because, in his view, the end of the war constituted a breaking point in the definition of fascism. ‘Before the war, fascism was simply one of various political ideologies’, he states in the interview, ‘[It was] an ideology common people could relate to as well. Respectable politicians like Churchill and Colijn expressed appreciation for Mussolini. Afterwards, it became an extreme option. Since then, fascism hasn’t indicated a political conviction, it’s become a swear word.’<sup>1</sup> Setting aside the fact other scholars have been less squeamish in designating the label to organizations in the post-war Netherlands, Huberts’ argument bears notable resemblance to the change of definition of fascism’s political counterpart. Anti-fascism is often considered to have been a militant practice exclusive to the radical left, without any connection to the heroic opposition against “actual” fascists during the inter-war and war years. Historically, post-war anti-fascists have been criticized for watering down the meaning of fascism, using it as an insult rather than a historical or theoretical referent.<sup>2</sup> Thus, after President Trump infamously claimed ‘very fine people’ had been present on both sides of the 2017 Charlottesville protests, he explicitly referred to Antifa as ‘pretty bad dudes’, reinforcing a commonly held definition of anti-fascism as nothing more than militant violence.<sup>3</sup> Puzzlingly, however, the marginal and maligned role of anti-fascism as an ideology or identity within a society, Dan Stone argues, that was constructed on the basis of what he has named the anti-fascist consensus: the primary shaping force of post-war politics which prompted Western European states to carry out fundamental cultural and economic reforms to prevent the pre-war conditions that facilitated the rise of fascism from re-emerging.<sup>4</sup> Anti-fascism, rather than being restricted to a political position or

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Is er een Nederlands fascisme geweest?’, *NRC Handelsblad*, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/04/28/onbehagen-voedt-fascisme-8445808-a1556293>, 28-04-2017, last accessed on 16-04-2018.

<sup>2</sup> Mercer, B., ‘Specters of Fascism: The Rhetoric of Historical Analogy in 1968’, *The Journal of Modern History* 88 (2016) nr. 1, 96-129, 96.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Trump revives criticism of ‘both sides’ in Charlottesville’, *The Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/14/trump-charlottesville-both-sides-tim-scott>, 14-09-2017, last accessed on 18-04-2018.

<sup>4</sup> Stone, D., *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe since 1945*, Oxford 2014, 9.

militant activism, is thus conceived of as a powerful political force.

Nonetheless, scholarly studies of this phenomenon have been relatively rare. Most of these have focused on the anti-fascist opposition of the 1930s to the 1940s and its legacy, but very few have aimed to discuss it as a currently relevant subject. What little research has been done on anti-fascism as a diachronic phenomenon has focused on countries formerly governed by native fascist regimes or ones which had successfully defied domestic fascism. A perspective on countries formerly occupied by Nazi-Germany and other fascist regimes has been sorely missing. The Netherlands is one example of one of these, where also relatively few historical works have examined anti-fascism as a multifaceted phenomenon lasting beyond the war. Therefore, questions abound. How has the term “anti-fascism” been invoked after 1945, by whom and to what purposes? Who adopted anti-fascism as an ideology, an identity even? What personal, domestic and foreign developments were primary factors in shaping the way anti-fascists conceptualized fascism? Is it even possible to speak of a consistent anti-fascist movement lasting throughout the post-war age? These questions revolve around the fundamental issue addressed in this thesis: what role did anti-fascism continue to play in Dutch politics from the end of War II to the end of the Cold War?

### Historiography

Studies of anti-fascism conducted during the Cold War primarily celebrated national resistance movements, neglecting the amount of support for and collaboration with fascism. This period is therefore sometimes referred to as ‘the anti-fascist paradigm’.<sup>5</sup> As the first attempt to provide a synthesis and a comparison of European anti-fascist movements, the publication of Jacques Droz’ *Histoire de l’anti-fascisme en Europe, 1923-1939* in 1985 was a rare exception.<sup>6</sup> In the works of authors adhering to the theory of totalitarianism, anti-fascism represented nothing more than a communist scheme to trick democratic parties into united fronts against fascism, with François Furet even reducing it to a Comintern invention.<sup>7</sup> Labeling it a ‘Stalinist tactic of infiltration and subversion’, Norman Davies considered anti-fascism

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<sup>5</sup> García, H., ‘Transnational History: A New Paradigm for Anti-Fascist Studies?’, *Contemporary European History* 25 (2016) nr. 4, 563-72, 565.

<sup>6</sup> García, H., Yusta, M., Tabet, X. and Clímaco, C., ‘Introduction. Beyond Revisionism’, in: García, H., Yusta, M., Tabet, X. and Clímaco, C. (ed.), *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present*, New York 2016, 1-11, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Traverso, E., ‘Antifascism between Collective Memory and Historical Revisions’, in: *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present*, New York 2016, 321-38, 328.



nothing more than ‘empty vessel’ that provided its supporters with an enemy, but not an belief system of its own.<sup>8</sup> Such a narrow view of anti-fascism was opposed by a post-revisionist turn that emphasized its connections to political movements and cultures outside of communism. These analyses created possibilities for the analysis of other forms of anti-fascism, most notably liberal or conservative anti-fascism.<sup>9</sup>

However, “anti-fascism” has proven an elusive concept because scholars have assigned it a great variety of meanings without necessarily clarifying how these are all connected or separated. Where Michael Seidman feels free to speak of anti-fascism as an ideology, other scholars have packaged the concept in more careful wordings. Nigel Copsey has outright warned against elevating it to this status since anti-fascists are merely united by their desire to combat fascism, but greatly differ in their strategies, interpretations of fascism and their ideas regarding the restructuring of post-fascist society. To further explain why he does not consider anti-fascism an ideology, Copsey makes use of Michael Freeden’s morphology of ideologies, which distinguishes between core, adjacent and peripheral ideological concepts. Whereas the core consists of ‘ineliminable key concepts’ that are fleshed out by adjacent concepts, peripheral concepts are situated on the perimeter of an ideology, being ‘historically context-bound and therefore more open to change within the broader framework set by the core concepts.’<sup>10</sup> Copsey identifies anti-fascism as such a peripheral ideological concept, which ‘reacts [emphasis original] to fascism as a phenomenon antithetical to core and adjacent (Enlightenment) conceptions of humanity and society.’<sup>11</sup> In other words: anti-fascism is a political concept that makes no sense just by itself, as it ‘can only be understood when examined within a particular idea-environment of surrounding concepts.’<sup>12</sup> Whenever fascism comes to pose urgent threat, anti-fascism, as a peripheral component, becomes significant to the core, whose survival it now must fight for.<sup>13</sup>

Still, disagreements and definitions remain, some of which are influenced by personal experience or subjective judgement. Whereas Antonia Grunenberg defined anti-fascism as a myth, ‘a complex of ideas, images and symbols that divided the world into two hostile camps

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<sup>8</sup> Davies, N., *Europe at War, 1939-1945. No Simple Victory*, Oxford 2004.

<sup>9</sup> García et al, ‘Beyond Revisionism’, 4; García, ‘Transnational History’, 565.

<sup>10</sup> Freeden, M., *Ideology. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2003, 61-2.

<sup>11</sup> Copsey, N., ‘Preface: Towards a New Anti-Fascist ‘Minimum’?’, in: Copsey, N., Olechnowicz, A. (eds.), *Varieties of anti-fascism: Britain in the inter-war period*, London 2010, xiv-xxi, xx.

<sup>12</sup> Freeden, *Ideology*, 61.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

– fascists and antifascists – and subordinated all political judgement to its relentless and Manichaen logic’, authors like Alberto de Benardi have emphasized the generative abilities of anti-fascism outside of combating fascism.<sup>14</sup> De Benardi’s main contribution in this regard was to characterize anti-fascism as a political culture that posed an alternative to fascist national identity, forming the basis of a new world order.<sup>15</sup> This line of thinking was followed by Stéfanie Prezioso, who has argued that Italian anti-fascism, as manifested in the Giustizia e Libertà movement, was rooted not just in the desire to produce an interpretative framework to analyze the concept of fascism and the failure of democracy, but also in the ambition to establish a genuinely democratic state.<sup>16</sup> Anti-fascism was therefore also an identity, which was international volunteers in the Spanish Civil War defined as ‘not (...) a doctrine or ideology but as an ethos, a way of being in the world’, a shared ‘common humanity’ and a strong belief in a cause, which, to former anti-fascists like Eric Hobsbawm, remains pure and innocent even in hindsight.<sup>17</sup> To Copsey, this self-identification is central to the definition of anti-fascism. In his work it is considered irrelevant whether the assessment of political enemies as fascist is accurate. Accordingly, even communists who branded social democrats as “social fascists” before the Popular Fronts of the 1930s could rightfully be regarded as anti-fascists.<sup>18</sup> The fact that the term “anti-fascism” has acquired so many different meanings is thus due to both its many different historical uses. However, it is also the result of the historiographical fragmentation of anti-fascist studies. Therefore, to make sense of the various settings in which scholars have discussed anti-fascism, it would be helpful to imagine the historiography as divided into three divisions, all of which remain relevant in contemporary research.

### **Historical anti-fascism**

Within the largest portion of contemporary literature, anti-fascism is studied as a historical phenomenon that occurred between 1922 and 1945, starting with the advent of Mussolini’s regime and ending with the defeat of the Axis powers. Such studies are still far-outnumbered by studies of historical fascism. By now it has become a cliché for scholars of anti-fascism, when arguing for the relevance of their research, to call attention to the tiny amount of

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Rabinbach, A., ‘Introduction: Legacies of Antifascism’, *New German Critique* 67 (1996), 3-17, 4.

<sup>15</sup> García et al, ‘Beyond Revisionism’, 4.

<sup>16</sup> Prezioso, S., ‘Antifascism and Anti-Totalitarianism: The Italian Debate’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 43 (2008) nr. 4, 555-72, 556-7.

<sup>17</sup> Rabinbach, ‘Legacies of Antifascism’, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Copsey, ‘Preface’, xiv-v.

WorldCat and Google hits searching “anti-fascism” brings up when compared to “fascism”, even though the former was eventually the more powerful and successful force.<sup>19</sup> However, while studies of anti-fascism as a historical occurrence floundered after the downfall of the anti-fascist paradigm, they have recently become fashionable because of the rise of transnational research strategies and methodologies with which new questions are currently pursued in academia. This constitutes the most major development within contemporary anti-fascist studies. Whereas studies of anti-fascist movements used to be fragmented, today contemporary scholars inspired by transnational methodologies tend to regard historical anti-fascism as a transnational movement, for three primary reasons that are outlined in the *Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History*.

Firstly, anti-fascism was closely linked to political movements like socialism and communism, but also liberalism and political Catholicism, which had established international networks and undertook activities that crossed national borders. For the best example of this, one might consider the countless campaigns organized with the aim of showing international solidarity with imprisoned political enemies of Nazi Germany, and the victims of fascist military aggression in the Spanish Civil War and Abyssinia.

Secondly, the spread of political refugees from fascist states established a diaspora of exiles that created an anti-fascist culture in European metropolises. Anti-fascists shared a recognition of their common transnational existence and addressed the dangers of fascism in numerous parts of the globe. Their anti-fascism formed a *Lebensgefühl* that assigned meaning to the struggle of losing one’s homeland and provided hope of renewal in a post-fascist world. Moreover, events like Hitler’s takeover, the formation of Popular Fronts throughout Europe and the Nazi-Soviet Pact impacted them similarly. As a form of censored oppositional politics forced to mobilize outside national borders, the phenomenon was by nature transnational.<sup>20</sup> Contemporary studies of anti-fascism thus tend to focus on diasporas, organizational and institutional links in foreign countries and the spread of anti-fascist ideologies and cultural forms across the globe.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Seidman, M., *Transatlantic Antifascisms. From the Spanish Civil War to the End of World War II*, Cambridge 2017, 1; García et al, ‘Beyond Revisionism’, 1; Buchanan, T., ‘Beyond Cable Street’. *New Approaches to the Historiography of Antifascism in Britain in the 1930s*, in: García, H., Yusta, M., Tabet, X. and Clímaco, C. (ed.), *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present*, New York 2016, 61-75, 62.

<sup>20</sup> Rabinbach, ‘Legacies of Antifascism’, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Sluga, G., ‘Fascism and Anti-Fascism’, in: Iriye, A. & Saunier, P.Y. (ed.), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History: From the mid-19th century to the present day*, New York 2009, 381-2, 381-2.

Seidman's *Transatlantic Antifascisms* is the most relevant example of this category of anti-fascism studies, as he sought, as few historians had done before, 'to define the nature, types and history of antifascisms in the Atlantic world.'<sup>22</sup> His work has contributed to an understanding of the exchange of anti-fascist politics and culture between Spain, France, Great Britain and the United States. Its central thesis follows the post-revisionist turn through the idea of the concurrent existence of revolutionary and conservative anti-fascism between 1936 and 1945. Revolutionary anti-fascism was decidedly socialist, since it regarded fascism as the outcome of capitalism and equated all political opposition to anti-fascism to fascism. This form first took hold on the left in the Spanish Civil War, and after saw a revival after World War II as the foundational ideology of the communist satellite states. On the contrary, conservative anti-fascism – an oxymoron to revolutionary anti-fascists – was counter-revolutionary. It aimed to restore the pre-war regimes, opposed infringements on freedom of speech and private property and stressed limits on state power. Favoring traditional pluralism over revolution, conservative anti-fascists were able to construct diverse and broad coalitions that included both conservative capitalists and union leaders, religious traditionalists and leftists, intellectuals and artists. Both forms are considered as types of anti-fascism because they prioritized combating fascism, recognized the necessity of forming alliances to do so and were willing to wage a war of attrition to prevent its spread.<sup>23</sup> *Transatlantic Antifascisms* thus exemplifies the first category of anti-fascism studies perfectly through its transnational perspective, a post-revisionist acknowledgement of the existence of varieties of anti-fascism and a conception of anti-fascism as a historical occurrence that ended with the Second World War.

### **Anti-fascism and memory politics**

The second category of anti-fascism studies focuses on the role the legacy of historical anti-fascism has played in shaping European politics since 1945. In *Rethinking Antifascism*, the divide between the first two categories is mirrored by the volume's division in parts respectively dedicated to 'Historical Antifascism, 1922-1945' and 'Political Uses, Memory Wars and Revisionism from 1945 to the Present'. Studies of this category have aimed to explain the effects of the experience of historical anti-fascism to the formation of post-war

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<sup>22</sup> Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-5.

state institutions, as well as the ways in which collective memories of anti-fascism have influenced the political identity of citizens. This kind of research has ranged from analyzing the uses of the anti-fascist legacy in formerly besieged or occupied democracies like Great Britain and France, post-fascist democracies like (West) Germany, Italy and Spain, and communist and post-communist states, most notably the GDR and the Soviet Union.

In these contexts, anti-fascism was an element of memory politics that legitimized the post-fascist order. In the West, anti-fascism came to describe the social-political culture of Western Europe, which was fundamentally reshaped politically and economically as a direct response to the catastrophes of the first half of the century.<sup>24</sup> Stone has argued that the post-war consensus in the West rested in part on a widely shared anti-fascist narrative that was not primarily based on lauding partisans, the Red Army or the working classes, but on remembering the crimes of fascism and a dedication to preventing such things from ever happening again. This ‘anonymous narrative of victory over ‘evil’ allowed for a silencing of the substantial levels of support for or collaboration with fascism.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, according to Anson Rabinbach, it created possibilities for coalitions between leftist parties, forging an overarching identity for the political left.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Copsey has documented how in Great Britain, the fusion of anti-fascism and patriotic nationalism during war-time created a myth of fascism as a ‘foreign import’ that was fundamentally incompatible with tolerant British culture.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, in the Eastern bloc revolutionary anti-fascism became ideologically important in the Soviet Union and the *raison d’être* of its newly founded satellite states. The GDR especially identified itself as an anti-fascist state, with an *Antifaschistischer Schutzwall* protecting the nation from the fascist West. Not 1917, but 1945 was its foundational year, as communist interpretations of the origins of fascism and its victory over it during the war took precedence over the socialist constitution. Profound social reforms were justified less with references to socialist economic theory and more so with the stated goal of preventing the material preconditions of fascism. As in the West, anti-fascism became a staple of the identity of communist states whose social order was seen to be foundationally at odds with fascism, while pride over the military and philosophical triumph over Nazism reigned victorious in the

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<sup>24</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 83.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> Rabinbach, ‘Legacies of Antifascism’, 4; 13.

<sup>27</sup> Copsey, N., *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, New York 2000, 81.

Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup>

In the cases of both types of anti-fascism, the authors within this category emphasize a recognizable conceptual shift of anti-fascism since the war. As it became an important marker of national identity, anti-fascism transformed from a political orientation and mass movement to policy making based on memory politics. These scholars are thus aligned with those of the first category in recognizing anti-fascism mostly as a historical occurrence limited to the Nazi era. New anti-fascist movements are considered as having been relegated to the political fringes and having no relevant connections to this earlier period.

### **Anti-fascism as a continuous phenomenon**

The final approach in anti-fascism studies, one that has been utilized far less, is almost entirely represented by Copsey's research on British anti-fascism. In *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, anti-fascism is treated not as a one-time historical occurrence or an element of memory politics, but rather as a continuous phenomenon that has lasted up until the present. As during the 1930s and 1940, anti-fascism thus continued into the post-war age to resist "real" existing forms of fascism, however they were defined. From this conceptualization of anti-fascism three important conclusions follow. Firstly, there is a direct line between the militant anti-fascism of the 1930s until now. Therefore, contemporary anti-fascism can be studied as a response to actual fascist threats. However, as Copsey bemoans, research into modern anti-fascism has hardly been undertaken because '[t]he historiography of militant anti-fascism in post-war Europe is almost non-existent.'<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, Copsey approaches this study by taking a broader interpretation of anti-fascism based on the idea of the anti-fascist minimum: the theory that all political and moral opposition to fascism has been rooted in the democratic values of the Enlightenment in some way. Even less than ideally democratic ideologies like communism are deemed to have descended from the tradition of humanism, rationalism, progressivism and universalism, while the origins of fascism lie in the irrational, elitist and chauvinist Counter-Enlightenment.<sup>30</sup> Despite its common source, Copsey points to relevant distinctions. As mentioned, there exists civil anti-fascism and radical, militant anti-fascism. Furthermore, while militancy is not

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<sup>28</sup> Diner, D. & Gundermann, C., 'On the Ideology of Antifascism', *New German Critique* 67 (1996), 123-32, 125-7.

<sup>29</sup> Copsey, N., 'Crossing Borders: Anti-Fascist Action (UK) and Transnational Anti-Fascist Militancy in the 1990s', *Contemporary European History* 25 (2016) nr. 4, 707-27, 707.

<sup>30</sup> Copsey, 'Preface', xviii.

necessarily driven by revolutionary ambitions, revolutionary anti-fascism combines physical confrontation with ideological struggle against fascism and the capitalist state from which it has sprung.<sup>31</sup> Seidman's idea of revolutionary anti-fascism as a historical occurrence has thus carried on until the modern day, with militant organizations like Anti-Fascist Action applying the same twin-track strategy.<sup>32</sup>

Lastly, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* concludes that anti-fascism is essentially reactive, since anti-fascist activism follows a cyclical pattern depending on the degree of public belief in the danger of right-wing extremism and real-live fascism. As such, the nature of the stimulus anti-fascism lies with its enemies.<sup>33</sup> Copsey's work has thus aimed to provide a theoretical definition of anti-fascism to understand it as a trans-historical, dynamic movement that has surpassed 1945.<sup>34</sup> While the anti-fascist minimum has received much recognition, making Copsey one of the leading scholars in his field, few have tried to follow in his footsteps. Therefore, there is still a considerable lack of studies, whether in a national or transnational context, that have aimed to trace an anti-fascist lineage throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Still, Copsey's theoretical definition of anti-fascism raises some questions. Most importantly, it is entirely based on the British case study, inviting the question how fascism has been marginalized in other countries if looked through this methodology. There have existed some crucial differences between the British experience with fascism and that of the European mainland, the most obvious one being that the former has not experienced fascist occupation or a domestic fascist takeover. As a result, there was no destruction of the political system, no war-time resistance, no annihilation of Jewish communities. Therefore, while fascism might have been a marginal political phenomenon in Britain, this was certainly not the case for other European countries, where the events and outcome of the war spelled different social-political consequences. Moreover, Copsey's view of anti-fascism as a purely reactive phenomenon that becomes active whenever 'fascism comes to pose an urgent threat' is problematic because however one may define "fascism" or "an urgent threat" is ultimately in the eyes of the beholder.<sup>35</sup> Uncritically adopting Copsey's viewpoint thus risks neglecting the subjective views of anti-fascists on what "fascism" encompassed, why it formed an acute

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<sup>31</sup> Copsey, 'Crossing Borders', 708.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 711.

<sup>33</sup> Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 189-91.

<sup>34</sup> García, 'Transnational History', 570.

<sup>35</sup> Copsey, 'Preface', xx.

danger and how these viewpoints evolved. Studies of post-war anti-fascism ought to be in the business of explaining why anti-fascists perceived such developments as urgent threats.

We may therefore call into question whether anti-fascism in countries like the Netherlands has merely existed as a reaction to actual fascist threats, or as an autonomous movement with a dynamic that cannot be explained as merely the mirror image of fascism. Therefore, it is relevant to ask the question of how anti-fascism on the continent lived on after 1945, whether it was a continuous phenomenon composed by historical anti-fascists or something entirely new.

### **Anti-fascist studies in the Netherlands**

While anti-fascist figures and the resistance have of course received quite some attention within the Dutch scholarly milieu, no research has been conducted on anti-fascism as its own phenomenon or political culture. Instead, the opposition against fascism has only been studied as a reactive phenomenon, by scholars of right-wing extremist parties in the Netherlands who since the early 1980s have sought explanations for their appeal and looked for strategies how to combat them. Striving to protect democratic values rather than merely regulating the struggle for power, social scientists agreed their foe had to be combated through civil debate.<sup>36</sup> Jaap van Donselaar's 1991 dissertation has proven one of the most valuable and most cited contributions to the academic literature on post-war fascism in the Netherlands. With *Fout na de Oorlog*, he not only provided an overview of right-extremist organizations and parties between 1950 and 1990, but also demonstrated the organizational continuity between these and Dutch fascist parties of the 1940s.<sup>37</sup> Van Donselaar saw this effort as an attempt to establish 'continuity and renewal, and to adapt old ideologies to post-war conditions.'<sup>38</sup>

Van Donselaar's study focused mostly on the role the state played in combating fascism and less that of anti-fascists or actors in civil society in general. Still, it becomes apparent that the existence of fascist parties was most threatened by the *Besluit Ontbinding Landverraderlijke Organisaties* signed by Queen Wilhelmina in September 1944, which not

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<sup>36</sup> De Vetten, J., *In de Ban van Goed en Fout. De bestrijding van de Centruumpartij en de Centrumdemocraten (1980-1998)*, Amsterdam 2016, 18-22.

<sup>37</sup> Van Donselaar, J., *Fout na de Oorlog. Fascistische en racistische organisaties in Nederland, 1950-1990*, Utrecht 1991, 23.

