Does the response to Geert Wilders' political and media provocations over the past ten years show a development, with consideration of the political and social theories of nationalism and multiculturalism?

The leader of the far-right Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders, is infamous in political circles for his highly polemical and controversial performances, both in a political setting and in the media. He is a politician with welldocumented anti-immigration, anti-European Union and, above all, anti-Islam sentiments. In the wake of recent incidences of extremism linked to radical Islam, such as the Charlie Hebdo massacre, the rise of the radical Islamic State and the 7/7 an 9/11 terrorist attacks, reaction to these events (and to Islam as a whole) has become polarised and divisive. While some call for strict anti-integration measures and a return to the notion of the unified nation, others have reacted with a multiculturalist stance, calling for tolerance and celebration of diversity (a reaction prompted by the nationalist reactions as well as the atrocities themselves). Wilders is a clear subscriber of the nationalist category because, while he labels himself a patriot, his actions fall more in line with a nationalist definition of being a 'principle that state and nation should coincide [...and being alert to] the threat immigrants can pose to the cultural and national identity.' In this essay I will not only discuss a number of Geert Wilders' specific provocations but also analyse the reactions to them from political opponents as well as wider individual or organised responses from affected and other key demographics in Dutch society. My expectation is that these responses will demonstrate an increasing sense of belonging among Dutch Muslims and Dutch-Moroccans as well as an increasing sense of acceptance of other cultures and support from other segments of society in order to combat not only

-

¹ Anne van Bruggen, 'The Rise of Dutch Neo-Nationalism: Three Explanations for the Recent Upsurge in Nationalist Mobilization', *The Yale Review of International Studies* http://yris.yira.org/essays/311> [accessed 24/04/2015]

Wilders' dogmatic rhetoric but also generalisations and preconceptions from society as a whole.

The first of Wilders' provocations I will analyse is the release of the anti-Islamic film *Fitna*, described by Canadian solicitor Richard Warman as 'classic hate propaganda'², which was released in March 2008 to convey Wilders' negative interpretation on the subject of Islam. It uses decidedly anti-Islam imagery, for example, video footage from 9/11 and radical Muslim clerics preaching hate, to enlighten the masses of non-Islams, or *kaffirs*, about the true nature of Islam. Such an inflammatory piece of media on such a sensitive topic naturally brought about numerous strong reactions.

There was general consensus among Wilders' political opponents that the film was abhorrent. Then-Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Jan Peter Balkenende, released a statement on behalf of the entire Dutch government, condemning the film for '[equating] Islam with violence' and pointing out that 'the vast majority of Muslims reject extremism and violence' and that 'the victims are often Muslims themselves', sentiments that were also held by numerous other parties, such as the *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* (CDA) and *Partij van de Arbeid* (PvdA) as well as *GroenLinks* (GL) and the *Socialistische Partij* (SP). The then-leader of the CDA, Pieter van Geel, further criticised the film for attacking Islam while contributing nothing to solving the issues. Mark Rutte, then-leader of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD), suggested that Wilders refocus his efforts onto solving the

-

⁵ [W.A.], 'Parties'

² Richard Warman, 'Fitna as criminal hate propaganda' http://www.richardwarman.ca/files/Fitna.pdf [accessed 24/04/2015]

³ [W.A.], 'Government's reaction to Wilders' film', *Ministry of General Affairs*

_[accessed_24/04/2015]

_news_items/2008/Maart/Government_s_reaction_to_Wilders_film> [accessed 24/04/2015]
⁴ [W.A.], 'Political parties react to Fitna', *Expatica* < http://www.expatica.com/nl/news/country-news/Political-partiesreact-to-Fitna_113295.html> [accessed 24/04/2015]

issues rather than merely showing 'old footage of terrorist and criminal acts'⁶, an idea that the SP and Femke Halsema (GL) likewise alluded to, by stating that the piece was 'nothing new' and '[did] not add anything to what has been published about violent extremism over the past years', respectively.⁷

This assertion of unoriginality was furthermore the main response from the most affected demographic, the Muslim community, which further suggested that Wilders was not as provocative in his efforts as he could have been and that they were expecting more offensive content. Yusuf Altuntas, speaker for the Dutch Muslim organisation *Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid* (CMO), was quoted as saying that Wilders sought the boundary lines without crossing any of them⁸, implying he was not as brave as he made himself out to be.