<sup>38</sup> Van Donselaar, Jaap, 'Post-war fascism in the Netherlands', *Crime, Law and Social Change* 19 (1993) nr. 1, 87-100, 87-8.



only formally dissolved domestic fascist organizations existing at the time, but also provided a legal basis for the disbandment of future organizations taking up their aims anew. New right-wing extremists thus had to adapt by putting up a tolerable front while hiding their true intentions to avoid prosecution.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, opponents of neo-fascism pursued a strategy of unmasking their political enemies to the public and the courts. However, studies like Van Donselaar's shed no light on which actors in civil society identified with anti-fascism and which political actors pursued anti-fascist strategies after the war. Because research has been focused on post-war fascism, insights into the motivations of anti-fascists have been neglected.

*Fout na de Oorlog* diligently showcases how the state and judiciary combated post-war attempts to establish new fascist organizations. However, severely lacking in studies of anti-fascism in the Netherlands is a perspective on the post-war continuation of anti-fascism as a political identity or strategy by political parties and organizations. Copsey has rightly bemoaned the near-total absence of an historiography of militant anti-fascism in post-war Europe, but in the Netherlands, the history of anti-fascism as a political signifier has not received much attention for the same reason: because after 1945, "actual" fascism was seemingly defeated and thus relegated to the dustbin of history.<sup>40</sup> Resultingly, there is little knowledge on the matter of anti-fascism in Dutch politics after the war, let alone its connection to historical anti-fascism. To be sure, there exists an extensive body of literature dedicated to the "dynamic memory" of World War II in the Netherlands. Various of these works from authors the likes of Ido de Haan, Frank van Vree, Rob van der Laarse, Rob van Ginkel and Jolande Withuis feature in this thesis to explain shifts in anti-fascist thought.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, anti-fascist activists have been studied by scholars of social-political changes, politicization and radical ideology, like James Kennedy, Hans Righart and Antoine Verbij concerning the 1960s, and Jan de Vetten in his study on resistance against the *Centrumpartij* (CP) and the *Centrumdemocraten* during the 1980s. However, while such studies certainly address the existence of anti-fascists, they are not primarily concerned with the continuities and evolution of anti-fascism since 1945. Dutch literature on anti-fascism follows the

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 88-9.

<sup>40</sup> Copsey, 'Crossing Borders', 707.

<sup>41</sup> The concept of "dynamic memory" is the subject of Van Vree, F., Van der Laarse, R. (eds.), *De Dynamiek van de Herinnering. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context*, Amsterdam 2009.

international pattern of anti-fascist studies, having paid very little mind to the notion that anti-fascism has been a phenomenon whose contents continued to evolve after 1945 and shifted considerably numerous times. Therefore, there has been no work which has aimed to present a historical overview of Dutch anti-fascism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as a political culture existing on its own outside the realms of resisting fascism, nor has there been much consideration for its longevity and (dis)continuities throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Contents

This study aims to address these topics and thereby fill a gap of knowledge by delivering a synthesis of the foremost proponents of anti-fascism in the Netherlands past the war to explain why ordinary people continued to identify with anti-fascism after the war. It will examine who identified with anti-fascism or used it as a political signifier after World War II until the mid-1980s, when the rise of far-right forces prompted a renewed usage of fascism and anti-fascism as political labels. The result of this research will contribute to our understanding of how anti-fascism has and the perceived threat of the return of fascism have shaped the Dutch political system throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Chapter 1 focuses on anti-fascism during the reconstruction. Contrary to scholarly assumptions, the CPN was not the only party pursuing an anti-fascist strategy during this time, as in 1947 the newly formed Labor *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) organized a national campaign “against the reaction and fascism”. However, anti-fascist efforts were also made by civil organizations formed by communists, moderate leftists and Third World groups, all for different reasons dedicated to keeping alive the memory of the war and preventing its reoccurrence. This chapter focuses on both the political parties and organizations in civil society, asking the question who considered themselves anti-fascists during this time. In what ways did they define fascism, and why was its return feared or even anticipated? How was their interpretation of fascism impacted by domestic and foreign “threats of fascism”? What did they aim to defend from these threats? Which strategies were pursued to combat fascism, and what tensions arose from these? How and why did their approaches differ? And was anti-fascism at this time limited to the political left? Could a conservative anti-fascism be said to have continued even during the height of anti-communism?

Chapter 2 will explicate the impact of profound social changes of the 1960s on spurring a second wave of anti-fascist activism. Fascism was reconceptualized by a new generation that

challenged its elders and their memories of historical fascism. Young anti-fascists leveled accusations of “fascism” against domestic social actors while also staging campaigns against regimes the likes of Chile, South Africa and Argentina and against the Vietnam War. Many of these activists became involved in political parties like the CPN or the Pacifist Socialist Party (PSP). This chapter is centered around this new face of anti-fascism. Which political parties continued or ceased to use the language of anti-fascism? How did shifting perceptions of fascism change and impact which political and civil actors used anti-fascism as a signifier? What threat had it come to symbolize? How does this relate to a changing memory culture of the war?

Chapter 3 revolves around the late 1970s and 1980s, during which anti-fascist activism grew exponentially and reached a height of popularity it had not enjoyed previously. Much of this was inspired by a desire to resist discrimination on the basis of race or sex. As Dutch society had become multicultural, anti-fascism increasingly focused on combating its belligerents. From the early 1970s onwards, the foremost political threat domestically seemed to come from the controversial far-right *Nederlandse Volks-Unie* (NVU), which campaigned on a platform of ethno-nationalism but gained little electoral success. More successful was the *Centrum*partij, which acquired parliamentary seats in the 1980s and caused public outrage. Again, this part asks who identified politically and personally as anti-fascist during this period, how fascism was perceived, and who anti-fascists sought to antagonize and protect. It seeks to understand why the period experienced a renewed interest in the concept of fascism and a surge in anti-fascist activism.

Finally, the conclusion to this thesis centers around the question of continuity between these three different waves of anti-fascism. How did anti-fascism change during the post-war age? How was anti-fascist discourse used, by whom, and to what ends? What developments were instrumental in creating their image of fascism? How did anti-fascist envision their resistance against fascism? Most importantly, what role did anti-fascism continue to play after 1945? In conclusion, this thesis seeks to elevate the role anti-fascism has played in Dutch society in as a political force.

## Methodology

To study anti-fascist cultures in the Netherlands, this thesis follows the theories of two scholars of anti-fascism. Nigel Copsey’s concept of the anti-fascist minimum will be used here

to indicate the varieties of possible anti-fascisms that have existed in the Netherlands. His belief that self-proclamation of oneself as anti-fascist is considered crucial to defining anti-fascism is likewise followed here. As such, this thesis is limited to an inquiry of those who purposefully used the label of anti-fascism to define their identity or actions. All the actors studied here have thus either identified with anti-fascism to some degree or used the specter of fascist danger for political or electoral gains. Therefore, this thesis is concerned with the motivations or parties and organizations, and not with deciding whether certain government policies or court rulings ought to be considered “anti-fascist”.

Secondly, the outcome of this research is presented in light of Stone’s theory of the breakdown of a post-war consensus that rested on the two pillars of social democracy and the “anti-fascist consensus”. This theory has contributed to an understanding of how the welfare state and memory politics formed a foundation for an anti-fascist Western Europe, and why the breakdown of this order has led to a resurgence of extreme-right and possibly fascist ideas in the mainstream. Inspired by this theory, this thesis likewise seeks to present developments within anti-fascist political cultures in the Netherlands in relation to the dynamics of the social democratic welfare state and public perceptions and memories of World War II. As Stone identifies the construction and deconstruction of anti-fascist values on the European continent, this research is concerned with a question he does not address, namely how this has affected the political forces and activists that fought under the banner of anti-fascism.

This study thus consists of both an institutional and conceptual analysis of anti-fascism. It aims to portray changing landscapes of various anti-fascist actors and trace the personal and institutional connections between them through time, which has not been the subject of Dutch anti-fascist studies before. Its conceptual analysis is inspired by political scientist Jan-Werner Müller’s view of a conceptual history that ‘should be detached from the larger view of modernity associated with *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe*’ in favor of putting more emphasis on taking seriously ‘the insight that concepts can always be contested and relocated in new conceptual contexts’.<sup>42</sup> It utilizes Cambridge-inspired concepts like “political language” and “discourse” to demonstrate ideological shifts and illustrate practical uses of anti-fascism over different political landscapes.<sup>43</sup> Through this institutional and conceptual analysis, I aim to

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<sup>42</sup> Müller, J.W., ‘European Intellectual History as Contemporary History’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 46 (2011) nr. 3, 574-590, 587.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 583.

discover what exactly comprised anti-fascist activity, who conducted it, what it meant and how anti-fascism was related to social-political developments in the second half of the twentieth century.

Self-proclaimed anti-fascist actors make up this research effort: the areas of government policies and institutions and public opinion are relevant, but only play a contextual role here. Of primary concern are the motivations behind the assumption of anti-fascist identities and a conscious political usage of anti-fascism. Thus, the focus lies on political parties and organizations in civil society. In each chapter, both are discussed in separate paragraphs. This thesis is structured in this way to illustrate the evolution of anti-fascism as mostly a political program used by left-wing parties during the late 1940s to a grassroots phenomenon in the 1960s, and how this transition eventually impacted political parties in the 1980s. To divide chapters into these independent paragraphs thus serves to highlight one of the most major developments in the history post-war anti-fascist action, which is its transfer from the frames of party politics to the public sphere.

Most of the research on the political parties was based on archives at the *International Institute for Social History* (IISG) in Amsterdam, with additional sources from the *National Archive* in The Hague. There is more variety to be found among anti-fascist actors in civil society, counting among them the organizations founded in the early post-war years, student committees, protest groups against war and oppression, concerned academics and militant anti-racists. Again, the collections at the IISG proved immensely valuable, with much of the information collected coming from their documentation of social and solidarity movements and Dutch politics. Online tools like newspaper archive *Delpher* provided further sources crucial to the outcome of the research.

## Chapter 1

# Fighting ‘a smoldering danger’

## Anti-fascism in the Netherlands during reconstruction, 1945-1955

### 1.1 Introduction

Histories of historical anti-fascism in the Netherlands have focused largely on anti-fascist initiatives and the attitude of the government towards fascism. Although the *Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging* (NSB), the most prominent fascist organization in the Netherlands, very early on met with hostility from most political parties, in the 1930s the Dutch political establishment was mostly concerned about extremism in general, with communism as the larger threat.<sup>44</sup> Liberal and confessional parties, from a principal belief in equality before the law, also made no distinction between democratic and anti-democratic demonstrators when imposing sanctions or cracking down on demonstrations with the intent of upholding public order.<sup>45</sup> Only between 1935 and 1937, after a growing visibility of the NSB following a surprising victory in regional elections until its mediocre performance in the national elections, did government policies target fascists specifically.<sup>46</sup> Such policies received the support of the churches, who forbade their followers membership of the NSB, but mostly because they feared losing votes for the confessional parties.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, there was no consistently and fundamentally anti-fascist Dutch political culture.

The most important initiatives against fascism in the 1930s came from the *Eenheid door Democratie* and the *Comité van Waakzaamheid*. EdD was founded in 1935 as a political movement advocating for all political parties to jointly defend the country against the fascist NSB, numbering 30.000 members at the height of its popularity and influence. Like the other progressive parties of left-liberals, social-democrats and communists parties, it presented

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<sup>44</sup> Te Slaa, R., Klijn, E., *De NSB. Ontstaan en opkomst van de Nationaal-Socialistische Beweging, 1931-1935*, Amersfoort 2009, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Gijsenbergh, J., *Democratie en Gezag. Extremismebestrijding in Nederland, 1917-1940*, Enschede 2016, 203-4; 209-10.

<sup>46</sup> Hartmans, R., *Vijandige broeders? De Nederlandse sociaal-democratie en het nationaal-socialisme, 1922-1940*, Amsterdam 2012, 185.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-9.

itself as defenders of a democracy to which the NSB was laying siege. However, different views on democratic institutions and principles, plus a severe mistrust of the progressive parties, were a primary reason why the conservative majority of conservative liberals and confessionals did not align with EdD.<sup>48</sup> Ironically, a strong emphasis on patriotism and support of the monarchy combined with a desire to uphold the status quo and a reluctance to incorporate new social and political ideas meant the movement could be considered the most important conservative anti-fascist movement of the Netherlands before the war.<sup>49</sup> Inspired by and related to the French *Comité de vigilance des intellectuels antifascistes*, *Waakzaamheid* was founded a year later by leftist intellectuals dedicated to strengthening Dutch democracy against attacks from both the extreme right and the Colijn-government.<sup>50</sup> The committee aimed at the support of intellectuals through holding lectures and issuing brochures targeting the dangers of national-socialism to the Dutch spirit, and by organizing events for a “Week for Freedom and Science” throughout different universities in 1937. Although its membership was politically quite diverse, the board was mostly composed of socialists, and because *Waakzaamheid* would not principally renounce communism or equate it with fascism, it was distrusted by EdD and conservative parties as a communist front.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, anti-fascist resistance against fascism of course reached its zenith during the German occupation. In a small, densely populated country like the Netherlands, without rugged natural barriers like mountains or forests, there was little to no possibility for guerilla war against occupation forces. Instead, resistance organizations and individual resisters had to hide and operate from within society. Resistance took many different forms and was not limited to certain political ideologies or belief systems. Here, the Dutch communist party (*Communistische Partij Nederland* or CPN) deserves to be mentioned as a noteworthy exception, as the only party that had anticipated and prepared for life under occupation.<sup>52</sup>

When German troops hurriedly fled the Netherlands in May 1945, they left behind an economically broken and politically disrupted country. As the first post-war governments stepped into the void, faced with the enormous burden of achieving national restoration,

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<sup>48</sup> Gijsenbergh, *Democratie en Gezag*, 93.

<sup>49</sup> Rovers, F., ‘Eenheid door Democratie’, *Utrechtse Historische Cahiers* 7 (1986) nr. 4, 1-97, 79-82.

<sup>50</sup> Wiersma, L.R., ‘Het comité van Waakzaamheid van anti-nationaal-socialistische intellectuelen (1936-1940)’, *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 86 (1971) nr. 1, 124-50, 128-30.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-3; 136.

<sup>52</sup> De Jong, L. *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* VII, The Hague 1976, 1024-6.

Dutch political culture did not immediately return to its state during the 1930s. Nor were the events of the war forgotten. In the wake of fascism, new or emboldened political parties stressed a continued battle against it, and civil organizations were founded to urge society to “never forget” what had happened and lawmakers to create policies to prevent its reoccurrence. Nevertheless, anti-fascism did not evolve into a political movement of its own during the post-war years for multiple reasons.

Firstly, during the hardships of the early post-war years, a ‘consensus of silence’ was formed that supported a selective understanding and forgetting of the past that accompanied, even legitimized the new shape of politics.<sup>53</sup> To be sure, while the prosecution of Jews was certainly not forgotten, it was remembered as a national event first.<sup>54</sup> For a long time, Jewish voices were marginalized within the Dutch historiography of the Holocaust.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, national unity was emphasized over the suffering of minority groups. Instead, there was widespread public concern for the disruptive effects of war-time experiences on morality. A primary concern was whether persons who had engaged in illegal resistance activities or who had been in hiding could adapt to peacetime. Scholar Jolande Withuis has argued that politicians and the public were fearful of ‘feelings of hatred and vengeance; overstimulated self-indulgence and aggression; demoralized workers who would rather do undeclared trade than work; years of training in sabotage, evasion and distrust; deficient respect for property; lost reverence for the law and authority of the government.’<sup>56</sup> Within the austere environment, such acute concerns took precedence over the notion of empowering minority groups victimized by the war.

The marginalization of anti-fascism in the face of reconstruction is illustrated by the process of purification of the nation from Nazi collaborators. Since the liberation of the Southern Netherlands in the fall of 1944, the anti-fascist resistance had taken the initiative to accuse and arrest suspected collaborators according to its strict demands for purification.<sup>57</sup> However, as the country was liberated in its entirety in May 1945, this process entered a more

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<sup>53</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Van Vree, F., Van der Laarse, R., ‘Ter inleiding’ in: Van Vree, F., Van der Laarse, R. (eds.), *De Dynamiek van de Herinnering. Nederland en de Tweede Wereldoorlog in een internationale context*, Amsterdam 2009, 7-16, 7-9.

<sup>55</sup> De Haan, I., *Na de ondergang. De herinnering aan de Jodenvervolgung in Nederland, 1945-1995*, The Hague 1997, 8.

<sup>56</sup> Withuis, *Erkenning*, 23-4.

<sup>57</sup> Romijn, P., *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig. De afrekening met de ‘foute’ Nederlanders 1945-1955*, Amsterdam 2002, 116.



'orderly' phase as the ministries of the newly installed government gradually took matters into their own hands and the former resistance was involved less and less. Increasingly, purification was considered to stand in the way of reconstruction. While there was broad consensus on the necessity of expelling national-socialists to restore public trust in the discredited civil service, conservative politicians especially advocated the notion that a consistent purge would implicate nearly everyone.<sup>58</sup> Over time, appreciation for the absolute norms of the former resistance gave way to indifference. Purification became more moderate, sentences were commuted and many former collaborators were pardoned or released from prison before the end of the 1940s, causing various outlets of the formerly illegal press to bitterly lament the 'betrayal of the resistance'.<sup>59</sup>

Secondly, strongly contributing to the diminishing of political anti-fascism in the Netherlands were the rising Cold War tensions during in the late 1940s, which put an end to what Geoff Eley has labeled 'the moment of rare anti-fascist unity' in West Europe.<sup>60</sup> This period, which lasted approximately from 1942 to 1947, saw communist parties at the height of their popularity in the West, the result of their resistance against the Axis regimes. Eley has claimed that during this time, 'the order of the day' was nonpartisanship and cross-party cooperation, which originated in the patriotic political culture of the resistance and enabled leftist parties to break out of their working-class isolation and participate in broad democratic reform-minded coalitions.<sup>61</sup> In the Netherlands, too, a desire for broad reforms was demonstrated, as the Christian Democrats, socialists and communists together gained 72% of the vote in 1946.<sup>62</sup> The war thus produced popular expectations of democratic citizenship, egalitarianism and social justice and a strong belief in the role governance had to play in cultivating the public good.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, the CPN reached its electoral zenith, gaining 10,6% of the votes, but did not enter the national coalition. However, the presence of actual unity between the left and far left need not be overstated, as desire for reform did not lead to cooperation or integration. The moderate left remained very distrustful of communist advances and never seriously considered the establishment of a new Popular Front or fusion

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 117; 123.

<sup>59</sup> Tames, I., *Doorn in het vlees. Foute Nederlanders in de jaren vijftig en zestig*, Amsterdam 2013, 87; Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig*, 126-8.

<sup>60</sup> Eley, G., *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*, Oxford 2002, 288.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 288-9.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 290-1.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 298.

of leftist parties. Therefore, the reduction of CPN membership and electoral figures to pre-war levels was not merely rooted in rising Cold War tensions, but in long-standing divisions between social democrats and communists. Both communism and Nazism were regarded by the public to be considered totalitarian threats to democracy – and thus, most Dutch rated the Soviet Union as negatively as Germany.<sup>64</sup> The Dutch communists thus remained politically isolated after a brief period of optimism about a breakthrough. Informed by the international party doctrine and their domestic isolation, CPN representatives would continue to lob accusations of fascism against the political establishment, establishing itself firmly as the party of anti-fascism.

Thirdly, anti-fascism lost its urgency with the defeat of the Axis powers. Domestically, potentially “fascist” threats were not self-evident. Van Donselaar’s research has revealed there was little presence of actually neo-fascist organizations in the Netherlands in the wake of the war. Their inevitable downfall was often not a direct result of anti-fascist activism, but of court rulings: since a 1944 law from the exiled government determined the disbandment of all future organizations that would again take up the aims of the NSB, they had to mask their true political beliefs or intentions to avoid legal prosecution.<sup>65</sup> To anti-fascists, the most pressing fascist danger seemed to come from abroad. Because of their disappointment with the insufficient denazification of West Germany, many within the former resistance also felt uneasy about the prospect of the country being rearmed and included in NATO. Furthermore, the opposition of Dutch communists to this notion was of course strongly related to Soviet fears of West German rearmament as a threat to national security.<sup>66</sup> This threat was formulated in the language of the revolutionary anti-fascist party doctrine that emphasized the continuities between Hitler’s and Adenauer’s Germany. According to the communist newspaper *De Waarheid*, the willingness of the bourgeoisie to cooperate with the new German state, which was suspected of having revanchist ambitions, posed a threat to national independence.<sup>67</sup>

The purpose of chapter is to identify the variety of actors who continued to identify as anti-fascist and practiced anti-fascist politics in the Netherlands during the reconstruction era. It

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<sup>64</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 236-7.

<sup>65</sup> Van Donselaar, ‘Post-war fascism’, 88.

<sup>66</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 145-6.

<sup>67</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 239-40.

aims to understand who, in these imperfect circumstances for political anti-fascism, still used anti-fascism as a political tool. What purpose did this serve? How did they define fascism and conceptualize it as a present danger for contemporary society? Who personified this danger? What influence did anti-fascist politics exert on Dutch society? Through a division in two respective parts, a distinction is made between the anti-fascism of political parties and organizations in civil society, one that will continue throughout the following chapters as well. It focuses on the organizations that were the primary exponents of anti-fascism in the Netherlands, most notably the PvdA and CPN, and a host of groups in civil society who continued to advocate against the fascist threat. Furthermore, it aims to determine whether their opposition to fascism should be labeled revolutionary or conservative according to Seidman's delineation.

### 1.2 The CPN and PvdA 'against the reaction'

The objects of inquiry into political anti-fascism are the Communist Party of the Netherlands and the Labor Party. Although this focus on left-wing parties might seemingly indicate a built-in bias towards the nature of anti-fascism, several considerations went into the decision to nevertheless limit the scope. The strategies of the CPN and PvdA personified respectively revolutionary and a mixed bag of conservative and revolutionary strands of anti-fascism, thus showcasing the palette of its various forms. Furthermore, this thesis centers around self-proclaimed anti-fascism in the form of conscious endeavors to combat whatever is perceived of as "fascism", which was not as much a part of the political repertoire of confessional and conservative parties. Therefore, it is unfortunately outside of the scope of this project.

Instead, the focus will lie on the place of anti-fascism in the interpretative framework and political rhetoric of the CPN and the PvdA after the conclusion of the war. I argue that the outbreak of the domestic Cold War in the Netherlands divided the anti-fascist politics of these parties in two phases characterized by cautious attempts at joint and then fragmented anti-fascism respectively. The prime subject of this analysis is a national campaign waged by the PvdA against the fascist danger in 1947 that, to my knowledge, has not been covered by academic literature and is absent from standard party histories.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> The campaign is absent from Frits Rovers' work *Voor recht en vrijheid: de Partij van de Arbeid en de Koude Oorlog, 1946-1958*, Amsterdam 1994.

## The PvdA and the CPN in 1946

Recently, it has been argued that the end of the anti-fascist moment in the Netherlands ought not to be considered solely the product of the imposition of external Cold War attitudes or the continuation of historical anti-communism, but rather of the combination of these in relation to the contingent nature of political reconstruction.<sup>69</sup> Although all non-communist parties remained suspicious of the adherence of CPN to proper democratic norms, for a very brief period after 1945, there was some willingness to accept a certain degree of political influence of the communists, whose sacrifices in the resistance were awarded with a degree of mainstream respectability unbeknownst to them. To reap the benefits, the party pursued the establishment of a national front based on a dual opposition against fascism and capitalism. The possibility of contributing to a national front government seemed real, given the recent establishment of such administrations in Belgium, France and Italy.<sup>70</sup>

To exert its newfound influence, the CPN made advances to the PvdA to emphasize cooperation between the leftist parties.<sup>71</sup> Anti-fascism was one of its tools to continue to advance this policy after the war. The threat of the German enemy was replaced by that of the fascist “reaction”. How the CPN conceived of this threat is revealed through a letter sent by its leadership to the convention at which the SDAP was liquidated to establish the PvdA in February 1946. Calling for a leftist bloc, it references the many ways in which the reaction had supposedly attempted to undemocratically thwart the desire for recovery and renewal, ‘which is shared by the large majority of our people’.<sup>72</sup> In the spirit of revolutionary anti-fascism, the reaction was represented as a capitalist, fascist and anti-socialist conspiracy stretching all over Europe, which intended to ‘preserve the powerful position of the big capital trusts, combat the desire for socialism among the people and to that end bolster and strengthen the remnants of fascism as much as possible.’<sup>73</sup> Capitalism and fascism were thus connected, following the Marxist interpretative framework of revolutionary anti-fascism. The reaction embodied both, threatening socialist forces, the unity of the proletariat and the

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<sup>69</sup> Sinke, T., ‘Dutch Communism in Transition: The Unfolding of a National Cold War during Political Reconstruction, 1944-8’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 52 (2017) nr. 4, 1042-62, 1044.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 1045-6.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 1046.

<sup>72</sup> PvdA 140, ‘Letter from the Party leadership of the CPN to the convention of the SDAP at the Bellevue in Amsterdam, 05-02-1946.’ For all archival collections, abbreviations have been used to shorten footnotes. See Sources for a list of all consulted collections.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

reconstruction and renewal of society.

The overtures of CPN were not met with any enthusiasm from the PvdA. The party was a product of the *Doorbraak*, the aspiration to break through the pillarization of the Dutch political system in favor of one in which the most important divide would be between progressivism and conservatism. As such, the PvdA did not merely succeed the SDAP, but included former members from confessional and liberal parties as well.<sup>74</sup> Still, the conflict between the PvdA and CPN stemmed from the previous one with the SDAP. Fundamentally different convictions regarding economic theory and especially the democratic system meant the party never actually considered a merger with the communists.<sup>75</sup> This was probably expected by the CPN leadership, which believed the moderation of the newfound party, which aimed to appeal across social classes, would cause a split in the proletariat that would play into the hands of the reaction.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising the party never took the invitations from the CPN very seriously. It was committed to building a democratic state that, according to its first election program of 1946 rested on the pillars of reverence for human dignity, social justice and a shared responsibility for the welfare of the people. Saliently, this program 'towards recovery and renewal' clearly references communism through the assertion that 'the democrat rejects any approach to a world of ideas that puts the state above man, from whichever country these ideas may originate.'<sup>77</sup>

However, in the immediate aftermath of the war, the parties did in fact share a desire for a radical transformation of society during reconstruction, based on a critique of capitalism. The PvdA was not only to combat the excesses of the capitalist system, but the system itself and the social relations that sprang from it.<sup>78</sup> Although fascism was never overtly linked to capitalism in these programs, the social democrats and communists evidently shared some interpretations of the cause of the war, ideas about the way forward and fears over threats to reconstruction. Like the CPN, the PvdA spoke of a drastic need for 'recovery and renewal' and the 'radical reform of society'.<sup>79</sup> The desire for radical change had existed before the war, and

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<sup>74</sup> Sinke, 'Dutch Communism in Transition', 1054.

<sup>75</sup> Verrips, G., *Dwars, Duivels en Dromend. De geschiedenis van de CPN, 1938-1991*, Amsterdam 1995, 225.

<sup>76</sup> PvdA 140, 'Letter from the Party leadership of the CPN to the convention of the SDAP at the Bellevue in Amsterdam, 05-02-1946.'

<sup>77</sup> DNPP PvdA, '1946. Vertrouwen in de toekomst. Een program voor Nederlands herstel en vernieuwing in de komende vier jaren', 1.

<sup>78</sup> DNPP PvdA, '1947. Beginselprogram van de Partij van de Arbeid', 4.

<sup>79</sup> DNPP PvdA, '1946. Vertrouwen in de toekomst. Een program voor Nederlands herstel en vernieuwing in de komende vier jaren', 1

now the events of the occupation had justified the struggle against pillarization by proving the failure 'of the social order of 1940'.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, both parties (initially) aligned in support of the decolonization of the Dutch Indies through the 1946 Treaty of Linggadjati, which de facto receded authority over important parts of Indonesia, provoking the ire of parties on the right. To the CPN, the insistence on drastic reform was intrinsically linked to the anti-fascist struggle. Because fascism was regarded as the extreme outcome of capitalism, the war against big capital was instrumental in preventing the outbreak of another world war. In 1946, it thus framed itself as 'the motor in the battle for social and political reform, for democracy and national independence against domestic and foreign fascism.'<sup>81</sup> Therefore, the dangers of the reaction and of fascism were one and the same. This begs the questions whether the political propaganda of the PvdA was influenced by the revolutionary anti-fascism of the CPN.

On February 21<sup>st</sup> 1947 a circular letter from the Party Leadership of the PvdA reached all party department boards throughout the country, announcing the commencement of the "Action against the reaction and the impending fascist danger". The campaign was supposed to begin in January, secretary Kees Woudenberg acknowledged, but an especially tough winter had ruled out this option.<sup>82</sup> As instructed, its media outlets newspaper *Het Vrije Volk* and magazine *Paraat* had already been producing articles agitating against the reactionary threat to the work of the PvdA.<sup>83</sup> Now it was finally kicking off. In coordination with the provincial and regional departments<sup>84</sup>, the Party Leadership had decided public meetings were to take place all over the country throughout March and April.<sup>85</sup> Woudenberg personally coordinated the assignment of speakers, who were all highly placed party members, MPs and even cabinet members, like party leader Koos Vorrink, reputable for his staunch anti-fascism before and during the war, and minister of Finance Piet Lieftinck.<sup>86</sup> In a circular, the Frisian provincial department implored all local sections – even those who would not facilitate a public meeting

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> DNPP CPN, '1946. Beginselverklaring en statuten der C.P.N.', 3.

<sup>82</sup> PvdA 1024-1025, 'Aan de Afdelingsbesturen van de Partij van de Arbeid. Betreft: Manifest tegen de reactie en het dreigend fascistisch gevaar.', 21-02-1947.

<sup>83</sup> PvdA 1689, Circular letter from the Friesland province party to the local sections, 06-03-1947.

<sup>84</sup> PvdA 32. 'Aan de leden van het Partijbestuur. Verslag van pg. Van Deelen over de periode 27 januari – 25 februari 1947', 21-03-1947. The earliest and only mention made of a deliberation between the national leadership and the provincial departments has it taking place on 12 February in The Hague.

<sup>85</sup> PvdA 1689. According to information from the archive, meetings were scheduled in at least 41 locations, a few of which fell through due to practical reasons or a lack of interest.

<sup>86</sup> PvdA 1689. The archive is stacked with brief letters sent by Woudenberg to potential speakers as well as their replies, mostly dated March or April 1947.

– to work together to organize public meetings that would be ‘so successful, so well attended, that for at least 14 days after, nothing else will be talked about except this massive gathering.’<sup>87</sup> Other information from the document further gives the impression that the campaign was taken seriously. For example, it is mentioned that the departments had received over two million copies of a manifest<sup>88</sup> against the reaction and the fascist danger, which were to be spread among the population. Moreover, local sections were instructed to purchase from the national party secretariat a poster calling attention to the danger.<sup>89</sup> These were hung in party offices or displayed publicly.<sup>90</sup>



*'It's still smoldering (fascism)! The rescue: democracy and socialism.'*<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> PvdA 1689, Circular letter from the Friesland province party to the local sections, 06-03-1947.

<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, this manifest was not obtained during research. Mentions of this manifest in the party archive seem to suggest that this was a different document than Meyer Sluysers' *Er dreigt gevaar!* from 1947, which is mentioned further on.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. These same figures were later repeated in 'Partij van de Arbeid valt de reactie aan', *Het Vrije Volk*, 24-03-1947, 2.

<sup>90</sup> PvdA 1689, Letter from H. Niesen to the Party Leadership, 18-03-1947.

<sup>91</sup> IISG BG E1/326, Broekman, N., 'Het smeult nog!', 1947.

A major player in “the Action” seems to have been Meyer Sluysen. Before the war, Sluysen feverishly agitated against communism and fascism in an SDAP house-to-house canvassing magazine. When he returned from London in 1945 he became a prominent figure in the PvdA, as deputy chief of *Het Vrije Volk* and during the early 1950s as head of the Action and Propaganda service.<sup>92</sup> In service of the Action, he wrote a brochure titled *Er dreigt gevaar!* (“Impending danger!”) that, together with news articles in *Het Vrije Volk*, illustrates the ways in which the PvdA conceptualized fascism and used it as a political specter.

Firstly, fascism was fundamentally linked to the reaction, which fought the Treaty of Linggadjadi and opposed the reform of post-war politics and society, most notably the financial policies of Liefstinck. To be sure, they were not considered to be one and the same: the reaction was perceived as split between two groups. One was represented by the Dutch banking exchange, which refused to accept the hardships of economic reconstruction, opposed political and economic reform and strove towards a return to the former capitalist order.<sup>93</sup> The other demonstrated ‘a clear fascist tendency’.<sup>94</sup> To Sluysen, not all opponents of “Linggadjadi” were fascists, but some of them had to be counted among ‘the political underworld of the Netherlands’.<sup>95</sup> This danger was personified by committees and organizations who opposed Linggadjadi and steered for ‘nothing less than civil war’ in the Dutch Indies.<sup>96</sup> These groups, who often counted soldiers among their ranks, were considered to be fascist because of their extreme nationalist and militarist values.<sup>97</sup> In this instance, PvdA propaganda repeated the accusations leveled by *De Waarheid* at former prime minister Gerbrandy, who headed the anti-Linggadjadi *Comité tot Handhaving van de Rijkseenheid*, with the important exception that the communist paper did not distinguish between the reaction and the fascist threat.<sup>98</sup>

Secondly, fascism was not to be regarded as merely an remnant of the past: it still was an active threat to world peace and safety – Sluysen formulated this most clearly: ‘Nazi

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<sup>92</sup> Description from the IISG collection Archief Meyer Sluysen, <https://search.socialhistory.org/Record/ARCH02723>, last accessed on 28-05-2018.

<sup>93</sup> ‘Partij van de Arbeid valt de reactie aan’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 24-03-1947, 2; ‘Tegen reactie en neo-fascisme’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 10-04-1947, 2; PvdA/SDAP 759, Sluysen, M., ‘Er dreigt gevaar!’, Amsterdam 1947, 9-10.

<sup>94</sup> ‘Even omkijken’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 08-02-1947, 3.

<sup>95</sup> PvdA/SDAP 759, Sluysen, ‘Er dreigt gevaar!’, 11-2.

<sup>96</sup> ‘De reactie organiseert zich. “Nationaal Reveil” een duister gedoe’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 31-03-1947, 1. The organizations mentioned by name here are respectively the ‘mustachioed’ *Comité tot Handhaving van de Rijkseenheid*, the *Nationaal Jongerenverbond*, the *Volksweerbaarheid* and the *Comité Nationaal Reveil*.

<sup>97</sup> ‘De reactie organiseert zich. “Nationaal Reveil” een duister gedoe’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 31-03-1947, 1.

<sup>98</sup> ‘In de aanval tegen de reactie! Oproep van het Partijbestuur der C.P.N.’, *De Waarheid*, 20-02-1947, 1; 3.



Germany is defeated. But fascism is not dead. Not in Germany. Nor in the Netherlands. It is still smoldering.<sup>99</sup> This did not exclusively refer to the opposition to Linggadjati, as Sluysen warned of fascist groups at home and throughout Europe that survived the war and now patiently awaited opportunities for clandestine action intended to endanger democracy.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, these evil forces would profit from the supposed moral decline of society since the war.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, fascism was alive and well in the form of the Franco regime in Spain. For MP Evert Vermeer, the rejection of a PvdA motion urging the United Nations to bring about the destruction of the regime was a sign that fascism, by its very nature, would cause another world war if given the chance.<sup>102</sup> However, at home, the biggest concern was the assumption of power by a conservative cabinet who would undo the progress hitherto made.<sup>103</sup>

If the distinction between the reaction and fascism still seems vague, it is because this was most likely the intent. Propaganda did not elucidate the differences between the threat of the reaction towards political and economic reconstruction and the lurking fascist danger that had not yet been defeated. The reaction was the main target of the campaign: it was not uncommon for reports of speeches not to make any mention of fascism at all.<sup>104</sup> Sometimes, propaganda for the action even warned against the dangers of communism to democracy and freedom.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, action against fascism was secondary to action against the reaction. On its own, “fascism” stood for shadowy elites who sought political power and wanted to undo the significant socio-economic reforms. It represented anxiety about the fragility of the post-war democratic system. Furthermore, the term was used to discredit the forces of the reaction by association with the evil that had just terrorized the world. Whether such accusations had any merit is not part of this thesis – but certainly, the use of fascism as a political swear word predates its devolution as a theoretical referent that has been thought to have begun in the 1960s.

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<sup>99</sup> PvdA/SDAP 759, Sluysen, ‘Er dreigt gevaar!’, 11.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-3.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-5. This line of thought is represented as well in DNPP PvdA, ‘1946. Vertrouwen in de toekomst. Een program voor Nederlands herstel en vernieuwing in de komende vier jaren’, 1.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Tegen fascisme en reactie’, *De Heerenveensche koerier: onafhankelijk dagblad voor Midden-Zuid-Oost-Friesland en Noord-Overijssel*, 15-04-1947, 8.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Progressie of reactie’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 04-02-1947, 5.

<sup>104</sup> ‘“Geen illusies: Wij zijn de smeders van ons eigen geluk”, Duizenden demonstreerden: Tegen de reactie en laster, Vóór socialisme en democratie’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 17-04-1947, 2.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Even omkijken’, *Het Vrije Volk*, 08-02-1947, 3.

The content of the PvdA campaign overlapped with the party line of the CPN, although the latter was far more outspoken in accusing its enemies of fascism and asserting itself as an anti-fascist force. Although *Het Vrije Volk* could occasionally be distrustful of the conservative flank of the Catholic coalition party KVP (*Katholieke Volkspartij*), *De Waarheid* insisted that the clique surrounding Gerbrandy aimed to engender the recovery of fascism. Seeking cooperation with the PvdA, it claimed that the PvdA had joined the coalition to curb the force of the reaction. Since this was obviously not working, the paper called the party to revise its attitude and join the CPN in an intra-leftist bloc.<sup>106</sup>

However, both parties stood on completely opposite ends of the Cold War. The anti-fascist moment faded as the PvdA conformed to strict pro-Atlantic anti-communism and communist parties throughout Europe adhered to the line of the just-established Cominform and finally backed off from the prospect of the national front.<sup>107</sup> The split between the PvdA and CPN was then finalized with the disintegration of the Linggadjati accords and the subsequent outbreak of the PvdA-supported war for the preservation of the Indonesian colony in 1947.<sup>108</sup> It was at this point that communist anti-fascist politics moved from a cooperative tool aimed at possible entry into government towards an explanation and legitimization of the failure of this tactic. *De Waarheid* continued to warn against a resurgent fascism by unmasking individuals and identifying fascist continuities in the elites of the Netherlands, and even more so in West Germany, which in the eyes of the communists remained the most pressing fascist danger. Inspired by communist dogma, the paper pushed conspiracy theories of an omnipresent capitalist-fascist plot.<sup>109</sup>

Ismee Tames has posed a two-fold explanation for the communist dive into anti-fascist conspiracy thinking. Firstly, it originated in communist experiences of events during the war and the fact that the party had now (again) become an isolated minority in a hostile environment. Secondly, the great emotional and personal sacrifices made in the violent struggle against Nazi Germany stood in the way of self-criticism. Conspiracy theories reinforced political faith in the communist utopia that would emerge once the fascist enemy had been defeated. Once the line in the sand had been drawn, anyone not wholeheartedly

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<sup>106</sup> 'In de aanval tegen de reactie! Oproep van het Partijbestuur der C.P.N.', *De Waarheid*, 20-02-1947, 1; 3.

<sup>107</sup> Sinke, 'Dutch Communism in Transition', 1051; 1054-5.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 1048.

<sup>109</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 235.

committed to this struggle automatically fell under suspicion of treason against the party.<sup>110</sup> Of course, the same motivations informed the international line led by the Soviet Union, which was strongly opposed to the capitalist West German state. It is thus unsurprising that editors of *De Waarheid* emphasized the continuity of the *Lebensraum*-seeking threat emanating from the Germany of Wilhelm II to that of Adenauer's.<sup>111</sup>

In parliament, the invocation of anti-fascism by the CPN served to criticize the government's anti-communism stance. Naturally, the communists took great issue with the early release of collaborators, many of whom had returned to society in the late 1940s.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, it protested the overwhelming political support for the return of statehood to former Dutch combatants in German forces, while the countrymen who had fought against fascism in the Spanish Civil War remained stateless.<sup>113</sup> It saw a further manifestation of the grand capitalist-fascist scheme both in the resurgence of certain neo-fascist groups and the fact that its questions in parliament about this topic were met with scorn by the government coalition, who argued that the CPN was not any worse than the NSB had been because both were in service of a foreign totalitarian regime.<sup>114</sup> The party aimed to counter the narrative of totalitarianism by criticizing the government's commitment to Transatlantic anti-communism. Communist rhetoric deemed anti-fascism incompatible with anti-communism because, unlike the former, the fight against communism turned a blind eye to the exploitation of oppressed people in the Third World.<sup>115</sup>

In these efforts, the CPN was sometimes joined by the PvdA, but the party did not attempt any further campaigns against fascism. In part, this had to do with the split between both parties, but mostly, the demand of the social democrats for "radical" reform had disappeared from the election program with the assumption of power and the passing of the immediate phase of reconstruction. While the fight against the reaction was not over, its

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 239-40.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 99-100.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-7. Despite these strong retorts, Tames notes behind the screens the regrouping of former national-socialists eventually became of urgent concern to the government.

<sup>115</sup> S-GD, 'Handelingen Eerste Kamer 1949-1950, 10<sup>e</sup> vergadering - 21 december 1949. 1478. Overdracht van de soevereiniteit over Indonesië', 106.

importance was decreasing.<sup>116</sup> References to the fascist threat disappeared. Anti-fascism had lost its place as a viable part of political strategies outside of the communist camp.

### 1.3 Communist and anti-totalitarian organizations in civil society

Since the late 1940s, anti-fascist rhetoric was primarily the staple of the CPN and the PvdA. However, there were also actors in civil society that were bound together by a belief that the concept of fascism remained a threat to peace, divided here in two categories. The first is composed of organizations dedicated, in various ways, to fighting against a reoccurrence of fascism. Second are peace movements that warned against the dangers of neo-fascism and totalitarianism in general. Such groups claimed a neutral space in the Cold War, fearful of the threat to peace and safety emanating from Cold War hostilities. The task at hand is to demonstrate how these parties conceptualized fascism to understand why they continued to warn society against fascism as a pressing danger.

Anti-fascist organizations were often closely associated to the CPN or infiltrated by communists. Organizations founded to oppose the threat of fascism were influenced by developments within the former resistance and war victim organizations. The most significant of these were firstly the disappointment among many members with the failure of the purification and the early release of former collaborators. Their disillusionment was only enhanced by the hardships of life during reconstruction, when not all hopes and ambitions for post-war society seemed to have come into fruition.<sup>117</sup> Furthermore, organizations were increasingly divided into communist and non-communist ones, which generated differing remembrances of the war.<sup>118</sup> Utilizing its important contribution to national resistance, the CPN strongly tied itself to the resistance to legitimize its political presence and argue that the fight against fascism continued.<sup>119</sup> Unsurprisingly, dedicated anti-fascist organizations were often joined by many communists or communist fronts.

West Germany was the focal point of these groups. Especially communist organizations concentrated their efforts on the peril of rearmament of West Germany and its incorporation into supra-national military organizations of the West like the abandoned European Defense

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<sup>116</sup> DNPP PvdA, '1952. Verkiezingsprogram.'

<sup>117</sup> Romijn, *Snel, streng en rechtvaardig*, 127-8; Withuis, J., *Na het Kamp. Vriendschap en politieke strijd*, Amsterdam 2005, 234-4.

<sup>118</sup> Withuis, *Na het Kamp*, 14-7; Sinke, 'Dutch Communism in Transition', 1055-6.

<sup>119</sup> Sinke, 'Dutch Communism in Transition', 1055.

Community and then NATO. The consequence of these developments, they claimed, would inevitably be the outbreak of another world war. The Dutch committee of Auschwitz survivors, mostly a communist front, warned that rearmament would put Germany in a position to execute a non-specified “revenge”, once again pursuing conquest and military dominance over Europe.<sup>120</sup> This notion was further pushed by the organization *Dat Nooit Weer* (“Never Again”), which cooperated with a host of international organizations protesting West German rearmament. At a joint conference in Denmark in 1952, representatives from the Western European organizations presented the case for their common cause. In short, remilitarizing West Germany would provoke Eastern militarization, perpetuate Germany’s division and strengthen the revival of militarism and fascism.<sup>121</sup> Flyers distributed among the public – the labor classes were especially targeted – emphasized the haunting image of a remilitarized Germany led by SS-generals plunging the country in civil war and the continent in crisis.<sup>122</sup> Although *Dat Nooit Weer* presented itself to the public as a neutral organization, allegedly comprised of ‘hundreds of scholars, clergymen and artists’,<sup>123</sup> it was watched closely by the Ministry of the Interior, who believed with absolute certainty that nearly all its members were affiliated with communism.<sup>124</sup> Unsurprisingly, then, *De Waarheid* promoted the organization, as both parties reiterated their shared viewpoints.<sup>125</sup> As non-communist members gradually realized the extent of communist dominance, and the organization’s close operation with other communist-affiliated organizations, many distanced themselves from it.<sup>126</sup>

Nevertheless, the danger emanating from a rearmed Germany was also felt outside of the communist milieu, by organizations that opposed both communism and fascism as totalitarian systems. The need to protest the threat the Cold War posed to peace, safety and democracy coming from both sides of the Iron Curtain was felt by the self-styled *Derde Weg* (Third Way). In various ways, its standpoint in the German case read along the lines of *Dat Nooit Weer*.

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<sup>120</sup> DNP 90, Flyer from the ‘Nederland Auschwitz Comité’, Amsterdam, September 1952. The modern-day Nederland Auschwitz Comité was only formed in 1955, yet the date listed on this document precedes that.