The *Landelijk Beraad Marokkanen* (LBM), a union of Dutch-Moroccans, was relieved the film was finally out and was underwhelmed by its content.⁹ The Dutch Islamic Federation did nevertheless take legal action against Wilders on grounds of violating hate speech laws, for which he was later acquitted.¹⁰ However, the general response from the Muslim community was calm and non-violent, for which Balkenende¹¹ and Wouter Bos (PvdA) praised them.¹² The demographic that did in fact have a stronger reaction than the Muslim community was the Jewish community. The *Centraal Joods Overleg* (CJO) denounced the film for

_

⁶ [W.A.], 'Parties'

⁷ ibid

⁸ Gerald Traufetter, 'Niederlande: Koranfeindliches Video veröffentlicht - Protest gegen Rechtspopulist Wilders', *Spiegel Online* http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/niederlande-koranfeindliches-video-veroeffentlicht-protest-gegen-rechtspopulist-wilders-a-543855.html [accessed 24/04/15]

tr. "Er sucht die Grenzen offensichtlich, aber er vermeidet, sie zu überschreiten"

⁹ Truffauter, 'Niederlande'

¹⁰ [W.A.], 'Dutch Relief Over Muslim Reaction To Anti-Islam Film.', *LiveLeak* http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=005_1206712774 [accessed 24/04/15]

¹¹ ibid.

¹² [W.A.], 'Parties'

generalising and for effectively hurting its own cause. ¹³ In particular, head of the pro-Zionist Centre for Information and Documentation, Dr. Ronny Naftaniel, was critical of the insinuation that all Muslims were terrorists but commented on how surprised he was that the community stayed silent throughout. ¹⁴ He stated that, if he were in that position, he would have been very vocal. He blamed this silence on governmental pressure to stay quiet and to rise above it but also on fear of anti-Islamic repercussions and reactions from the general public. ¹⁵ This claim by Naftaniel highlights the Islamic predicament: the Muslim community, already fearful of consequences and backlash from the rest of society because of the atrocities committed in the name of Islam, are urged by the government to respond 'appropriately', which makes them even more wary of reacting. This fear effectively paralyses them, yet other communities interpret this silence as a sign of weakness, as an inability or unwillingness to stand up for themselves – they cannot win either way.

The second provocation to be analysed happened the following year in September 2009 during parliamentary session. Occurring around the same time as the proposal for France's 'burqa ban', the proposal for a law, which would require Muslim women to purchase a permit costing €1000 per annum in orderto wear a head scarf in public, was pejoratively named a *kopvoddentaks*, meaning 'head rag tax', which would lead to the total dehumanisation of Muslims, according to Francis Pakes, something that 'regularly characterises the Wilders approach to issues if religion and diversity'. ¹⁶ In his speech during parliamentary General Reflections, Wilders stated he did not want to ban the headscarf but

-

¹³ Cnaan Liphshiz, 'Dutch Jews louder than Muslims in condemning 'Fitna' film', *Haaretz* http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/dutch-jews-louder-than-muslims-in-condemning-fitna-film-1.243203 [accessed 24/04/15]

¹⁴ Liphshiz, 'Jews'

¹⁵ ibid.

¹⁶ Francis Pake, 'Global forces and local effects in youth justice: The case of Moroccan youngsters in Netherlands', *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 38 (2010), pp. 109-119 http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1756061610000315?np=y

simply make the 'polluter' pay.¹⁷ While this move was intended as a move to remove, what Wilders, a self-proclaimed supporter of the rights of women, referred to as, a symbol of female oppression, and was no more anti-Islamic than the release of *Fitna*, he failed to see the irony of his proposal.¹⁸ He wanted to remove a symbol of an ideology he abhors by making the people he wanted to liberate, in effect, pay for it and moreover label them as 'polluters' in the process.