<sup>121</sup> CVD 623, ‘Kennisseving, aangenomen op de conferentie Odense door de afgevaardigden van België, Denemarken, Frankrijk, Groot-Brittannië, Italië, Luxemburg, Nederland, Noorwegen en Zweden’, 15-06-1952.

<sup>122</sup> CVD 623, ‘Rotterdams Vredescomité. Aan de arbeiders werkzaam bij Wilton’, Rotterdam, 11-06-1952.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> CVD 623, Letter from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Justice concerning Comité *Dat Nooit Weer*, no. BX 108943, The Hague 21-05-1951.

<sup>125</sup> ‘Actiegroepen “Dat nooit weer” waarschuwen opnieuw tegen Duitse herbewapening’, *De Waarheid*, 10-01-1952.

<sup>126</sup> CVD 623, Report from “KB” to “HB”, concerning the conference for the discussion of the German question, 25-06-1952; Withuis, *Na het Kamp*, 198.

Likewise, it concluded that remilitarization meant a return to fascism because former militarist and fascist powers would lead a new army that would drill its soldiers in old-school Prussian fashion.<sup>127</sup> However, it did not raise the notion of a new fascist war. Instead, it argued that basing the military cadre of the new army on Nazi officials and sympathizers would endanger the process of reconciliation between West Germany and the European democracies.<sup>128</sup> Moreover, it did not trust former military supporters of the Nazi regime with the defense of democracy and ensuring European unity.<sup>129</sup> Lastly, in contrast to *Dat Nooit Weer*, the *Derde Weg* was principally anti-totalitarian and fiercely criticized the Soviet Union like it did Western powers.<sup>130</sup> Another, if very short-lived, attempt was made by members of the PvdA, among them Vorrink, to found an anti-fascist, anti-communist organization, called the *Comité van Verweer tegen Totalitaire Propaganda* (Committee of Defense against Totalitarian Propaganda), which its initiators aimed to be a continuation of the pre-war *Comité van Waakzaamheid*.<sup>131</sup> The would-be committee regarded communism and neo-fascism as threats to Western culture firstly. Neo-fascism manifested itself not in Nazi generals, but appeared ‘disguised in faith to moral traditions, which it in fact abuses as the fulcrum of social conservatism, racial discrimination and blood-and-soil mythology.’<sup>132</sup>

#### 1.4 Conclusion

During economic and political reconstruction, Dutch politics, like in many other countries throughout Western Europe, was united by an anti-fascist consensus that supported constructing a welfare state to prevent the reappearance of the material preconditions that led to war. Although opposition to Nazism had triumphed, and political parties tried to profit from this legacy, the war did not spawn anti-fascism as a viable political ideology or movement in its own right. The demise of the Axis meant the disappearance of fascist ideology from everyday life, and as reconstruction presented its own set of pressing issues, the anti-fascist consensus in the West ensured that processes of denazification gradually wound down. As a “peripheral ideological concept”, anti-fascism retreated to the background.

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<sup>127</sup> *Oproep tegen de Duitse herbewapening*, Amsterdam 1955. Like the sources from footnotes 133, 134 and 135, this document is a brochure published and distributed by the *Derde Weg*.

<sup>128</sup> Beuve-Méry, H., *De zaak van een neutraal Europa*, Amsterdam 1952, 3-4. This article is a reproduction from an original publication in *De Groene Amsterdammer* from the same year.

<sup>129</sup> *Duitsland, Europa en de wereld*, Amsterdam 1953.

<sup>130</sup> *Vredesbeweging “De Derde Weg”*, Wassenaar 1951, 3.

<sup>131</sup> CVTP, Unaddressed letter from H. van Hulst concerning ‘a new “Comité van Waakzaamheid”’, 1950.

<sup>132</sup> CVTP, Manifesto *Comité van Verweer tegen Totalitaire Propaganda*, 1950.

Nonetheless, the notion of the still-present or ‘smoldering’ danger of fascism remained a valuable political tool for leftist parties and organizations in civil society. From the “never again” mantra of the anti-fascist consensus sprang organizations who continued to warn against the threat of fascism as a threat to peace and Western culture. The division between communist and non-communist anti-fascists was tangible in the perception and portrayal of the West, which determined whether organizations saw Western politics as inherently (proto-)fascist or the product of cynical *Realpolitik*.

The CPN stood in the tradition of revolutionary anti-fascism that fundamentally tied capitalism to fascism. As it did in the Soviet Union, anti-fascism thus functioned as an argumentative tool against capitalism. However, communists also hoped that a shared anti-fascist understanding would facilitate intra-leftist cooperation during reconstruction – and once this tactic failed, revolutionary anti-fascism explained the subsequent political isolation of the communist party. The party’s anti-fascist credentials during the occupation had brought it a level of popularity and support it would never equal again. By asserting a strong claim on the legacy of the resistance, it aimed to hold on to this.

Members of the PvdA also became involved in anti-fascist initiatives within and outside of the party. The “Actie” was a remarkable moment because it was the highpoint of the party’s political use of anti-fascism, which bore similarities to the communists’ agitation against “the reaction”. Although the motivations behind the campaign could not be cleared up, it could be explained as a potential outreach to the communists at a particularly tense moment in Dutch politics. More likely, anti-fascist politics were an electoral tactic of the communists, aimed at securing votes from working class voters who were distrustful of the transformation of the labor-oriented SDAP into the PvdA, which aspired to be a broad people’s party.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, the anti-fascism of the PvdA always remained conservative per Seidman’s definition: in the campaign, the party continued to advocate traditional pluralism and limits to the state’s power and staunchly oppose infringement on personal freedom and property rights.

In the post-war era, anti-fascists of all trades feared international developments of the Cold War might induce the return of fascism, and at home feared fascist groups would profit off the conservative reaction against structural reform. The most salient divide was between

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<sup>133</sup> Verrips, *Dwars, Duivels en Dromend*, 227.

revolutionary and conservative anti-fascists, because the latter did not consider the political system inherently fascist. However, we must also recognize and acknowledge the limitations of anti-fascism to appeal to a large public in the 1940s and 1950s. As of yet, there was no widespread or public indignance with a perceived rise of neofascism. Moreover, although revolutionary and conservative anti-fascists desired to protect their respective notions of democracy from fascism, contemporary anti-fascism was devoid of aspirations for democratization or emancipation of minorities.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> NVA, 'Maandoverzicht Centrale Veiligheidsdienst november 1946 (Overzicht no. 11), no. 9067, The Hague 31-12-1946', briefly mentions the founding of a communist-led 'Bureau against Fascism and Racial Glorification', but little else is known about this organization.



## Chapter 2

# Real or fashionable?

## Anti-fascism during the late Golden Years, 1958-1973

### 2.1 Introduction

During the early years of the reconstruction, anti-fascism had served as a rallying cry for political parties and social organizations wary of right-wing threats to structural reform. The late fifties and early sixties, however, saw the gradual completion of post-war reconstruction. A solid welfare state had been constructed on the basis of a widely-shared political belief in welfare capitalism that was conceptualized by the events of the war. Following Hobsbawm's argument that "real existing socialism" in the East provided the main impetus for capitalist self-reform, Stone has argued that Western politicians regarded the welfare state as a form of compensation for the hardships endured during the war, but also as a tool to keep extremist, i.e. communist, ideologies at bay.<sup>135</sup> Moreover, its creation was legitimized through the anti-fascist argument that fascism was conceived from a crisis in capitalism. However, while revolutionary anti-fascist ideologies therefore argued for the overthrow of the capitalist system, social democrats and conservatives in the West believed in the ability of a regulated economy to prevent the conditions that would induce fascism.<sup>136</sup> Stone primarily attributes the recovery of Western Europe to the widely shared anti-fascist consensus that, firstly, celebrated the 'anonymous narrative of victory over 'evil'' and downplayed widespread support for and collaboration with fascism, and secondly, supported a social-economic system designed to prevent its return.<sup>137</sup> The end of the reconstruction and advent of economic prosperity could thus reasonably appear to signify the triumph of the anti-fascist post-war consensus after reconstruction. This leads us to wonder how conscious anti-fascist activism manifested itself during the years of economic prosperity until 1973, which Hobsbawm regarded as the start of the "Decades of Crisis" and Stone deems the beginning of the end of the anti-fascist consensus.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Hobsbawm, E., *The Age of Extremes, 1914-1991*, London 2004, 267-9; Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 83.

<sup>136</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 83; De Rooy, P., *Republiek van Rivaliteiten. Nederland sinds 1813*, Amsterdam 2002, 211-2.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>138</sup> Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 8-10; Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 186-7.

While anti-fascism continued to be heavily interwoven with the dynamics of the Cold War, three sociocultural developments especially impacted anti-fascist activism in the Netherlands. Firstly, public interest in the events of the war and especially the significance of the notion of resistance increased, partly the result of extensively covered media events such as the Eichmann trial and the publication of Jacques Presser's historical work *Ondergang*, which conveyed to the public the extent of the horrors of the Holocaust and the unheroic role the Dutch had generally played in this.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, with increasingly free communication during the gradual collapse of pillarization, Jewish survivors and resistance members became more able to voice their experiences in newspapers and the growing television industry, which sought ways to attract new audiences.<sup>140</sup> A growing awareness of the shameful past fed into the second development, namely the rise of criticism of and resistance against the sociopolitical order.<sup>141</sup> Thirdly, the most dramatic change to anti-fascist culture was the ascendance of rebellious youth culture and student protests, in which these developments came together. Among the younger generation, it was increasingly felt that elites had kept up a false image of resistance and collaboration for their own benefit, and therefore, that fascist tendencies continued to exert power over politics and society.<sup>142</sup> This meant an outright attack on the central myth of the anti-fascist consensus by a generation which had not experienced the war, yet desired to continue the war against fascism and in doing so borrowed from 'the vocabulary and repertoire of symbols of their parents'.<sup>143</sup> This was to be accomplished, Stone argues, by overthrowing the morality of their parents' generation, which had not prevented fascism, even collaborated with it.<sup>144</sup> "Fascism" thus became a way to categorically distinguish right from wrong.<sup>145</sup>

Consequently, the 1960s saw a host of controversies that left the press, political parties and civil organizations from all over the political spectrum worried about a revival or continuation of fascism (however defined) in Dutch society. The public responses to the harsh treatment of protesters against the wedding of Princess Beatrix to the German Claus von

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<sup>139</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 253.

<sup>140</sup> De Haan, *Na de ondergang*, 102.

<sup>141</sup> Kennedy, J.C., *Een beknopte geschiedenis van Nederland*, Amsterdam 2017, 353-4; 357-8. Withuis, *Na het Kamp*, 278.

<sup>142</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 277.

<sup>143</sup> Righart, H., *De eindeloze jaren zestig. Geschiedenis van een generatieconflict*, Amsterdam 1995 220.

<sup>144</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 113.

<sup>145</sup> Schuyt, K., *Het Spoor Terug. J.B. Charles | W.H. Nagel, 1910-1983*, Amsterdam 2010, 389.

Amsberg in March 1966 by the Amsterdam police provide one example of the way accusations of “fascism” were leveled by multiple sides of dividing social issues. Criticizing the insistence on respect for authority over the right to free speech and expression, those who approved of the protests or, in any case, disapproved of the police responses marked them as examples of ‘fascistoid tendencies in society’.<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, one leader from the conservative Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) publicly castigated the demonstrators as ‘nihilist elements’ that had ‘taken over the methods of the Nazis and fascists’. In accordance with totalitarian theory, their efforts were said to have amounted to ‘fascism in a red coat, passing itself off as anti-fascism’.<sup>147</sup>

Therefore, the prominent use of “fascism” in political language during the 1960s has led some historians to conclude that, in Western Europe, the decade ‘witnessed the emptying of the meaning of the term as it became ever less a historical or theoretical referent.’<sup>148</sup> Ben Mercer’s study on the cases of France, Italy and Western Germany sheds light on the dramatic change of anti-fascist culture with the convergence of social and cultural changes. Constituencies of youthful revolutionary leftists, moderate students and sympathetic socialists and liberals increasingly criticized and protested an establishment that justified an only superficially democratic social-political order through the history of the resistance.<sup>149</sup> In doing so, they frequently utilized the concept of fascism as an accusation. Therefore, the concept came to refer less often to the fascist of the past or specific contemporary neo-Nazi parties, and more so to a general disposition to violence and authoritarianism in society and the suppression of democracy. Consequently, from the blurring of the term arose general conceptual confusion: politicization as well as apathy towards politics were said to be potential sources of fascism, both activist minorities and the masses were denounced as “fascist”, and, as seen above, the fascist label was applied to both the state and protesters.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, the rhetorical use of the concept of fascism did not indicate an engagement with the historical occurrence of fascism, but ‘it formulated the fears of a variety of constituencies about the shallowness of postwar democracy.’<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> ‘Comité Waakzaamheid verontrust over fascisme’, *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19-12-1966, 13.

<sup>147</sup> ‘Het begint weer’, *Gereformeerd Gezinsblad*, 17-03-1966, 1.

<sup>148</sup> Mercer, ‘Specters of Fascism’, 96.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

The combined and intertwined forces of interest in the events of the war and the popularized notion of resistance created a trend of what Jolande Withuis has referred to as “fashionable anti-fascism”.<sup>152</sup> To be sure, this was intended as a derogatory term decrying a form of anti-fascism that was characterized as opportunistic and separated from the real anti-fascism of resistance fighters and other survivors of the war. However, I argue that the emergence of fashionable anti-fascism denotes the evolution of anti-fascism to becoming a grassroots phenomenon. This thesis defines it according to three main characteristics. Firstly, fashionable anti-fascism originated from the post-war generation, was inspired by New Left ideas and tied remembrance of the war to aspirations for democratization and resistance against the establishment. This resulted in a vaguely defined notion of anti-fascism that primarily focused on resisting “authoritarianism”. Secondly, fashionable anti-fascism was not a strictly communist concept, but did borrow symbols, concepts and Marxist convictions from the revolutionary anti-fascist tradition. Lastly, conceptual vagueness allowed for a broader acceptance of the term “anti-fascism” by the non-communist socialist and moderate left. Fashionable anti-fascism thus boiled down to a popularized understanding and use of anti-fascism.

This chapter will continue many of the same questions that the first revolved around, but during the period of dramatic change in Dutch society in the 1960s and 1970s. Who still consciously used anti-fascism as a political signifier during this time of radical changes in society and the definition of fascism? Who were the most prominent anti-fascist actors, civil and militant, reformist and revolutionary? Again, a distinction is made between political parties and organizations in civil society. This chapter focuses on their perception of “fascism”, the actions they undertook against it, the people who made up the anti-fascist constituencies, and the continuities with and breaks from earlier anti-fascists.

## 2.2 Anti-fascism for an isolated CPN

In the final days of 1958 Paul de Groot, speaking at the 19<sup>th</sup> party congress of the Dutch communist party as party leader, made a declaration that would have rung familiar to the attendees:

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<sup>152</sup> Withuis, *Na het Kamp*, 283.

‘[t]he great struggle against the reaction and fascism has begun. The CPN shall and must lead this struggle. All progressives must be convinced of the necessity of resistance against a right-wing government...’<sup>153</sup>

The government De Groot referred to was the Second Beel cabinet, the first post-war coalition of the Netherlands without the PvdA or other left-wing participation. Although it was merely a rump cabinet whose main responsibility was organizing elections, which took place a few months later, *De Waarheid* warned readers of the prospect of an autocratic government contrived by big business.<sup>154</sup> Warning against ‘the fascist danger’, De Groot pointed to rising unemployment, the muted role of parliament and war-mongering capitalists as signs of conditions that went ‘into the direction of fascism’.<sup>155</sup> Invoking past opposition of the PvdA against “fascism”, and seeing an opportunity for increased agitation, he called for ‘unity of the action against the reaction’: cooperation with the social-democrats and the merger of the communist union EVC with the socialist NVV, which the party had already long desired considering its declining membership.<sup>156</sup>

However, the effort failed predictably: the PvdA did not respond to these calls or denounce their former colleagues as fascists. By February, De Groot had dropped all aspirations for anti-fascist unity, instead accusing the PvdA of being supported by ‘West German fascism’.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, the CPN was simultaneously dealing with internal dissent and conflicts having to do with the destalinization of the party and the direction of the EVC. Although after the elections an actual right-wing cabinet was formed that the CPN attacked in the press, the party did not systemically portray the new administration as a fascist threat. Nevertheless, during the 1960s *De Waarheid* carried on cautioning for the revival of fascism, unmasking elites and unearthing “capitalist-fascist” conspiracies. From the paper’s accounts and party statements it is possible to assess various categories of what did constitute a fascist threat according to the official party line. Especially De Groot’s speech on the 26<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the famous mass February strike of 1941, organized by the then-illegal CPN in response to German measures and policies directed at Jews, encapsulates communist anti-fascist memory politics.

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<sup>153</sup> NVA, BVD report on the 19th Party Congress of the CPN, nr. 481.587, The Hague 29-01-1959, 11.

<sup>154</sup> ‘Oproep van het 19<sup>e</sup> congres der CPN’, *De Waarheid*, 30-12-1958, 1.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Paul de Groot: “Wijs de sociaal-democraten de juiste weg”’, *De Waarheid*, 05-02-1959, 1.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Oproep van het 19<sup>e</sup> congres der CPN’, *De Waarheid*, 30-12-1958, 1.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Paul de Groot: “Wijs de sociaal-democraten de juiste weg”’, *De Waarheid*, 05-02-1959, 1.

Firstly, adhering to Moscow directives, the CPN remained vehemently opposed to West Germany as a continuous source of fascist peril, stemming from alleged revanchism among scornful elites, resurging militarism following rearmament and fascist continuities as most obviously evidenced by the placement of former Nazis in positions of power. One new development was the founding of the extreme-right *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD), which, in contrast to the West German communist party, had not been declared illegal because of the presence of (former) Nazis in high places of government, it was mused. Moreover, West German aspirations to acquiring nuclear weapons were portrayed as a step leading to war.<sup>158</sup> In this the CPN was joined by the short-lived Socialist Workers' Party, formed by CPN dissidents who had desired the destalinization of the party, although the SWP stated far less alarmingly in its political program that while the danger of resurgent fascism was alive and mostly radiated from West Germany, it did not constitute a grave threat to the achievements of the working class.<sup>159</sup> The Pacifistic-Socialist Party, rooted in the peace movements against the nuclear war and the arms race, reacted similarly to events such as the appointment of former Wehrmacht general Johann von Kielmansegg as Commander-in-Chief of NATO forces in Central Europe by fearfully concluding in its journal *Radikaal* that 'the Nazis are among us.'<sup>160</sup>

Secondly, growing hostility from the Dutch populace and establishment towards the CPN created a constant feeling of besiegement within the party – which was not entirely unjustified since the party was watched by the Domestic Security Service (BVD) – that led it to denounce the political system as approximating fascism.<sup>161</sup> In the wake of the famous revelations of Stalin's crimes and subsequent internal feuding, anti-fascist rhetoric only ramped up as the CPN lashed back against the government coalition that felt vindicated in its political opposition to communism. In the official CPN report of the 22<sup>nd</sup> congress of the Soviet communist party (CPSU), De Groot exclaimed:

'We do not allow us to be besmirched by the Nazi-servants! (...) With revulsion we turn against our Suurhoffs<sup>162</sup> and KVP-fascists, who try to cast blame on communism, because in the Soviet Union excesses are fought against that are of frequent occurrence in the PvdA

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<sup>158</sup> CD CPN, Speech from Paul de Groot on 'the February strike of 1941 and today's situation', 23-02-1967, 2-5.

<sup>159</sup> DNPP SWP, '1960. Beginselprogramma van de Socialistische Werkers Partij', 8.

<sup>160</sup> 'De nazi's zijn onder ons', *Radikaal. Weekblad voor socialisme en vrede* 1 (1967) nr. 7, 1.

<sup>161</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 237-8.

<sup>162</sup> In reference to then-PvdA party leader J.G. Suurhoff.

and KVP, where the personal rule of leaders and cliques reduces every notion of democracy to a mockery.’<sup>163</sup>

It is important to note that such an accusation came from the belief of the Dutch communists that their current struggle and activities represented a continuation of the ‘great war against fascism’ of which the February strike had been part as well.<sup>164</sup> Indeed, for many years, the CPN, especially De Groot, used the annual commemoration mainly to discuss other subjects and political issues than the actual event.<sup>165</sup> Any perceived efforts to undermine both this narrative and the idea of communist leadership in the struggle against fascism were therefore portrayed as consciously undertaken to aid the resurgence of fascism in the West. It was thus justified, De Groot felt, to criticize historian Loe de Jong of ‘sullyng and twisting the traditions of the national anti-fascist resistance’ for nefarious political purposes:

‘Because these traditions are a powerful weapon today, they are a stimulant for our youth, they are a stimulant for today’s struggle now that we have come to face the imperious revival of fascism in West Germany, that exerts in our country a clear influence on domestic politics through the Boerenpartij, as has been illustrated without a doubt, but during the latest elections also in camouflaged form as with D’66. And moreover [*sic*] in a regrouping, in a certain breakaway in the so-called major right-wing parties and even within the PvdA.’<sup>166</sup>

Besides rallying against the vaguely fascist mainstream, communists identified fascist enemies within the elites and certain political parties. *De Waarheid* published reports regarding covered up cases of collaboration with the intent of casting a shadow on the political system, thereby giving further credence to the notion of capitalist-fascist plots.<sup>167</sup> The idea of resurgent fascism was not exclusive to communist media outlets. As Van der Heijden has mentioned, journalists from the left-wing *Vrij Nederland* wrote concerned articles about the rise of the NPD and the tolerance of the West German establishment towards extreme-right and domestic fascist organizations: Europe, it was warned, threatened to descend into Nazism

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<sup>163</sup> CD CPN, De Groot, P., ‘Wat gebeurt er in Moskou? CPN over het 22<sup>e</sup> CPSU-congres. Verslag van Paul de Groot, leider van de delegatie van de CPN naar het 22<sup>e</sup> Congres van de CPSU, in de zitting van het Partijbestuur der CPN in november 1961’, December 1961, 14.

<sup>164</sup> CD CPN, Speech from Paul de Groot on ‘the February strike of 1941 and today’s situation’, 23-02-1967, 2.

<sup>165</sup> Mooij, A., *De strijd om de Februaristaking*, Amsterdam 2006, 121-2

<sup>166</sup> CD CPN, Speech from Paul de Groot on ‘the February strike of 1941 and today’s situation’, 23-02-1967, 2.

<sup>167</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 240-4.

again.<sup>168</sup> One fascist target for the general press was the *Boerenpartij* (BP), formed in 1958 as a farmers' interest group that came to exert an appeal to the extreme right.<sup>169</sup> After surprising electoral gains in 1963, the party found itself in hot water when its new senators Hendrik Adams and Evert Jan Roskam were discovered to have been members of Nazi-allied movements, which led to widespread indignance and protests from political parties in parliament. The CPN called for the formal disbandment of the party on grounds of the Besluit Ontbinding Landverraderlijke Organisaties signed in 1944.<sup>170</sup> While the CPN represented only a small part of the resistance against the Boerenpartij, its opposition was in line with its goal of upholding the continued anti-fascist struggle through a strategy of uncovering fascist plots and then calling on the government to act. When, after persistent coverage from *De Waarheid*, a gathering of former SS members was called off, the paper triumphantly claimed it was the only one that upheld the spirit of the resistance of the war-years.<sup>171</sup>

The political party that most prominently represented anti-fascism in parliament after the conclusion of reconstruction thus remained the CPN. Its particular brand of revolutionary anti-fascism remained relatively unchanged, as party dogma continued to emphasize the connections between capitalism and fascism while opting to work within the confines of parliamentary democracy. Domestically and abroad, the fascist dangers were the same. West Germany was still its foremost source because high-placed former Nazis pulled the strings in the government and turned a blind eye to fascist tendencies that developed within society. Such ideas were not solely the product of communist propaganda, but had long been widely available within the political left. They had been part of the heritage of Third World activism and peace movements, and thus found resonance in leftist journals and political parties like the PSP, whose activist members were often recruited from the *Ban-de-Bom* movement for nuclear disarmament and religious peace organizations.<sup>172</sup> At home, the political system was denounced for excluding the CPN, undermining anti-fascist traditions and conspiring with big business in "capitalist-fascist" plots to cover up its own crimes and weaken democracy.

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<sup>168</sup> Van der Heijden, C., *Dat Nooit Meer. De nasleep van de Tweede Wereldoorlog in Nederland*, Amsterdam 2011, 427-8.

<sup>169</sup> Van Donselaar, 'Post-war fascism', 93.

<sup>170</sup> Tames, *Doorn in het Vlees*, 144.

<sup>171</sup> 'Fascisten en anti-fascisten', *De Waarheid*, 25-09-1961, 3.

<sup>172</sup> Verbij, A., *Tien rode jaren. Links radicalisme in Nederland, 1970-1980*, Amsterdam 2005, 62-3.



### 2.3 Towards a popularized anti-fascism

While the CPN continued to function as the self-appointed political representant of anti-fascism, the most noteworthy development of anti-fascism during the 1960s was the ascendance of anti-fascist rhetoric and activism in civil society. Whereas most anti-fascist initiatives during the previous decade were often instigated by the communist party and doomed to irrelevancy and a speedy demise, now anti-fascism became a more influential staple of political language. This paragraph focuses on the domains from which this tendency becomes apparent, namely the student movement, organizations of victims from World War II and the anti-fascist *Comité Waakzaamheid*. Again, the main question posed here is why these actors strove to carry the torch of anti-fascism and how they set about doing so. Furthermore, we ask ourselves if they, in this way, stood in continuation of pre-war, wartime and post-war anti-fascism.

At the basis of anti-fascist politics of the student movement lay the broadening or, per Mercer, emptying of the meaning of fascism. One important precursor to this development was the body of work of criminologist Willem Nagel on his experiences in the resistance and the nature of fascism, under the pseudonym J.B. Charles. Although *Volg het Spoor Terug* expressed much of the same ideas as early as 1953, his 1962 *Van het kleine koude front* enjoyed more popularity with to the new generation because of its 'combative-moralist character'.<sup>173</sup> Most significantly, Charles analyzed fascism as a human condition rather than a historical occurrence. Within everyone, he stated, there existed a 'little bastard' that formed the foundation of fascism.<sup>174</sup> Inspired by Theodor Adorno's F-scale used to measure the authoritarian personality, Charles' works argued that actual (proto-)fascists in society could be recognized through a host of personal traits, aesthetic preferences and political convictions. Anything as simple as reading the right-wing *Telegraaf* newspaper or disliking the abstract art of Karel Appel could thus be indicative of one's fascist tendencies.<sup>175</sup> These ideas evidently appealed to rebellious youths that wanted to distinguish right from wrong and do better than their parents, who had not conducted themselves as *goed* during the war as they had been let to believe. Therefore, while Charles' works aimed to deconstruct the myth of

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<sup>173</sup> Schuyt, *Het Spoor Terug*, 402-4.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 400-1.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 280-1.

there being just *goed* and *fout* during the war, they also encouraged a tendency, especially prevalent among younger people, to dismiss anything they disapproved of as “fascist”, “fascistoid” or “proto-fascist”, thus reinforcing the dichotomy of right and wrong in the post-war era.<sup>176</sup> However, while influential, Charles’ method of uncovering fascism through seemingly innocuous characteristics was often dismissed and sometimes ridiculed by the public, even by leftist media. Take the example of *Radikaal*, the PSP weekly journal, discussing the uproar over the supposed fascism of the sequel to Jan Cremer’s popular autobiography. ‘Whoever would want to trace the trail of latent fascism within Dutch literature would, at first sight, have to rank Jan Cremer among the unequivocal black brothers’, the reviewer sardonically notes before arguing that cherry-picking of quotes and paragraphs does not expose an author’s work as “fascist”.<sup>177</sup>

However, the anti-fascism of the student movement was perhaps even more influenced by the Cold War than World War II. While not all necessarily identifying as communist, political thought and action among student activists was shaped by the communist worldview and youth organizations that could be directly allied to the communist party. J.B. Charles’ ideas, too, went against totalitarian theory by depicting communism as an ideology that, while having become corrupted, was fundamentally positive, unlike fascism.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, the student movement naturally inherited traditions from revolutionary anti-fascism, even the groups and organizations that in no way identified with communism. At the date of the wedding of Princess Beatrix, for example, hundreds of members of the counterculture movement Provo gathered at the statue of the dock-worker in Amsterdam, a memorial to the 1941 February strike, to lay down roses and distribute pamphlets titled ‘Death to Fascism’.<sup>179</sup> In practice, these activists imitated the tradition of the CPN to gather at the *lieu de memoire* to call for the sustained struggle against the forces of fascism that remained an unrelenting threat to a democratic society.

The student organizations that were involved in anti-fascist activism or made use of anti-fascist rhetoric were all found on the left of the political spectrum. The *Algemeen Nederlands Jeugd Verbond* (ANJV), as the youth organization most closely tied to the CPN,

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 389-90.

<sup>177</sup> ‘Ik – Jan Cremer – II: kokketerie met het fascisme?’ *Radikaal*. *Weekblad voor socialisme en vrede* 1 (1967) nr. 2, 6.

<sup>178</sup> Schuyt, *Het Spoor Terug*, 389.

<sup>179</sup> Righart, *De eindeloze jaren zestig*, 218.

advanced the party line of opposing West-German rearmament and “revanchism”.<sup>180</sup> Moreover, it joined demonstrations against the Francoist regime in Spain that were called for by former Dutch anti-fascist combatants, although it remains unclear in what numbers.<sup>181</sup> Other organizations of which the names frequently appear on pamphlets warning against fascist threats are those of socialist student organizations like *Perikles* and *Politeia*, student union SVB, the PvdA youth organization FJG, local PSP departments, the Socialist Youth (SJ) composed of youth members of the PSP and radical members of Politeia, and Provo. However, in contrast to the period starting in the late 1970s, fascism and anti-fascism still remain peripheral ideological concepts within youth activist communities. Employing the rhetorical power of “fascism” and comparisons to Nazism still took precedence over analyzing fascism as a socio-political phenomenon, which is simply absent from student pamphlets and other publications.

Initiatives of the various of aforementioned organizations to boycott the movie *The Green Berets* (1968), which demonstrated a positive stance towards American involvement in Vietnam, exemplified how this power was consciously harnessed. Denouncing it as a ‘fascist propaganda movie’, three different drafts of a call for its boycott were composed, each including different references to fascism and Nazism, and each with different signees.<sup>182</sup> The first (unsigned) one claimed opposition to the film on the ground of lead actor John Wayne being a member of the far-right, ‘fascist’ John Birch Society.<sup>183</sup> A second version, this time signed by the ANJV, FJG, Perikles, Politeia, SVB and SJ, stated the United States supported a government ‘of which the leader has repeatedly exhibited admiration for Hitler’.<sup>184</sup> The final draft, just signed by the ANJV and Perikles, implored the reader to carry on the Amsterdam tradition of fighting for freedom and against oppression, of which the February strike was ‘such a magnificent example’.<sup>185</sup>

Whereas before, fascist danger abroad emanated from West Germany, the United States had increasingly become the current boogeyman to student activists. Calling for ‘death to fascism’, the SJ denounced the American invasion of Cambodia in 1970 by establishing a

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<sup>180</sup> ANJV 114, Press release, 21-02-1969.

<sup>181</sup> ANJV 114, Undated and untitled press release.

<sup>182</sup> DSN 173c, ‘Amerikanen ook uit Amsterdam’, undated.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> DSN 173c, ‘Amsterdammers, boycot de groene baretten’, undated.

<sup>185</sup> DSN 173c, ‘Boycot de groene baretten’, undated.

direct connection to Dutch suffering at the hands of the Nazis. Again, a small country had been raided by a large army; again, people were being deported and executed; again, a legitimate national resistance was portrayed as criminal; again, there was collaboration. Again, there were concentration camps, an occupation and racially motivated murder.<sup>186</sup> In this, the anti-fascism of student activists stood in the tradition of the anti-imperialism inspired by both communism and the Third World peace movements of the 1950s.<sup>187</sup> Instead of dissecting fascism as a phenomenon in its own right, comparisons to it served to highlight the system's inherent violent authoritarianism and lack of regard for democracy.<sup>188</sup>

Although both were opposed to fascism and Nazism, left-wing student activists did not find much support in the organizations for the former resistance and war victims. Their objections echoed those of Amsterdam citizens responding to the anti-fascist Provo protests in the *Parool* newspaper. The tenor of these letters was that the young protesters were disqualified from referring to a war they had not experienced. Besides, they would not have dared to raise their voices this way during the war. Many thus felt the anti-fascism of a generation that had not experienced the war was a violation of their own collective experience.<sup>189</sup> Accordingly, from the 1960s onwards, patriotic, Christian organizations came to consider the rising left-wing movement of students and intellectuals an even graver threat to their values and democracy than the communists. Like the ARP, they observed worrying similarities between their militant methods and fascist lawlessness.<sup>190</sup> However, this period of increased scrutiny of the events of the war, appreciation of the notion of resistance and rise of leftist values in society, combined with the advent of *detente* in the late 1960s, proved favorable to communist organizations. Fashionable anti-fascism popularized the communist vision on the war and the resistance. Withuis presents the case of the communist *Vrouwen van Ravensbrück* as an example of how this view achieved *Salonfähigkeit*. In 1973, the Amsterdam city council agreed to a proposal of the organization to construct a monument that would honor the remembrance of women in the resistance and also emphasize the importance of "saying no". City councilors of the PvdA enthusiastically embraced the project,

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<sup>186</sup> DSN 21, 'Dood aan het fascisme', 05-05-1970.

<sup>187</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 113-4.

<sup>188</sup> Mercer, 'Specters of Fascism', 127.

<sup>189</sup> Righart, *De eindeloze jaren zestig*, 220.

<sup>190</sup> Withuis, *Na het Kamp*, 247-9.

citing recent events in Chile and Greece as examples of the continued danger of fascism.<sup>191</sup> Further exemplifying the changed atmosphere, the Van Gogh Museum presented an exhibition, simultaneously with the unveiling of the monument in 1975, titled 'old and new resistance' and included contributions from the anti-apartheid movement, a Vietnam committee and the ANJV, while receiving funding from the municipality and the national government.<sup>192</sup> These events demonstrate a profound break from the late 1940s and 1950s, namely the growing popular appeal of an anti-fascism that fundamentally connected the war to the contemporary notion of resistance against oppression.

Outside of the confines of the student movement and the organizations of the former resistance and war victims existed civil initiatives that positioned themselves in the tradition of the pre-war Comité van Waakzaamheid, as the Comité van Verweer tegen Totalitaire Propaganda had aspired to in the early 1950s. The archives of the IISG hold various examples of short-lived organizations founded to resist fascism through action, exhibitions and education.<sup>193</sup> Of these anti-fascist initiatives, the *Comité Waakzaamheid* proved the most organized and received the most media attention. Obviously posing as the spiritual successor to the famous committee of intellectuals in the 1930s, the organization that was to become Waakzaamheid was founded in 1966 by Leo Braat, Tom Rot and Louis Kloet out of discontent with the changing nature of the public 4 May commemoration service of World War II at the Dam in Amsterdam, which evolved to a tribute to countrymen fallen in the wars in Korea and Indonesia as well.<sup>194</sup> Equating the victims of these wars, the gentlemen feared, meant failing to recognize the unicity of National Socialism, an argument still often heard today.

However, the men were not content with merely taking a stance against the development within this particular commemoration. Their concerned observations were fundamentally linked to worries that fascism was again on the rise in modern society. At one of the earliest meetings, in Café Moderne in Amsterdam, Kloet declared that remembering the victims of the war 'partly because of political developments, [had] to be connected to a demonstrative expression of vigilance and signaling of symptoms of fascism in the political

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 278-80.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 282-3.

<sup>193</sup> One example is ANJV 114, Letter from 'the committee for combating resurgent fascism', Rotterdam, 09-03-1960.

<sup>194</sup> AW, Speech from Louis Kloet at the Café Moderne, Amsterdam, 19-02-1966.

and social life in our country.<sup>195</sup> Thus, the men intended not just to resist the distortion of history to protect the memory of the war, but believed this crucial in the continuing struggle against the fascist danger. Knowledge of the nature of fascism and National Socialism was essential to recognizing its symptoms. Anti-Semitism had been and still was an important part of it, Kloet stated, but more generally, the Nazis had induced enmity against the very notion of being different. Thus, the still nameless group considered fighting the hatred against minorities as vital part of the general struggle against fascism.<sup>196</sup> The particularities of this danger remained vague. However, it further expanded on the ideas of the Comité van Verweer, which considered neo-fascism primarily a threat to Western culture, tagging along to this a direct assault on political institutions:

‘The struggle against this ideology, fascism, is not over. In times of political and economic recession, it will re-emerge openly and organized to attempt concrete attacks against our spiritual and political liberty. At present, it is done in an unorganized manner, though already unhygienic, against expressions of our contemporary culture and against parliamentary democracy. We therefore renounce with great decisiveness and force the thought that fascism in Germany or elsewhere was a coincidental occurrence, an unfortunate period.’<sup>197</sup>

In the weeks following the meeting in Café Moderne, a workgroup was constructed to establish Waakzaamheid as an anti-fascist committee.<sup>198</sup> From an announcement of the committee’s first public meeting, in the Krasnapolsky hotel in Amsterdam on the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1966, its political orientation becomes quite clear. With the flyer came an extensive listing of the organization’s board, advisory council and committee of recommendation, which revealed that its prominent members were mostly intellectuals, left-wing dissidents and former members of the resistance.<sup>199</sup> In the 1930s, head of the board Tom Rot, for example, had taken part in the International Red Help, which assisted German communist refugees in the Netherlands, and founded the illegal newspaper *De Vonk* in 1940. Like many others, he was a

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> AW, Document on the origins of the Comité Waakzaamheid, Amsterdam, 23-11-1966.

<sup>199</sup> ANJV 114, Announcement of a public meeting held by the “Comité Waakzaamheid i.o.” at the Krasnapolsky in Amsterdam on 04-05-1966.

CPN-dissident.<sup>200</sup> During the 1930s, Kloet himself had been a youth member of various independent socialist, anti-Stalinist organizations and was marked by Dutch secret services as a left-wing extremist.<sup>201</sup> Within the advisory council, there were more members to be found with a reputable past in anti-fascism. One of these was among the original founders, sculptor Leo Braat, who had been part of the resistance group of Gerrit van der Veen, was made responsible for the purge of Nazi artists after the war and by 1966 was just finishing *The anti-fascist*, a statue honoring Willem Kraan, one of the instigators of the February strike.<sup>202</sup> Reverend Kleijs Kroon had strongly opposed National Socialism in the 1930s, protested the German occupation and hid Jewish children during the war and afterwards continued to publish works denouncing anti-Semitism.<sup>203</sup> Well-known CPN dissidents like Ger Harmsen, Nico Rost and Gerben Wagenaar were also part of the new committee. The latter two had actively participated in the communist resistance, but after 1958, their membership had been revoked, after which they occupied positions of leadership within the short-lived SWP.

Between February and May 1966, Waakzaamheid defined and redefined its conception of fascism and its opposition against it. From the outset, the committee faced a division between members who were merely in it to commemorate the victims of National Socialism and more staunch anti-fascists who tied this endeavor to the resistance against forms of contemporary fascism. It was agreed to organize a national memorial of the victims of National Socialism on the 10<sup>th</sup> of May, but not all were on board with the second goal of 'signaling and, if necessary, warding off attacks on our political and spiritual liberties.'<sup>204</sup> Although documents from the Waakzaamheid archive do not reveal the extent of the division, it is clear one side feared a resolutely anti-fascist stance would lead to friction and internal conflict, while the other argued that young people would not be interested in just a commemoration. Public meetings and commemorations, they contended, had to be accompanied with anti-fascist slogans immediately. Finally, it was concluded that, while there was no point in formulating and utilizing such slogans so early on, '[t]he memorial only has

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<sup>200</sup> Description from the IISG Archief Tom Rot, <https://search.socialhistory.org/Record/ARCH01215>, last accessed on 07-11-2018.

<sup>201</sup> HING, BVD 59/76, CID list of left-wing extremist persons, arranged alphabetically per municipality, 1939, 47.

<sup>202</sup> Profile of Leo Braat at the Netherlands Institute for Art History, <https://rkd.nl/explore/artists/11842>, last accessed on 07-11-2018. See also: Van den Berg, F., *De Vrije Katheder, 1945-1950. Een platform van communisten en niet-communisten*, Amsterdam 1983, 70-2.

<sup>203</sup> Kroon family profile on the Yad Vashem Righteous Among the Nations list, <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4022448>, last accessed on 07-11-2018.

<sup>204</sup> AW, Meeting of the still-nameless group, Amsterdam, 24-02-1966.

meaning in case it becomes part of our general resistance against fascism. On their own, memorials fade away because they are tied to a generation.<sup>205</sup> By early March, the name “Waakzaamheid” was officially adopted to signal the committee’s vigilance ‘against new fascist currents and tendencies.’<sup>206</sup>

Waakzaamheid leaflets from later in the month detailing its tasks and goals illustrated the shift that had taken place quite early on. The committee was to scrutinize the media who attacked the principles of parliamentary democracy and wanted to ‘outlaw expressions of contemporary culture’, signal corporatist and totalitarian currents in political parties, observe political developments in West Germany, support MPs who dared to oppose the undermining of parliamentarism by the government, advocate measures that would prevent a BVD coup d’état, and lastly, endorse rules that forced mayors to account for their policing policies to the city council.<sup>207</sup> The summation of these goals displays the shift of political anti-fascism since the 1960s. On the one hand, fears of elitist right-wing subversion and even a takeover of the democratic system and concerns about West Germany as a likely hotbed for future fascist threats were already well-established anti-fascist tropes. However, Waakzaamheid’s mission statement also demonstrates how fashionable anti-fascism often reduced the meaning of fascism to authoritarianism.

This is further illustrated by an article in *Radikaal* in which Waakzaamheid was represented by professor Salomon Kleerekoper. Before the war, Kleerekoper had joined the SDAP after the ascendance of fascism in Italy, and both during and after the war, he had been closely involved with Dutch Jewish organizations.<sup>208</sup> Now, he claimed that the foremost fascist danger came from reactionary forces within the Dutch people, with which he meant the Boerenpartij and parties that conspired to establish in the Netherlands a Gaullist system, ‘a form of noble-fascism’ itself. Revealingly, his notion of fascism was along the lines of J.B. Charles’ transhistorical understanding of fascism. Kleerekoper branded fascism as part of the ‘eternal struggle against the emancipation of humankind’ of which examples could be found in ancient Rome, the Oriental East and pre-modern Europe: Julius Caesar and Napoleon

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> AW, ‘Report of a meeting of the workgroup to prepare a meeting separate from the memorial at the National Monument around the 10<sup>th</sup> of May to remember the victims of national-socialism’, 08-03-1966.

<sup>207</sup> AW, Propaganda leaflet from the Comité Waakzaamheid i.o., March 1966.

<sup>208</sup> ‘Kleerekoper, Salomon (1893-1970)’, <http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/bwn1880-2000/lemmata/bwn4/kleerek>, last accessed on 08-11-2018.



Bonaparte were rebranded as archetypal fascists.<sup>209</sup> Thus, to Kleerekoper specifically and Waakzaamheid in general, such institutions and issues as the electoral system of proportional representation, the power of mayors as heads of local police and mutual intolerance between monarchists and republicans were not only problems that needed addressing, they were embodiments of 'fascistoid tendencies in society'.<sup>210</sup>

At a public meeting in late 1966, again at the Krasnapolsky, the exact dangers of fascism were explicated more thoroughly, although no direct targets were named. The new chairman, J.H. Smeets, opened his speech by declaring that 'within our society the voices that urge repression of different opinions through confinement in work camps, censorship of expressions, violent conduct and other violent means, sound ever more loudly.'<sup>211</sup> This was the manifestation of contemporary fascism, and it came from three groups especially: fascists survivors of the war, who still exerted a discernable influence on society, 'authority worshippers' that committed violent excesses as law enforcers, and those who abuse their own positions of authority.<sup>212</sup>

Throughout 1966, these matters became increasingly central to the work of Waakzaamheid. Gradually, attention shifted away from commemorating war victims to protesting events and developments that were perceived of as detrimental to the democratic process. Therefore, the committee sought to establish cooperation with the left-wing youth and student organizations. At the beginning, these were already minorly represented in the board in the form of Tine Uylenburg-van Tijn, who in 1964 also chaired the Socialist Youth.<sup>213</sup> On 8 March, meeting minutes point to one Riethoff as part of Waakzaamheid meetings as a representative of Politea.<sup>214</sup> Other organizations like Perikles wrote the committee asking to be involved as well, prompting an internal discussion about the association's ties to the CPN. Although setting out to establish contacts with the students, suspected communist fronts were typically avoided.<sup>215</sup> Soon, Waakzaamheid began receiving letters from two other parties to participate in actions against respectively the American presence in Vietnam and police

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<sup>209</sup> 'Waakzaamheid. Fascisme in Nederland', *Radikaal. Weekblad voor socialisme en vrede* 1 (1967) nr. 1, 3.

<sup>210</sup> 'Comité Waakzaamheid verontrust over fascisme', *Algemeen Handelsblad*, 19-12-1966, 13.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> NVA, BVD summary of non-extremist groups, nr. nr. 771.152, The Hague 10-02-1965, 4.

<sup>214</sup> AW, Report of a meeting of the 'workgroup to prepare a meeting separate from the memorial at the National Monument around the 10<sup>th</sup> of May to remember the victims of national-socialism', 08-03-1966.

<sup>215</sup> AW, Report of the third meeting of the workgroup to establish the Comité Waakzaamheid, 28-03-1966.

brutality in Amsterdam.<sup>216</sup> Meanwhile, the idea of the 10 May commemoration was dropped in favor of public meetings, which, according to the committee itself, were attended by over a thousand people, and were helpful in raising money and attracting new followers.<sup>217</sup> Media covered these as well, although most newspapers, even when they were appreciative of Waakzaamheid's goals, criticized their methods, referring to the downfall of the first Waakzaamheid by stating 'that man cannot stop fascism or national-socialism with all the committees and speeches by intellectuals of the world.'<sup>218</sup>

However, besides organizing public meetings and lectures, what remained of the committee's work consists of numerous protest letters to municipal and national authorities. Pursuing transparency and restrictions on the abuse of authority, it demanded investigations into the violent conduct of the Amsterdam police that had cost the life of a demonstrator.<sup>219</sup> Furthermore, it wrote in protest against laws that if feared would lead to censorship and repression, especially laws that broadened the capabilities of the secret service.<sup>220</sup> A short-lived change of organizational structure from a committee to an 'association to the defense of democracy' by October demonstrated the embrace of the fashionable notion of anti-fascism that saw fascism in the authoritarian conduct of high-placed officials within the government and secret service.<sup>221</sup> Other issues were sidelined: although the appointment of Von Kielmansegg as NATO commander meant the group continued to discuss the threat coming from West Germany, it resulted in no concrete action.<sup>222</sup> Nor did it ever target the Boerenpartij, to the disappointment of members who had wanted to publicly protest the party.<sup>223</sup> From this point onwards, the trail turns cold, and Waakzaamheid seems to have fizzled out by 1970.

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<sup>216</sup> AW, Report of the fourth meeting of the workgroup to establish the Comité Waakzaamheid, 05-04-1966.

<sup>217</sup> AW, Report of the 4 May meeting, 11-05-1966.

<sup>218</sup> 'Het Zelfbedrog van "Waakzaamheid"', *De Telegraaf*, 29-12-1966, 5; 'Comité Waakzaamheid', *Trouw*, 07-05-1966, 7.

<sup>219</sup> AW, Letter to the Ministry of Justice and the Amsterdam city council, 14-06-1966.

<sup>220</sup> The Archief Waakzaamheid contains multiple of these letters sent to ministries and public broadcasting.

<sup>221</sup> AW, Declaration of Waakzaamheid, vereniging ter verdediging van de democratie, Amsterdam, October 1966.

<sup>222</sup> AW, Minutes of the twelfth board meeting, 06-02-1967; Archief Waakzaamheid, Minutes of the thirteenth board meeting, 20-02-1967.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

## 2.4 Conclusion

J.B. Charles' publications were illustrative of the development of contemporary anti-fascism in civil society. They represented a public reckoning with the fascist past and its implications for contemporary politics that led to the emergence of popular notions of fascism and anti-fascism. Renewed interest and revealing publications about the lacking bravery of the Dutch population during the occupation fed into rising criticisms of the post-war political order, especially from the new generation. Whereas anti-fascism in civil society had largely retreated to the background during the 1950s, in the following decade it thus reemerged in a left-wing movement that desired democratic reforms and protested authoritarianism. The flexibility of anti-fascism as a "peripheral ideological concept" enabled it to serve the message that past generations had insufficiently resisted evil, that the cultural hegemony of the elite should thus be fought against, and, to youthful revolutionaries, be replaced by a new order that would avoid these mistakes. This idea was not merely restricted to the CPN, which continued to advocate the unmasking of capitalist-fascist plots, or the student movement. Other left-wingers, often belonging to the PSP or PvdA, or inspired by the New Left, publicly warned against the symptoms of what they saw as fascism on the rise, which manifested itself in power structures and use of violence at home and abroad. Anti-fascism thus became a more grassroots phenomenon than it had been before.

Nevertheless, fashionable anti-fascism was not entirely new: in ideas as well as methods, it was heavily indebted to the tradition of revolutionary anti-fascism. Neither did the emptying of the definition of fascism start with student protesters: it had been a staple of revolutionary anti-fascism from as early as the 1920s. Protesters that would denounce professors or policemen as fascists stood in the tradition of pre-war socialist and communist doctrines that emphasized above all the fundamental connection between the capitalist system and the establishment of fascism. The tendency of 1960s anti-fascists to think in black-and-white, fascist and non-fascist, in fact echoed communist rhetoric that divided society in forces fighting for and against the revolution: in both instances the fascism seemed to refer more to right-wing authoritarianism. Moreover, the usual suspects domestically remained big business and rightist political parties, in cahoots with each other to subvert the democratic system and establish a fascist order. Abroad, West Germany was still the foremost target.

Partly inspired by the peace movements of the 1950s and the ideology and traditions

of revolutionary anti-fascism, the popularized notion of fashionable anti-fascism amounted to an assault on the anti-fascist consensus that had upheld the post-war order. The CPN and radical student groups genuinely desired revolution to upset the status quo, even when it was never clear what this really meant. In the tradition of revolutionary anti-fascism, these groups formulated their anti-fascism in terms of a dual struggle against both fascism and the state that facilitated fascism. This anti-fascism could be radical: student groups organized actions on the streets and did not shun physical confrontation with the authorities, although armed violence was a rarity. Forms of civil anti-fascism came from prominent left-wing intellectuals who stood in the tradition of the pre-war Comité van Waakzaamheid. Although it shared the world view of many anti-fascist youths, whom they sought to cooperate with to further their goals, they protested the authorities through public meetings and private letters concerning the abuse of power.

Notably, the operations of all parties were aimed at the authorities, be they academic, municipal or national, in absence of self-styled fascist enemies. Although the Boerenpartij was embroiled in political controversy surrounding the Nazi past of some of its members, student activists and the intellectuals of the second Waakzaamheid rarely targeted them directly. Only the resurgence of far-right parties during the 1970s would drastically alter this state of affairs.

## Chapter 3

# ‘A daily practice of liberation’

## The decline and rise of anti-fascism, 1973-1989

### 3.1 Introduction

The absence of a conveniently identifiable enemy forms a common thread throughout the history of post-war anti-fascism. After historical fascism had perished, left-wing parties and civil groups continued to invoke the specter of fascism to protest various developments or actors they considered a threat to democracy. However, fascism now proved an elusive concept to define and denote, much less physically oppose. Self-proclaimed fascists and unrepentant neo-Nazis composed a tiny minority that exercised little political power and hardly represented an acute danger to the state. To be sure, former Nazis in parliament did exist, but once they were unmasked it quickly meant the end of their political careers. When it was discovered that the Boerenpartij had, in multiple instances, provided a home to “political delinquents”, the party quickly dissolved under the combined pressure of intense scrutiny from all parliamentary parties and internal dissent. Therefore, as has been illustrated previously, portrayals of the fascist threat were often vague, representing it as coming from shadowy reactionary elites colluding with big business or “fascistoid tendencies in society”. In reality, “fascism” represented fears of authoritarianism instead of a political reality. Especially after politically active students took this conceptual confusion to its logical extreme by denouncing university boards or the police as fascists, anti-fascism became devaluated as an analytical framework and political force. These developments stemmed from the fact that, unlike during the 1930s and 1940s, there was no obvious impulse to propel the force of anti-fascism in the post-war era. If we are to follow Copsey’s argument, anti-fascist activity remained relatively low during this time because the scale of the anti-fascist response ‘has been defined by the nature of its stimulus’.<sup>224</sup>

Developments during the late 1970s and 1980s seemed to represent a swing in Copsey’s cyclical pattern of anti-fascist action. One could hardly miss the sudden exponential growth of anti-fascist committees and organizations, their allegiance with various political

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<sup>224</sup> Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 189.

parties and other bodies and the level of their activities at this time. Another aspect is immediately noticeable as well: a large deal of this revitalized anti-fascist energy initially seems to be motivated by and directed at the *Nederlandse Volks-Unie* (NVU) and the Centrumpartij. Although publicly denying its ties to Nazism, the former consisted of former NSB- and SS-men and young radicalized militants. However, it was the CP that caused a major stir in Dutch politics by attaining a Second Chamber seat in 1982, constituting what was seen as a political breakthrough of the extreme right. Van Donselaar considered the CP an alternative to the NVU, which professed the same intention of repelling “foreigners” (i.e. certain groups of immigrants and their descendants) from the Netherlands, though with a more reformist policy and careful approach as to avoid prosecution.<sup>225</sup> This was met with concern by large parts of a Dutch public that possessed an ethos that, in the words of James Kennedy, ‘was resolutely anti-racist and in solidarity with victims of unequal treatment.’<sup>226</sup> Neo-fascism increasingly became an object of study. In their publications, Dutch and Belgian scholars all emphasized the need for resistance against the NVU and CP, demonstrating a consistent view of democracy as a set of procedures designed to realize and protect democratic values and rights, which had come under attack from the extreme right.<sup>227</sup> Meanwhile, the CP’s entrance into parliament was met with a proclamation of the Second Chamber universally calling for ‘vigilance against currents that apparently deem discrimination and racism in our society acceptable.’<sup>228</sup> Thus, anti-fascism became a dominant analytical framework to explain the existence and apparent success of the CP.

The increasingly influential appearance of right-wing populism, Stone argues, was the product of the downfall of the post-war consensus in the West, which rested on the two pillars of social democracy and anti-fascist norms and values. Here, Stone follows Hobsbawm’s timeline of the short twentieth century, as he traces the start of these processes to the Decades of Crisis. These began with the 1973 oil crisis, which exacerbated an economic trend of inflation, unemployment and low productivity, leading to a major reduction in production and supply that set off an international economic crisis. As the downturn lasted, many welfare states turned to the free market, severely cutting government programs, liberalizing trade and privatizing national companies. While this did lead to rising profits, workers’ rights were

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<sup>225</sup> Van Donselaar, ‘Post-war fascism’, 95-6.

<sup>226</sup> Kennedy, *Een beknopte geschiedenis van Nederland*, 358.

<sup>227</sup> De Vetten, *In de Ban van Goed en Fout*, 21-2.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

eroded, labor and living conditions worsened, and the economy remained subject to periodical crashes and slumps throughout the next decades.<sup>229</sup> Hobsbawm thus concluded that during the Decades of Crisis, social democratic ideas were gradually delegitimized. To Stone, the erosion of the welfare state meant the downfall of the political consensus on anti-fascism as its intellectual basis. The social contract changed dramatically, now emphasizing individualism and wealth instead of guaranteeing the provision of health, education and welfare by the state.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, social changes coincided with a revision of the past that further challenged and reconfigured anti-fascist myths that had upheld the post-war consensus. A positive outcome of this was the debunking of national myths of victimhood and resistance, and a greater public awareness and acknowledgement of the suffering of everyone affected by the war. Since the 1970s, the theme of resistance and collaboration was increasingly supplanted by that of the Holocaust.<sup>231</sup> Consequently, psychiatrists as well as the public became more aware of and started to acknowledge the long-term effects of the war on its victims.<sup>232</sup> Through the assertiveness, awareness and democratization of the 1970s and new medical knowledge regarding trauma, these groups then became more inclined to publicly seek recognition of their experiences. It is no wonder that anti-fascism evolved to center around protesting discrimination of minority groups at the same time the prosecution of minorities during the war received an explosive amount of public attention. Changes in memory culture of the war thus partly accounted for ideological shifts within anti-fascism. Another way in which this was the case was that the steady downfall of traditional anti-fascist myths created space for the reinvigoration of older far-right traditions in the mainstream, now framed around new social topics like immigration and globalization. Stone considers this 'the breakdown of the anti-fascist consensus'.<sup>233</sup> In his interpretation, 1973 thus proved the advent of the reanimation of fascist sympathies, which in turn provoked a popular anti-fascist response.<sup>234</sup>

Thus, we are faced with the challenge of reconciling the supposed decline of anti-fascist values with a peak in anti-fascist activity in the same historical period. How are they

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<sup>229</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 180-3; Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, 10.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 186-7.

<sup>231</sup> Kennedy, *Een beknopte geschiedenis van Nederland*, 358.

<sup>232</sup> De Haan, *Na de ondergang*, 131-2.

<sup>233</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 191.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, vii-viii.

related? To understand this seeming contradiction requires an analysis of the beliefs and actions of anti-fascist activists, a diverse and elusive group which has received so little academic study thus far. Who were they? Which groups, organizations and parties operated on the forefront of anti-fascism? How did these constituencies differ? With whom did they cooperate and why? What kind of action did they engage in to further their ends? What space did anti-fascism, as a peripheral phenomenon, occupy in their respective sets of ideological beliefs? Furthermore, this chapter seeks to explicate their belief systems in an effort to demonstrate their goals and motivations. What prompted activism? How did anti-fascist constituencies conceptualize fascism, and how did this affect their resistance against it? Who did they consider the enemy? As in the previous chapter, the question of the (dis)continuities between this and earlier eras of anti-fascism remains a crucial point of discussion.

### 3.2 Anti-fascism and the integration of the Small Left

Distinguishing the political and public sphere from each other is inherently an awkward, somewhat of a contrived effort. However, it remains a fruitful endeavor because it lays bare the connections between politics and social developments. In the case of this thesis, maintaining this distinction has so far demonstrated the different uses, in the political and the public sphere, of the concept of anti-fascism until the late 1970s. During the reconstruction era, anti-fascism and social democracy formed the pillars of the welfare state that aimed to avoid repeating the follies of the previous two decades. Anti-fascist activism during this time was mostly the business of left-wing political parties that seized on the concept to raise the threat of the undermining of this project by shadow elites. However, an insurrection from politically motivated youths indicated a shift of anti-fascism transitioning into, what was to become in the early 1980s, a grassroots phenomenon rooted in civil society. Thus, the ideological components of anti-fascism were increasingly determined by ideas within civil society rather than by political parties and their media outlets, like *De Waarheid*. Consequently, the late 1970s mark the gradual fusion of anti-fascist action within the political and public sphere. Leftist parties ceased to pursue their own individual initiatives against fascism. Rather, they joined forces, setting up a shared anti-fascist policy that followed the examples of civil activists more than it shaped the anti-fascist movement. As a result, their mutual ideological differences became less and less visible. This development forms the



center of this chapter, which primarily strives to identify the causes behind and exhibit the participation of political parties in the anti-fascist cause in the Netherlands.

Since respectively the late seventies and early eighties, the extreme-right NVU and CP had drawn widespread ire from the public and the political establishment. NVU agitation during the campaign season for the 1977 Second Chamber elections generated a debate in the press and among parties about the possibility of a ban on the party. The PvdA pursued such a measure, arguing for prosecution on the grounds of the 1944 *Besluit Ontbinding Landverraderlijke Organisaties*. However, public opinion remained divided over the use of a party ban within a democratic framework and the classification of the NVU as a neo-Nazi party. Consequently, the state instead strove to prosecute the NVU as a threat to public order, seeing important differences with the NSB, as the NVU played into the conflicts resulting from the Netherlands transitioning into a multicultural society.<sup>235</sup> Although efforts to prohibit the NVU never succeeded, they attest to the scope of political activity induced by the intrusion of far-right parties into national politics, which would repeat itself with the electoral gains of the CP in 1982. However, Jan de Vetten has rightly cautioned against labeling all such resistance as anti-fascist. In fact, the majority of opposition countered the NVU and CP on the basis of their perceived racism, while only a fraction, consisting of anti-fascist activists, marginal left-wing parties and related media outlets, regarded and portrayed their enemies as the forces of fascism.<sup>236</sup>

Those left-wing parties, whose names consistently appear on anti-fascist documentation, publications and flyers, are primarily the CPN, PSP and PPR, who made up a conglomeration of parties nicknamed “the Small Left”. Since the 1970s, these parties gradually identified with post-materialist social movements like the women’s, anti-racist and environmental movements, which engineered a sizeable amount of support in the Netherlands and formed their own leftist sub-cultures.<sup>237</sup> As voters sympathetic to these currents looked for a political home, new progressive parties were founded while older ones were transformed. Influenced by Provo and the New Left, the PSP saw its pacifist roots evolve from ethically absolute to politically strategic, expanded its socialist tenets to advocate a system akin to council communism and waged extra-parliamentary action against imperialism,

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<sup>235</sup> Van Donselaar, *Fout na de Oorlog*, 163-4; 170.

<sup>236</sup> De Vetten, *In de Ban van Goed en Fout*, 266.

<sup>237</sup> Kennedy, *Een beknopte geschiedenis van Nederland*; 363.

the nuclear arms race and the monarchy.<sup>238</sup> The progressive but self-perceived unideological Party for Political Radicals (PPR), was founded in 1968 as an off-shoot of the KVP, although its character was only Christian for only a brief period. Believing in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary work as complimentary endeavors, the PPR similarly strove towards democratization of politics and society, environmental protection and solidarity with Third World countries.<sup>239</sup> Change proved a more painful process within the dogmatic organization of the Stalinist CPN, which initially remained a traditionally Old Left party. Still, the influx of new young members led the CPN to become more involved with the new social movements and progressively favor cooperation with the PSP and PPR over organizing separate initiatives. These changes created an identity crisis that escalated into an existential one, as the party became split between orthodox Marxists and reformists who aspired to replace the Leninist party structure with a democratic system and sought ever closer cooperation with the Small Left. Radical reform was achieved at the 1984 party congress, which abolished such core concepts and goals as the dictatorship of the proletariat, state socialism and Leninism in favor of political democratization, workers' control of nationalized production and feminism. Consequently, differentiating between the programs of the CPN, PSP and PPR became progressively difficult. Since once prominent ideological elements like communism and pacifism were disappearing from parties' agendas in favor of anti-racist and feminist ideals, the convergence of ideology and cooperation thus simultaneously indicated both a widening of party programs, in the sense that they became less specific, and a narrowing, as their mutual differences shrunk.<sup>240</sup>

Although the parties were as of yet unwilling to merge, electoral alliances within the Small Left became more frequent after the 1977 national election, which had produced disastrous results for all three, reducing their total number of seats in the Second Chamber from 16 to 6. Simultaneously, cooperation with the PvdA declined. Even though necessity prompted these constructions, throughout the 1980s these were more often created out of voluntary choice. By 1986, so-called "triple alliances" were formed in roughly 40% of areas where the PSP and PPR participated in regional elections.<sup>241</sup> This seems to have extended into

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<sup>238</sup> Lucardie, P., Van Schuur, W., Voerman, G., *Verloren illusie, geslaagde fusie? GroenLinks in historisch en politicologisch perspectief*, Leiden 1999, 33-4.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-4.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-50.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-2.

anti-fascist action. The PSP and PPR, together with the PvdA and the minor progressive Evangelical People's Party (EVP), participated in a 'progressive deliberation' in which political matters were discussed primarily by the parties' leaders. When the parties convened in 1981 to discuss a common approach to resisting fascism, the CPN was invited because of its experience and involvement with the subject.<sup>242</sup> Indeed, anti-fascism had not disappeared from the agenda of the communists. According to documents the party released before the 26<sup>th</sup> party congress in 1978, anti-fascism had remained one of the central topics of its international activities.<sup>243</sup>

Up until the late 1981 meeting, much of the domestic anti-fascist activity from the CPN came from the ANJV, a youth organization closely aligned with the communist party. Some of these actions were conducted by the organization itself, such as the annual "Bonte Reuswasdag", in reference to a popular washing brand, a day on which the young communists, in cooperation with other youth groups, would remove fascist graffiti from Amsterdam neighborhoods.<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, the cooperation of local authorities was sought in endeavors to deny fascists a platform. When the Amsterdam municipality reached out to owners of event spaces to assist them in avoiding renting to fascist and racist organizations, the ANJV formally proposed that the city council would instead compose a list of such groups for owners to consult.<sup>245</sup> However, documents from the ANJV archive reveal that the organization, following the CPN, consciously moved away from solo activities to participation in cross-ideological partnerships with other youth organizations.<sup>246</sup> One example of such a coalition is provided by a 1980 poster printed and distributed by the ANJV in cooperation with a host of other youth groups. Although its message centered around warning against discriminatory groups, the text implored the audience to actively resist fascism through a comparison to the prosecution of minorities during World War II.

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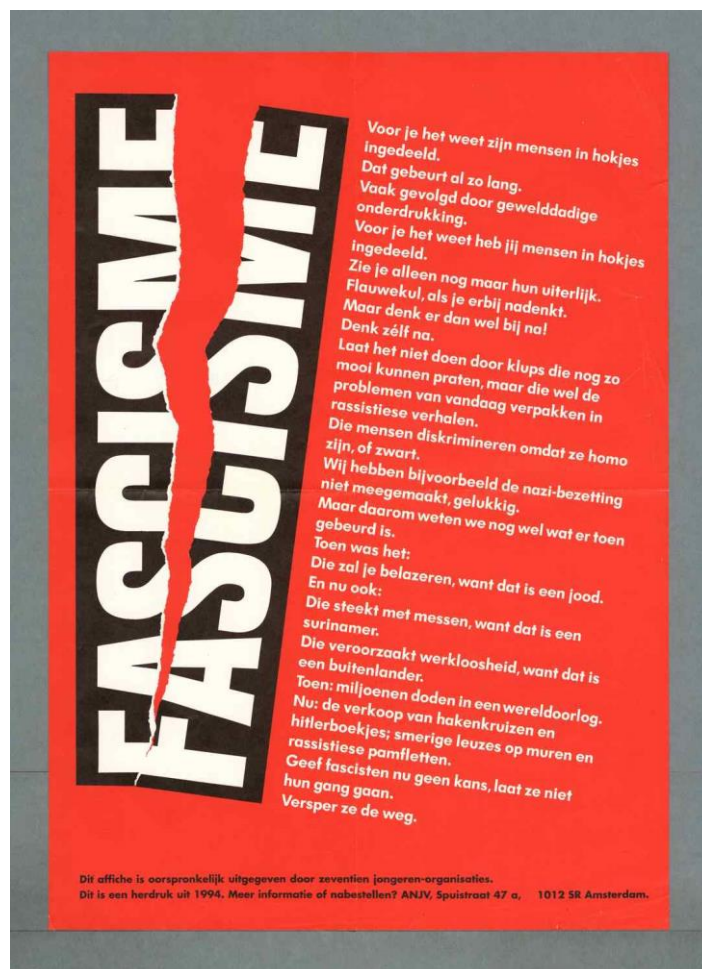
<sup>242</sup> PSP.J 71, 'Diskussiemap Themadag Fascisme', *SVS-Bulletin, mededelingenblad van de Stichting Vorming en Scholing/PSP* (1981) nr. 43, 2.

<sup>243</sup> CSD 290, 'Documentatie bij de stellingen van het 26<sup>ste</sup> Congres van de CPN, deel 3', 1978, 23.

<sup>244</sup> ANJV 114, Press release from the ANJV, Amsterdam, 11-12-1980; 'Massaal protest tegen fascisme', *Nieuwe Leidsche Courant*, 15-12-1980, 6.

<sup>245</sup> ANJV 114, Questions and answers from the city council of Amsterdam, nr. 188, 24-02-1981. Provision of information regarding organizations with fascist and/or racist purposes, 371-2, 371-2.

<sup>246</sup> ANJV 114, Letter from P. Wiessing to Marc Wouters, Amsterdam, 17-09-1981.



‘Back then, it was: That one will deceive you, because that is a Jew. And now, too: That one stabs, because that is a Surinamer. That one causes unemployment, because that is a foreigner. Then: millions of deaths in a world war. Now: the sale of swastikas and Hitler-books; disgusting slogans on walls and racist pamphlets. Give fascists no opportunity, do not let them go ahead. Bar their way.’<sup>247</sup>

This message was backed by a coalition of leftist civil organizations, many of which were regular ANJV partners. Examples of these were the *Belangenvereniging Minderjarigen*, an anti-authoritarian pressure group for the underage, the *Vereniging voor Dienstplichtige Militairen*, which strove towards democratization of the armed forces and the recreational and nature-oriented democratic socialist NIVON organization. However, the coalition also included, among the youth branches of the PvdA, PSP and PPR, those of the Christian democratic CDA and the conservative-liberal VVD. Other youth departments included those

<sup>247</sup> IISG BG D83/129, ANJV, ‘Fascisme’, Amsterdam 1980.

of the Christian workers' union CNV and the KWJ organization for Catholic working youths.<sup>248</sup> In the following years, this pattern of cooperation between youth political parties and organizations in civil society would continue. One notable example includes the founding of a league of youth organizations against the rise of fascism (JOF), which was joined by most of the aforementioned parties plus various social associations representative of Turkish and Moroccan laborers in the Netherlands, Chilean revolutionary leftists and the gay community.<sup>249</sup> This league provided youth parties, coming primarily from the Small Left, with the opportunity to find support for often local anti-fascist initiatives and manifestations.<sup>250</sup>

The 1981 deliberation of left-wing political parties to discuss their mutual approach to opposing "fascism" was thus a step towards centralization of anti-fascist action of the Small Left. Here, it was decided that actions were best initiated on the local level, where parties were most familiar with the issues at stake. Furthermore, these initiatives would preferably be informative, 'where the goal should be to retrace existing problems to what they are by undoing them of (racial) prejudice'.<sup>251</sup> As long as anti-fascist action was driven by an anti-discrimination and anti-racist narrative, it could even count on widespread political support, especially when it targeted the NVU or CP.<sup>252</sup> Thus, anti-fascism proved an instrument for mutual cooperation between the small leftist parties that would eventually merge in the *GroenLinks* party in the early 1990s.

The extent to which mainstream parties supported the banner of anti-fascism varied. It seems youth parties were the most eager forces, with those of the CDA and VVD even supporting the interpretation of an anti-fascist publication that defined fascism as a 'an extremely conservative movement that resists every change of existing property and power relations', and which professes to stand up for the lower classes, but in reality serves big capital, the power and influence of which it depends on.<sup>253</sup> However, parties outside of the political left remained mainly absent from events that were not spurred on by local incidents or the national advance of the far right, staying away either voluntarily or because they were

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

<sup>249</sup> PSP.J 71, Minutes from JOF meeting, 19-11-1984.

<sup>250</sup> PSP.J 71, Press release from the JOF, November 1984; Ibid., 'Racisme/Fascisme & Jongeren. PPR-jongeren tegen fascisme', program PPR youth conference, April 1984.

<sup>251</sup> PSP.J 71, 'Diskussiemap Themadag Fascisme', 2.

<sup>252</sup> DSN 21, 'Buurtgenoten. Racisme geen oplossing', Amsterdam, 1982; Ibid., 'Waarschuwing', Amsterdam, 25-02-1982; Ibid., 'Haags Initiatief tegen Fascisme en Diskriminatie', The Hague, date unknown.

<sup>253</sup> DSN 21, 'Anti-fascistische jongerenkrant', Gouda, May 1980, 2.

not wanted there in the first place.<sup>254</sup> Unsurprisingly, they did not throw their weight behind partisan anti-fascist initiatives, such as a 5<sup>th</sup> of May demonstration against identified-as-fascist regimes in countries like Chile, Indonesia and Turkey and neo-fascist groups in West Germany, Austria, Italy and Spain, among others. The announcement for this event was not signed by other parties than the PvdA, CPN, PSP, PPR and ANJV.<sup>255</sup> Furthermore, the anti-fascist discourse provided space to Small Left parties to criticize the political establishment and governing parties, as a coalition of the CPN, PSP and VCN (a post-1984 orthodox off-shoot of the CPN) did in a 1986 leaflet, prior to the elections of the same year. Lamenting the callous attitude of governing parties CDA and VVD towards fascism, the Small Left parties condemned them for further weakening the position of refugees, often the targets of discrimination and xenophobia, through legislative efforts. Thus, anti-fascism was also utilized as an electoral tool to present the campaign proposals of the Small Left parties to more actively prosecute racists and sexists, eradicate discriminatory regulations and stimulate the employment of “foreigners” in the Netherlands.<sup>256</sup>

Between the late 1970s and 1980s, the most significant anti-fascist actors of the political parties were to be found on the political left, especially the Small Left parties CPN, PSP and PPR. The gradual influx of a new generation of leftists and progressives affiliated with post-materialist movements since the 1970s and the disastrous 1977 election results stimulated their increased cooperation in parliament and on the streets in the 1980s, which manifested itself in regard to anti-fascist activism as well. The Small Left parties, sporadically together with the PvdA, initiated and took part in events together and coordinated their efforts. However, their youth branches and affiliated youth organizations, with members who were closely affiliated with the new social movements, were the ones who took the initiative in pursuing cooperative anti-fascist action. As before, anti-fascism was often utilized as an instrument for attempting to unite parties on the left and criticize the political establishment. By no account does this constitute a major surprise. However, what is surprising is the cautious willingness of other political parties to join the discourse and practice of anti-fascism. Although De Vetten’s assurance that only a fraction of the resistance against the Centruumpartij identified with anti-fascism is correct, it obscures the fact that in various cases anti-fascist action and

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<sup>254</sup> DSN 21, Program of an anti-fascist manifestation, 22-09-1984, Zeist.

<sup>255</sup> DSN 21, Flyer announcing demonstration against fascism, 05-05-1980.

<sup>256</sup> DSN 21, Flyer against fascist, sexist and racist violence, 04-06-1986.

discourse was sometimes co-opted by parties on the center right. This was mainly inspired by a widespread concern about the rise of the far-right in the Netherlands and a resolutely anti-racist public ethos. Such general political coalitions were most often found in local contexts, where involved parties wished to signal a nonpartisan rejection against discrimination. One example of this was the 1986 *Haagse Initiatief tegen Fascisme en Diskriminatie*, which protested the NVU and CP, calling for the disbandment of racist organizations, criminalization of discrimination and an 'anti-fascist educational program'.<sup>257</sup> However, this does not yet suffice to explain the resurgence and mechanisms of Dutch anti-fascism. That is because, while various political parties participated in anti-fascist activity, they were following a development emanating from and cultivated by organizations in civil society.

### 3.3 A heterogeneous movement

In June 1981, a group of twenty distraught citizens gathered at their local center of the Vondelpark-Concertgebouw neighborhood in Amsterdam for the founding meeting of a committee of vigilance against fascism and racism. The initiative followed a 200-odd demonstration in response to a planned deliberation of Centruumpartij members in the vicinity. Indeed, during the meeting members acknowledged that, although they believed the CP constituted a grave threat, political resistance against the far right far outweighed support for it.<sup>258</sup> This trend of committees being established as a response to the NVU and/or CP is recognizable throughout the country the late 1970s and early 1980s. On one hand, this apparently supports Copey's classification of anti-fascism as a reactive phenomenon. However, the Centruumpartij and NVU were still very marginal forces in Dutch politics, so it could hardly be claimed that anti-fascism was activated by an urgent threat of fascism. Therefore, hostility against these far-right parties, although often the self-professed primary cause behind the establishment of anti-fascist groups, by itself does not explain their existence. After all, while the founding of the *Anti-Fascistische Komité Utrecht* (AFKU) was a direct response to NVU and CP meetings in Soesterberg and Utrecht respectively, its activities did not merely revolve around the far right: in 1980, for example, it protested the rejection of homosexual men as sperm donors by the city's academic hospital.<sup>259</sup> This constitutes a radical

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<sup>257</sup> DSN 21, Brochure of the Haags Initiatief tegen Fascisme en Diskriminatie, The Hague 1986, 1-2.

<sup>258</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, Report of the founding meeting of the committee of vigilance against fascism and racism Vondelpark-Concertgebouw neighborhood, Amsterdam, 16-06-1981, 2.

<sup>259</sup> PSP.J 71, 'Diskussiemap Themadag Fascisme', 4.

break from the past: just how did such matters come to concern anti-fascism? And how does this relate to the rise of anti-fascist activism in the early 1980s, at the forefront of which were organizations and initiatives from civil society? To answer these questions, this paragraph aims to identify the most significant anti-fascist actors at this time, examine their exploits and the strategy behind them and determine the various ways they conceptualized fascism.

Prior to the success of the Centrumpartij in the 1982 elections, the anti-fascist tradition remained alive within the former resistance and victims' organizations. As before, many of their endeavors focused on the reemergence of fascism originating from West Germany, and they were often coordinated in transnational cooperation with like-minded associations from both sides of the Iron Curtain. Thus, a host of Dutch groups joined in the so-called Brussels Appeal on 3 November 1977 to demonstrate 'against the rehabilitation of Nazism' and 'for the disbandment of the SS', referring to organizations of former SS men who they believed continued to exercise considerable influence within the West German state.<sup>260</sup> At a following meeting in Dortmund, Dutch resistance organizations, as part of this alliance, confirmed both this stance and support for the popular communist-led initiative against the placement of American neutron bombs in Western Europe as part of a campaign 'against war and fascism'.<sup>261</sup> However, they now also fervently opposed contemporary fascist tendencies in two ways. Firstly, the organizations sought to inform the youth about the nature of fascism through film and exhibitions. Secondly, they tried to exclude the extreme right from partaking in elections by appealing to the Ministry of Justice, especially targeting NVU leader Joop Glimmerveen, whom they referred to as 'Herr Glimmerveen'.<sup>262</sup>

However, the most salient change in anti-fascist political culture was the emergence of an anti-fascist movement rooted in civil society. Resurgent anti-fascism was strongly rooted in the squatting movement, which arose in the 1960s in response to housing shortages. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the movement, which had never shied away from physical action, underwent processes of radicalization and ideological widening. Thus, squatters were increasingly involved with protests against nuclear energy, militarism and fascism. Radicalization, meanwhile, created a split between moderate, legal squatters and a more violent minority that had adopted hostile attitudes towards the state in general. This schism

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<sup>260</sup> DNP 90, Call from the Bond van Anti-Fascisten for an 'anti-SS demonstration' in Cologne, 1978.

<sup>261</sup> DSN 21, *Stichting We nemen 't wéér niet*, bulletin 1978, 1.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



was echoed throughout the anti-fascist movement, becoming final after a violent incident in the village of Kedichem in 1986. Anti-fascist protesters violently disrupted a meeting of CP leaders by – although some still claim by accident – setting ablaze the hotel in which they had gathered, an incident which left dozens injured. After this, civil anti-fascists and the social organizations that backed them distanced themselves from radicals.<sup>263</sup> The Kedichem incident was the culmination of the radicals' militancy towards the Centrumpartij, which included disturbing party meetings, conferences and inaugurations in local parliaments through physical confrontation. Civil anti-fascism, meanwhile, found fertile soil in public that largely saw the CP as a continuation of pre-war fascism. Most importantly, it was the party's discrimination, especially towards foreigners, that formed the ideological basis of opposition to a party that once again was branded as "fout".<sup>264</sup> At this time, public rejection of discrimination, racism, fascism and critiques of multiculturalism were connected with a moral remembrance of World War II that emphasized vigilance above all else.<sup>265</sup>

One organization that led the charge against resurgent fascism was the *Anne Frank Stichting*, which since the late 1960s had advocated for far-reaching changes in society to counteract discrimination and prejudice. Influenced by the student protests, it often invoked World War II to criticize events occurring abroad in countries Vietnam, South Africa and Chile.<sup>266</sup> However, throughout the 1970s discrimination and racism became integral parts of the foundation's interpretation of fascism, as it began to focus on the extreme right in Western Europe. This coincided with a wider shift in the public and among scholars, who came to regard racism and anti-Semitism as core components of fascism.<sup>267</sup> The founding of the Centrumpartij in 1979 marked a definitive shift in this process, after which the foundation gloomily warned of the dire threat neo-fascism posed to the survival of Western democracies.<sup>268</sup> As such, it constructed an interpretative framework of fascism that was adopted by many anti-fascist committees and organizations established in the early 1980s, and which was defined by two characteristics. First, racism and discrimination stood at its center. Thus, in a 1981 exposition the following were provided as examples of neo-fascism:

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<sup>263</sup> De Vetten, *In de Ban van Goed en Fout*, 221-3.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 264-6.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>266</sup> Rensman, E., 'De Anne Frank Stichting en haar lessen uit de Tweede Wereldoorlog, 1957-1994', *Utrechtse Historische Cahiers* 16 (1995) nr. 1, 1-98, 32-3.

<sup>267</sup> De Haan, I., 'Fascism? What fascism?', *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* (2003) nr. 2, 27-40, 31.

<sup>268</sup> Rensman, 'De Anne Frank Stichting', 52-3.

‘... a dance club refuses to let in a black person but does allow a white one in. [...] A teacher is fired because he is a communist. [...] People say that during an economic crisis, women should return home: an unemployed man is worse than an unemployed woman. [...] Speculators take matters into their own hands and form gangs to violently beat [*sic*] squatters out of residences.’<sup>269</sup>

Secondly, the rise of neo-fascism was connected to memories of the war. Education was seen as an important tool for creating well-informed citizens that would not fall for far-right lies. Lamenting the emphasis history books in schools placed on militarism, romanticism and heroism when discussing World War II, the foundation thus remarked that ‘the association of pupils (...) should be: injustice, misery, resistance and recognizing similarities with resurgent forms of fascism.’<sup>270</sup> Lectures, seminars, exhibitions, theater plays, films and publications reinforced the comparison to the 1930s as a time during which poor economic conditions caused a receptibility to fascism, a scenario which the foundation feared was repeating itself.<sup>271</sup> Furthermore, expositions attacked the myth of widespread and courageous Dutch resistance against the German occupation.<sup>272</sup>

These two central aspects of the anti-fascist framework of the Anne Frank Stichting were widely echoed throughout the left. The PvdA commission tasked with advising a strategy regarding dealing with the CP adopted its diagnosis and analysis of racism and xenophobia: a likely outcome since one of its members had contributed to the foundation’s 1982 publication titled *Old and New Fascism*.<sup>273</sup> However, they were also connected to anti-fascist initiatives outside of parliamentary politics. Looking past the divide of civil and radical anti-fascists, one can induce from the IISH archives three different types of anti-fascist activist organizations: neighborhood-oriented groups, local committees and regional umbrella organizations. Although all were deeply connected to the squatter movement and worked together quite intimately, they were different in size and in the scope of their activities.

At the inception of neighborhood groups often lay a desire to combat the activities of “fascist” organizations in their respective areas. Activities from likes of the committee of Vondelpark-Concertgebouw neighborhood residents were locally based as well. On the street

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid., 65-6.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>273</sup> De Vetten, *In de Ban van Goed en Fout*, 60.

level, committees aimed to counter fascist vandalization, like runes, which were mostly accredited to the NVU and CP.<sup>274</sup> Furthermore, they proposed to physically prevent gatherings of fascist organizations, maintain records of racist incidents and set up hotlines.<sup>275</sup> Education was also seen as an important tool of 'the ideological campaign against fascism and racism' that was to take place in schools, clubs and community centers.<sup>276</sup> In this field, groups could cooperate with established organizations like the Anne Frank Stichting to organize local exhibitions that warned that the 'writing [was] on the wall.'<sup>277</sup> Legal action against fascist organizations were considered as well, although local groups did not enter into a lawsuit single handedly, and rather joined more formidable committees and umbrella organizations.<sup>278</sup>

However, the majority of anti-fascist groups operated citywide, outside of certain neighborhoods. They proved the more active initiatives, were better organized and employed a wider arrange of activities. Oftentimes, their origin lay in indignance with NVU and CP activity. In Utrecht, AFKU was a reaction to regional far-right activity, while in Amsterdam, an anti-fascist committee at the Free University (VU) was established in direct response to the founding of the CP by a scholar affiliated to the VU.<sup>279</sup> In Nijmegen - a well-known bulwark of leftist activism - anti-CP activists were behind the *Komit  van Waakzaamheid*.<sup>280</sup> The ranks of these anti-fascist groups were largely made up of supporters of the new social movements for equal rights for women and minorities. As in Utrecht, party members of the CPN, PSP and PPR were inclined to join such groups, although PvdA departments were hesitant to join committees that did away with party structures.<sup>281</sup> Like their smaller counterparts, committees were divided in work groups that combated racism at the neighborhood level, composed educational programs, devised cultural activities and initiated demonstrations and

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<sup>274</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, 'Buurtcomit  bewo(n)st)ers tegen racisme, fascisme en vreemdelingenhaat, Staatslieden- en Hugo de Grootbuurt', Amsterdam, 21-05-1982.

<sup>275</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, Minutes of 'Comit  van Waakzaamheid tegen Fascisme en Racisme Vondelpark-Concertgebouw' meeting, Amsterdam, 30-06-1981.

<sup>276</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, Report of the founding meeting of the committee of vigilance against fascism and racism Vondelpark-Concertgebouw neighborhood, Amsterdam, 16-06-1981, 3.

<sup>277</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, Flyer from the 'Comit  van buurtbewoners tegen fascisme, racisme en vreemdelingenhaat', Amsterdam, 1983.

<sup>278</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, Report of the founding meeting of the committee of vigilance against fascism and racism Vondelpark-Concertgebouw neighborhood, Amsterdam, 16-06-1981, 3.

<sup>279</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 4.1, Publication from the anti-fascist committee SKW titled 'de weke onderbuik van het fascisme', Amsterdam, April 1983, 2.

<sup>280</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 2.7, Publication from the Komit  van Waakzaamheid titled 'Geen bedreiging? Fascisme', Nijmegen, January 1983, 8.

<sup>281</sup> PSP.J 71, 'Diskussiemap Themadag Fascisme', 4.

other forms of physical action.<sup>282</sup>

Lastly, umbrella organizations were founded to streamline to coordinate the operations of anti-fascist committees and promoted cooperation with external organizations. The JOF was among these, providing a forum for youth parties, employee organizations and immigrant associations stemming from the likes of Morocco, Turkey and Chile.<sup>283</sup> This coalition primarily dealt with staging memorials and organizing demonstrations of transnational solidarity, like a Chilean festival – with indigenous meals, music and dance recitals – protesting the country's regime.<sup>284</sup> Another was the Anti-Fascist Front Amsterdam (AFFRA), which arose from the desire to unite the insufficiently active neighborhood committees in the capital.<sup>285</sup> However, cooperation between the committees, employee organizations, squatters and special interest groups like the COC group for gay emancipation, was primarily desired because '[a]fter the shocking election results of the [Second] Chamber election [sic] of September 1982, which yielded the Centrumpartij a seat, the absence of a permanent structure of deliberation between the above-mentioned organizations was felt as a clear want.'<sup>286</sup> AFFRA prioritized resistance against 'fascist actors' through physical and legal means, aiming to bar them from political participation and centralizing the neighborhood hotlines into one, where it could be notified of fascist meetings and gangs, but also of incidents of discrimination based on race, skin color, gender and sexual orientation.<sup>287</sup> One final example of an overarching organization was the *AFdruk*, a magazine by and for the anti-fascist movement established in 1983 with the purpose of 'exchanging experiences and information about the (extreme-) right' between the committees.<sup>288</sup>

By the early 1980s, heterogeneity was the prime characteristic of the anti-fascist movement, which had become a conglomeration of diffuse political cultures. As it had been during the entire post-war period, "fascism" was a term easily used and applied to denounce certain developments in society. A change in what fascism meant did seem to have occurred:

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<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>283</sup> PSP.J 71, Press release from the JOF, November 1984.

<sup>284</sup> PSP.J 71, Minutes from JOF meeting, 19-11-1984.

<sup>285</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 002 3.1, Letter to all organizations affiliated with AFFRA, Amsterdam, 18-12-1984.

<sup>286</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 002 3.1, AFFRA Study map for the 'cooperation & strategy weekend' of 23 and 24 April, 1983, 3.

<sup>287</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 002 3.1, Announcement of the opening of the AFFRA hotline, undated. For more on the subject of the hotline, see the IISG Archief Anti-Fascistisch Front Amsterdam. Meldkamer.

<sup>288</sup> 'Overwegingen vooraf', *AFdruk. Nieuwsbrief van antifascisme groepen* 1 (1983) nr. 1, 3, 3.

discrimination had become the watchword of anti-fascist of varieties. However, Dutch anti-fascists continued to struggle with, and never overcame, the same inherent conceptual problem of post-war anti-fascism, which was summarized in an AFFRA study map intended to design an anti-fascist strategy. On the one hand, reducing “fascism” to just the NVU and the Centrumpartij was to ignore the relation of their rise to the economic downturn, racism, sexism, xenophobia, state authoritarianism, and a public aversion to the political system, which collectively formed the ‘potential mass base of fascism.’<sup>289</sup> On the other, the conceptual inflation brought about by fashionable anti-fascism, which seemed to recognize fascism in nearly every form of oppression, rendered the concept of fascism almost meaningless and thus provided the anti-fascist struggle with no means to develop a strategy.<sup>290</sup> The inherent insolvability of defining fascism in the post-war age thus continued to create different constituencies that sought to steer the anti-fascist struggle according to their own beliefs about and conceptions of fascism.

However, conceptual confusion was also helpful for assembling a movement against the unspecified evil of discrimination, however one might have defined it. The AFdruk editors admitted as much in their opening piece:

‘The editorial office does not want to strive for a completed definition of ‘fascism’ and such, or assume one. But everything that the different committees experience with and take action against repression, discrimination, intimidation, fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, homophobia and the like must be able to be discussed in AFdruk, and in this way become known to the people who are active. So that [*sic*] we jointly come to a clear image of the ideas and practices denoted by the term ‘fascist tendencies’, and the possibilities of the fight against it.’<sup>291</sup>

Loose definitions of fascism thus helped consolidate a host of groups who instead shared a common political culture that idealized direct action against repression and exploitation. Fascism was ‘an ever-present possibility’, from which anti-fascism was ‘a daily practice of liberation’.<sup>292</sup> Anti-fascist activism was thus inspired just as much – if not, more – by an

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<sup>289</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 002 3.1, AFFRA Study map for the ‘cooperation & strategy weekend’ of 23 and 24 April, 1983, 31.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>291</sup> ‘Overwegingen vooraf’, 3.

<sup>292</sup> ‘Anti-fascisme. Waar doen we het voor?’, *AFdruk. Nieuwsbrief van antifascisme groepen* 1 (1983) nr. 3, 6-7, 7.

emotional desire to contribute to society through political action, which was innate to social movements. Because political struggle was a core component of the identity of activists, they always perceived threats that needed to be resisted through action. This formed the basis for the paradox, rightly noted by AFdruk, that anti-fascists inadvertently denied the effectiveness of their own exploits by continuously repeating the mantra that fascism was on the rise.<sup>293</sup> Still, a lack of conceptual clarity not only helped left-wing activists unify, it also proved useful in finding external allies. Referencing the frightening consequences of sectarian division on the left during the Weimar Republic, the AFdruk argued that a broad anti-fascist movement should instead attract social organizations that did not necessarily identify with anti-fascism.<sup>294</sup>

However, within the movement certain interests were accorded different degrees of value, and thus constituencies were formed that fought to steer the anti-fascist cause in their respectively desired directions. Anti-racists formed the most dominant constituency, following the idea that racial discrimination in contemporary society indicated a return to fascism. Exemplary of this perception was the division – repeated within many other committees - of the Nijmegen committee in two primary workgroups, ‘Ethnic Minorities’ and ‘Cultural anti-fascism’. Members of the former were occupied with scrutinizing municipal policies regarding minorities, researching instances of discrimination and setting up exhibitions centered around themes of ‘discrimination, racism and migrant labor’.<sup>295</sup> The “cultural anti-fascists” then connected these themes to the war through memorials, 5 May festivities and research, reasoning that ‘the experience of the past is an important weapon against the currently resurging fascism.’<sup>296</sup> Fascism was thus conceptualized as the result of tensions rising from the combination of insufficiently calculated policies regarding migrant labors and the economic crisis.<sup>297</sup> On this topic, anti-fascists attempted to reach out to immigrant communities and cooperate with their representative organizations, organizing events and demonstrations targeting foreign regimes and movements.

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>295</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 2.7, Publication from the Comité van Waakzaamheid titled ‘Geen bedreiging? Fascisme’, Nijmegen, January 1983, 8.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., 15.



*AFKU poster for a 'festival against fascism', with translations in Turkish, Arabic and Greek.*

*The program includes a Moroccan music group and a Turkish choir. Utrecht, 1982.<sup>298</sup>*

The fascists that foreigners, immigrants and their descendants had to be defended from ranged further than just the NVU and CP. Some were other domestic groups like the *Oud-Strijders Legioen*, the *Viking Jeugd* and the *Nationaal Jeugd Front*, but fascism also came in the form of foreign organizations in the Netherlands, most notably the Moroccan Amicales and the Turkish Grey Wolves, both extensions of their native governments. In fact, anti-fascism and anti-racism nearly became synonymous phenomena, as evidenced by the fact that many anti-fascist committees often switched between styling themselves as being against racism, fascism or both.<sup>299</sup> Anti-fascist initiatives were thus primarily a response to racist incidents and the election of the *Centrumpartij*, which reminded much of the public of fascist scapegoating of minorities during the 1930s. According to Marja Vuijsje of the Amsterdam committee of women against fascism, '[t]he countermovement that arose did therefore not call themselves

<sup>298</sup> IISG BG D7/431. AFKU, 'Waakzaamheid en solidariteit', Utrecht 1982. Another example of translations, this time in Arabic, Italian, Spanish and Turkish is found in DSN 21, Flyer calling to bar fascists from the streets, Delft, 05-04-1988.

<sup>299</sup> One example is the Amsterdam neighborhood committee from the Staatslieden- and Hugo de Groot neighborhood, which since 1982 opposed fascism, racism and xenophobia, whereas it initially opposed just the latter two.

anti-racist, but carried the torch that was left smoldering by the last generation of anti-fascists.<sup>300</sup> However, not all anti-fascists were on board with this development, cautioning that '[w]ithin the committees one can sometimes detect the tendency to call all racist remarks fascist. We have to be careful with this. That [*sic*] is wrong: Fascism and Racism [*sic*] must be separated.'<sup>301</sup> Equating the two meant ignoring all other nefarious aspects of fascism, most importantly its connection to capitalism.<sup>302</sup> Indeed, while still prevalent within the movement, anti-capitalism was no longer a mainstay of post-war anti-fascism as it had been, having been marginalized by anti-racism and feminism. Moreover, anti-racist anti-fascists brushed over the problematic relationship between the almost exclusively white anti-fascist committees and 'foreigners and their organizations'.<sup>303</sup> In AFdruk, it was acknowledged that anti-discrimination demonstrations were mostly either black or white affairs.<sup>304</sup>

Secondly, women's committees against fascism made up a feminist constituency of the anti-fascist movement. Alongside issues of race, sexist discrimination had increasingly become part of the operations of the neighborhood committees whose names often professed to opposing "fascism, sexism and racism".<sup>305</sup> Separate anti-fascist "women's groups" were established in Amsterdam, Nijmegen and Utrecht, often working within larger anti-fascist organizations like AFKU.<sup>306</sup> The perceived connection between feminism and fascism was twofold. Firstly, sexism was considered simply a part of the unequal worldview of fascism that pitted people against each other, 'in the case of sexism one sex above the other. With racism one skin color above the other, with fascism one race above the other.'<sup>307</sup> Moreover, following J.B. Charles notion of fascism as "the little bastard inside yourself", fascism, racism and sexism were all considered character traits, produced by external surroundings and manifesting in oppressive and exploitative behavior. By slyly exploiting the sexist structure of society, it was

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<sup>300</sup> 'Strijd tegen sexisme wel doelstelling maar geen praktijk', *AFdruk. Nieuwsbrief van antifascisme groepen 3* (1985) nr. 4, 6-8, 6.

<sup>301</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, Report of the founding meeting of the committee of vigilance against fascism and racism Vondelpark-Concertgebouw neighborhood, Amsterdam, 16-06-1981, 2.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> 'Zwarten in de antifascistische strijd', *AFdruk. Nieuwsbrief van antifascisme groepen 1* (1983) nr. 1, 19-20, 19-20.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>305</sup> DSN 21, Flyer against fascist, sexist and racist violence, 04-06-1986; CSA SAVRZ053 002 3.1, Circular from the AFFRA workgroup 'cooperation & strategy' regarding the weekend of 23 and 23 April, 1983.

<sup>306</sup> 'Waar zijn de vrouwengroepen tegen fascisme gebleven?', *AFdruk. Nieuwsbrief van antifascisme groepen 2* (1984) nr. 7, 3-5, 4; PSP.J 71. 'Diskussiemap Themadag Fascisme', *SVS-Bulletin, mededelingenblad van de Stichting Vorming en Scholing/PSP* (1981) nr. 43, 4-5.

<sup>307</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 002 3.6, Publication from anti-fascist initiative De Vonk titled 'Wat En Waarom?', 1989-1990.



feared fascists could thus expand their potential base.<sup>308</sup> Secondly, women's groups stressed the uniquely anti-feminist nature of fascism, referencing the extremely patriarchal Nazi system.<sup>309</sup> The same arguments were made by the pro-homosexual constituency within anti-fascism. Although more marginal than the women's movement, anti-homophobia was occasionally part of anti-fascist activism and the COC organization representing homosexual men and women in multiple instances joined anti-fascist organizations.<sup>310</sup>

In practice, however, both feminist and pro-homosexual anti-fascism played second fiddle to anti-racism, with many anti-fascist women's groups quickly disappearing. While recognizing sexism as a form of discrimination that anti-fascists needed to oppose, critics warning of conceptual inflation rightly noted that the groups were not clear on the exact relation between women's issues and anti-fascism. Whereas some located it in the direct threat of the extreme right, others pointed to social decline resulting from the economic crisis, while more were primarily concerned with everyday sexism in the form of porn, role-affirming marketing and sexual violence.<sup>311</sup> Gay and anti-fascist activism did not prove ideally compatible either for numerous reasons. Firstly, according to gay activists themselves, heteronormativity among white anti-fascists accounted for the marginalization of gay rights within the movement. However, the problem was worse in organizations like AFFRA because these were allied with "foreigner" organizations, where homosexuality was an even greater taboo. Lastly, homosexual subcultures were not free of sexist, racist and anti-Semitic prejudice themselves.<sup>312</sup>

Finally, an anti-authoritarian constituency was composed of squatters that primarily opposed police violence.<sup>313</sup> Its ideas actually continued on well-established anti-fascist tropes. By 1985, for example, the committee of the Staatslieden- and Hugo de Groot neighborhoods in Amsterdam issued a manifest titled '1985: Who is whatching [*sic*] you?' in which it warned of power abuses and the rise of a fascist police state resulting from increased government control and surveillance, echoing the concerns of the 1960s Comité Waakzaamheid from

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<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 4.1, Publication from the anti-fascist committee SKW titled 'de weke onderbuik van het fascisme', Amsterdam, April 1983, 2; 'Waar zijn de vrouwengroepen tegen fascisme gebleven?', 3.

<sup>310</sup> PSP.J 71, 'Diskussiemap Themadag Fascisme', *SVS-Bulletin, mededelingenblad van de Stichting Vorming en Scholing/PSP* (1981) nr. 43, 5.

<sup>311</sup> 'Waar zijn de vrouwengroepen tegen fascisme gebleven?', 5.

<sup>312</sup> 'Fascisme en homoseksualiteit', *AFdruk. Nieuwsbrief van antifascisme groepen* 1 (1983) nr. 2, 3-5, 5.

<sup>313</sup> 'Strijd tegen seksisme wel doelstelling maar geen praktijk', 7.

Chapter 2.<sup>314</sup> Indeed, more than merely emphasizing the connection between capital and fascism, it repeated communist mantras of ‘the imperialist yoke’ of the United States.<sup>315</sup> As De Vetten has stated, it is from the squatters scene that the radical minority sprung.<sup>316</sup> Such groups openly opposed the state, stating that ‘history has taught us that fascism cannot be stopped with peaceful and parliamentary methods.’<sup>317</sup> Because the government was negligent in opposing the Centriumpartij and itself implemented racist policies, it was up to radical anti-fascists to obstruct the operations of fascists and racists.<sup>318</sup> Violence and intimidation were permitted, it was argued, as instruments to scare off CP members, as a form of self-protection and as a political symbol.<sup>319</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion

The resurgence of anti-fascism in civil society in the 1980s was rooted in the rise of the new post-materialist social movements during the previous decade. Their supporters composed the base of the anti-fascist movement and joined or established political parties that collectively came to be known as the Small Left. This constituted a major breaking point for anti-fascism in the post-war age: for the first time, there was a genuine anti-fascist movement composed of a wide array of various different and overlapping groups congregating under the banner of opposing discrimination, mainly against foreigners and women. Consequently, the heterogeneity of the anti-fascist movement reflected the convergence of ideology and cooperation between the Small Left parties. This shift proved the most fundamental change in Dutch anti-fascism, which until that point had primarily stuck to advocating against authoritarianism, fascist regimes abroad, capitalism and the reemergence of the fascists of yesteryear. To be sure, these tropes were not done away with. Older concepts such as “fascistoid tendencies”, the notion of fascism as a common phenomenon formed by irrational emotions and personal traits of characters, and Marxist interpretations of the relation

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<sup>314</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 3.1, Manifest from the anti-fascist committee of the Staatslieden- and Hugo de Groot neighborhoods titled ‘1985: Who is watching you?’, Amsterdam, undated.

<sup>315</sup> CSA SAVRZ053 001 2.7, Publication from the Comité van Waakzaamheid titled ‘Geen bedreiging? Fascisme’, Nijmegen, January 1983, 9.

<sup>316</sup> De Vetten, *In de Ban van Goed en Fout*, 221-3.

<sup>317</sup> ‘Direkte actie’, *AFdruk. Nieuwsbrief van antifascisme groepen 2* (1984) nr. 2, 3-7, 3.

<sup>318</sup> DSN 21, Letter from anonymous militant anti-fascist group, Amsterdam, 20-04-1989; CSA SAVRZ053 001 4.1, Flyer from the group Staatsliedenbuurt in cooperation with Verenigd Verzet, 1984.

<sup>319</sup> ‘Direkte actie’, 4-5; Havenaar, R., ‘De Centriumpartij en de zuigkracht van het anti-fascisme’, *Tirade* 28 (1984) nrs. 290-295, 531-50, 541.

between capital and fascism, remained prominent in 1980s anti-fascist thought. However, the shift towards anti-discrimination was connected to a steadily anti-racist ethos of a public that had become more knowledgeable of the events of World War II and recognized its long-term impact on those affected by them. Thus, because the core ideological components of anti-fascism had shifted so dramatically to anti-discrimination, action against fascism could actually count on tacit approval outside of leftist milieus – as long as such action did not turn violent or aimed to criticize other political parties.

Anti-fascist activists were organized in neighborhood-based groups, local committees and umbrella organizations that aimed to centralize their activities and link them to social organizations. These ranged from trade unions, political parties, leftist organizations and institutes, departments of the state bureaucracy and special interest groups for “foreigners”, women and the gay community. Anti-fascist activity could then be divided into three categories. Firstly, cultural initiatives were meant to educate and inform people about fascism. To this end, anti-fascists and organizations like the Anne Frank Stichting taught seminars, staged and showed plays and movies, set up exhibitions, organized informational meetings and distributed anti-fascist newspapers. Secondly, public displays of anti-fascism through demonstrations, festivals and memorials amounted to a form of indirect, symbolic action. Thirdly, anti-fascists engaged in direct action against “the fascists” through legal means and seeking the help from authorities to prevent their gatherings or forbid organizations, or by protesting their events. At home, they mainly targeted the NVU and Centruumpartij, while the Amicales, the Grey Wolves and more minor far right groups were also the subject of anti-fascist ire. Abroad, the anti-fascist obsession with West Germany, although alive and well within the resistance organizations, decreased within the movement, which instead turned to mainly focusing on developments in Chile, Greece and Turkey.

All in all, the late 1970s and 1980s were a unique time for anti-fascism, both in its ideological shift and level of activity and support in civil society. At the start of this chapter, I raised the question how this could occur simultaneously with the process Dan Stone dubbed the decline of the anti-fascist consensus. In fact, one was the product of the other. To be sure, a considerable part of anti-fascist documentation points to the NVU and especially the Centruumpartij as motivating causes behind anti-fascist initiatives and actions, but as I have tried to demonstrate here, these went far beyond merely opposing the CP, and demonstrated their own, anti-fascist sets of ideas about the restructuring of society. Besides, anti-fascists,

while genuinely worried about a return to fascism, acknowledged that animosity towards the extreme right far outweighed support for its most successful exponent, which tellingly only occupied one seat in the Second Chamber. Thus, while Nigel Copsey's thesis of anti-fascism 'as a peripheral ideological concept that *reacts* [emphasis original] to fascism as a phenomenon antithetical to core and adjacent (Enlightenment) conceptions of humanity and society' does apply here, the notion that this concept increasingly becomes important to the core whenever fascism becomes an actual threat needs to be reassessed.<sup>320</sup> In this case, the Centrumpartij represented a worrying development, at best.

Lastly, Stone's thesis allows for a deeper appreciation of the width of Dutch anti-fascism in the 1980s. The resurgence of anti-fascist activism was not just a reaction to the rise of the Centrumpartij, but a product of the reinvigoration of far-right ideas in pockets of society due to the deconstruction of the two pillars upholding the anti-fascist consensus.<sup>321</sup> It was built on the leftist subcultures of new social movements whose ideas and narratives had taken hold in the public since the 1970s, and whose activist supporters made up the bulk of the anti-fascist movement. Under these conditions, anti-fascism took root in civil society in a fashion unprecedented in the post-war age.

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<sup>320</sup> Copsey, 'Preface', xx.

<sup>321</sup> De Haan, 'Fascism? What fascism?', 27.

## Conclusion

To ascertain the role anti-fascism has played in Dutch politics during the post-war age, it is necessary to distinguish between three anti-fascist waves. In every instance, anti-fascism shifted in terms of its ideological components, by whom it was represented and how the fascist threat was perceived. To be sure, post-war identification with anti-fascism and use of anti-fascist discourse belonged predominantly to left-wing parties and organizations. The first wave of post-war anti-fascism, lasting from 1945 to the mid-1950s, was primarily characterized by leftist campaigning against “the reaction”, which encompassed a conglomeration of wealthy elites, rightist politicians and soldiers that sought to subvert significant political, economic and colonial reforms. In the tradition of revolutionary anti-fascism, the CPN and also the PvdA - prior to the end of the anti-fascist moment in 1947 - stressed the fundamental connection between capitalism and fascism in particular. Disillusioned by the deficient denazification of Western Europe and wary of anti-democratic values, anti-fascist groups were formed in civil society as well, as multiple communist, anti-totalitarian Third Way and resistance organizations advocated vigilance against the return of fascism in political and cultural life. Notably, the CPN and these organizations shared a concern of fascism returning to West Germany, in the form of militarism and revanchism, as a threat to peace on the continent. For the most part, however, anti-fascism remained a device used by political parties instead of manifesting as a movement in the public sphere.

The groundwork for the fundamental shift of this dynamic was laid by the second anti-fascist wave. Since 1947, the CPN had formed the only political party that cast its activities in the image of the struggle against fascism, using the notion of capitalist-fascist plots to explain its political isolation. However, another type of anti-fascism sprung from the leftist activism of the new generation and the New Left, which attained far more mainstream acceptability in the following years. Borrowing symbols, language and concepts from the revolutionary anti-fascist tradition, fashionable anti-fascism nevertheless diminished the importance of class analysis in favor of resisting “authoritarianism” in the forms of power abuses, glorification of authority and oppression of civil rights. Even though committed resisters of “fascism” were often in some way connected to parties like the PSP or CPN, anti-fascist resistance had become a grassroots phenomenon instead of being forced from the top down. Nevertheless, it remained a concept that was too abstract to construct an anti-fascist movement around.

Only during the third anti-fascist wave did this movement truly develop. Born out of the new social movements of the 1970s, anti-fascism was radically reshaped in their image and had become about resisting discrimination, specifically against non-whites, women and gay people. The size and respectability of the movement was greatly boosted by the fact that for the first time during the post-war age, it had identifiable targets that aroused widespread mainstream disgust and comparisons, namely the NVU and the Centrumpartij. However, while anti-fascist activism was often directly aimed at these parties, it more broadly targeted “fascistoid” developments in society, in particular the rise of xenophobia and racism. Although multiple constituencies strove to control the direction, anti-racism became the core component of the anti-fascist movement.

In the post-war age we thus see three significant ideological shifts of anti-fascist activism that mostly align with the contemporary concerns and activities of the political left. However, to answer the main question of this master thesis, which is to determine the role of anti-fascism in the Netherlands during the post-war age, it is essential to establish the lasting continuities in over forty years of Dutch anti-fascism. Consequently, I have established three notable uses of anti-fascism after World War II. Firstly, anti-fascism provided left-wing parties and organizations with a *discourse to express concerns about the state of democracy* in the Netherlands. Both the PvdA and CPN, exponents of respectively conservative and revolutionary anti-fascism and thus also deeply distrustful of each other, deeply feared the young and fragile social democracy might fold under the pressure of the conservative backlash to post-war reforms. These fears were manifested in images of conspiracy and war, most notably the notion of a fascist threat profiting from “the reaction”. The fashionable anti-fascism of the 1960s, meanwhile, aimed to deconstruct the post-war socio-political order instead of defending it. As Mercer stated, the usage of anti-fascism language and symbols was not part of a backlash against self-styled fascist groups, but ‘formulated the fears of a variety of constituencies about the shallowness of postwar democracy.’<sup>322</sup> Third-wave anti-fascism, then, reflected fears of the threat extreme right parties and organizations posed to democracy, birthing a movement that strove to repress them under the banner of anti-fascism. Since 1945, leftist organizations had thus used the language of anti-fascist traditions to articulate objections against what they perceived as impediments to genuine democracy.

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<sup>322</sup> Mercer, ‘Specters of Fascism’, 127.

Secondly, anti-fascism was an *expression of shifting narratives regarding World War II*. In particular, it was strongly connected to the construction and downfall of the anti-fascist myth in the West. First-wave anti-fascist actors embraced the carefully constructed myth that espoused the ‘anonymous narrative of victory over ‘evil’’, emphasized resistance and downplayed the extent of collaboration during the austerity of the reconstruction era, priding themselves, and indeed the Dutch people, on their resistance against the Germans during the war.<sup>323</sup> However, the myth was subsequently eroded by the result of the growing public realization of Dutch complicity to Nazi rule, which brought forth the importance of the notion of daring to resist oppression. Because the anti-fascist myth provided the intellectual basis of the post-war consensus and legitimacy of the democratic establishment, it is no wonder the attack of second-wave anti-fascism against the political order went hand in hand with the deconstruction of the myth it was based on, as rebellious student protesters accused the establishment of covering up moral failures during the war. The decline of the post-war consensus and increased public attention to different groups victimized by the war then fueled third-wave anti-fascism concerned by the reinvigoration of older far-right traditions. Anti-fascism was thus consistently informed by the narratives of memory of World War II.

Lastly, anti-fascism was a *potential instrument for political cooperation between and integration of left-wing parties*. During the anti-fascist moment, the CPN had attempted to establish a leftist bloc with the newfound PvdA on the basis of shared anti-fascist convictions and values. However, the communists simultaneously utilized anti-fascist rhetoric for their own gain as they sought electoral success by trying to draw working-class votes away from the PvdA, which in turn launched its own campaign against fascism. Their anti-fascist rhetoric soon turned against the political establishment as they were subsequently politically isolated. However, during the 1960s small socialist parties like the CPN and PSP were able to attract young leftist activists through shared anti-fascist beliefs. Since the 1970s, the influx of young people had transformed these parties, leading to converging party programs and intensified cooperation. In the early 1980s they met to discuss anti-fascist policy, explicitly inviting the CPN at the table, and eventually forfeited pursuing their own respective anti-fascist actions in favor of a combined approach. Thus, shared anti-fascist beliefs held the potential for leftist parties to seek cooperation, eventually resulting in their merger in GroenLinks.

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<sup>323</sup> Stone, *Goodbye to All That?*, 60.

At the heart of an inquiry of post-war anti-fascism usually lies what can be called the anti-fascist paradox: the continued existence of anti-fascism after the defeat and disappearance of historical fascism from the political theater. Like many anti-fascist studies, this thesis has aimed to explain why anti-fascism has stayed around. In doing so, it also comments on the theories of scholars of these studies. One example is Ben Mercer's assertion that since the 1960s, anti-fascism has attained a variety of meanings that were either specific (such as referring to foreign regimes or political parties) or vague (such as a predisposition to violence). I would argue that this development was actually rooted in the late 1940s, during which Dutch communists and social democrats rallied against the vague notion of fascist subversion, and the CPN and Third-Worldists warned of West Germany as a potentially fascist danger.

However, more importantly, this thesis comments on Copey's characterization of anti-fascism as a reactive phenomenon that is activated by the urgent threat of fascism. Although this conception of anti-fascism is not entirely incorrect or unworkable, it is shown here to be flawed. Most problematically, adhering to this concept means overlooking the fact that anti-fascist conceptions of fascism and anti-fascism itself have continuously changed through time to emphasize different ideological components. It means ignoring the question why, for example, opposition to sexism was part of the anti-fascist repertoire in the 1970s, which would have been unthinkable during the late 1940s. Because whatever constitutes a fascist threat is necessarily subjective, anti-fascist studies of large timeframes should not attempt to localize and identify objective forms of fascism and study the political response to it. Instead, the conception of self-proclaimed anti-fascists of fascism should be studied to understand the evolution of anti-fascism over time.

When doing so, we are able to better understand the phenomenon of anti-fascism itself. Even now, it is hard to tell what it represented over the course of decades of Dutch history. Was it a movement? Until the early 1980s, it was too diffuse and marginal to be. Was it an identity? Perhaps, but again, not until a genuine movement came about. Up until that point, "communist", "socialist" or "activist" would be more significant markers of identity. Just a rhetorical device, then? In some way, yes, but reducing it to this undersells the genuine belief of anti-fascists in the urgency of the fascist threat. However, in the case of the Netherlands anti-fascism can be identified as a host of expressions, of democratic anxieties, of remembrance of World War II and of hope of political cooperation, all occurring on the left.



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