The responses were again particularly damning, ranging from disbelief at 'selling his principles' to accusations of sexism.¹⁹ While Alexander Pechtold of *Democraten 66* humorously asked whether Minister of Education Ronald Plasterk's trademark hat would also count as a head covering or would that be 'a different price', the response from women, which was more prevalent now than in response to *Fitna*, was much more serious.²⁰ Agnes Kant (SP) asked whether the wearing of yarmulkes among Jewish men would be taxed²¹, clearly referring to Wilders' past support for the Jewish community and for Israel, and Femke Halsema (GL) went as far as to compare him to a controlling Iranian man. Their only difference, according to Halsema, was that the Iranian man forces women to wear a headscarf whilst Wilders is forcing them to take it off but they still use the same tactic of force.²²

This was also a key issue brought to the fore by the demographics. While the CMO denounced Wilders' remarks for going against the right of religious freedom, Abdou Menebhi of the *Nederlands Marokkaans Netwerk* stated that such a development as the *kopvoddentaks* would lead to 'increasing tensions between communities [...] legitimising that part of the Dutch population is treated as second class citizens'. Sheikhs representing the As-

1

¹⁷ 2/7_16 september 2009: Algemene Beschouwingen Termijn 1 Geert Wilders (PVV). Pres. Geert Wilders. YouTube. 2009.

¹⁸ ibid

by van Geel; [W.A.], 'Wilders wil 'kopvoddentaks'', *De Verdieping Trouw* http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1166140/2009/09/16/Wilders-wilkopvoddentaks.dhtml [accessed 24/04/2015]

²⁰ [W.A.], 'kopvoddentaks'

²¹ ibid.

²² ibid.

Sounnah Mosque in The Hague said that, instead of 'building a peaceful mutual future between Muslims and non-Muslims', an openly anti-Islamic will cause 'more hatred, fear and violence' – everything the PVV does not want to happen.²³ The disparity in social class for different demographics that Menebhi speaks of is emphasised by the Sheikhs' opinion that a 'one-way adaption of Muslims to the Dutch culture, norms and values will not lead to anything'24, which relates to Soutphommasane's idea on multiculturalism that 'minority ethno-cultural groups' seek political recognition and protection of their shared identity. ²⁵ It is evident that the Muslim community is calling for a more multiculturalist and understanding society, which was echoed by PM Balkenende, who said he stands for 'a society, in which we respect each other' and that does not 'throw people in one heap'. 26 Yet, even though their response is stronger and defensive than the one to Fitna, there is still an air of negativity. The focus on the negative results of a non-multicultural society reflected a common feeling of dissatisfaction among Muslims with the construction of the coalition, as Yasmine El Ksaihi of the *Poldermoskee*²⁷ in Amsterdam supported. ²⁸ They were disheartened that, because of the way the government is set up and Wilders' position in it, he did not have to abide by the ministerial codes of conduct, thus was able to say anything in parliament without repercussion, which 'gives the PVV relatively a lot of power'.²⁹

²³ Mare S. Visser, 'Nationalist-populist rhetoric & the demise of Dutch multiculturalism: What future for Muslim minorities' (unpublished MA, The American University of Cairo, 2011) pp. 82-83 ²⁴ ibid.

²⁵ Tim Soutphommasane, *The Virtuous Citizen: Patriotism in a Multicultural Society, Cambridge Books Online*

 $< http://ebooks.cambridge.org/pdf_viewer.jsf?cid=CBO9781139177740A009\&ref=true\&pubCode=CUP\&urlPrefix=cambridge\&productCode=cbo> [accessed 24/04/2015] pp. 43-44$

²⁶ [W.A.], 'Balkenende verwerpt 'hoofddoekjestaks', NRC.nl

http://vorige.nrc.nl/binnenland/article2362768.ece/Balkenende_verwerpt_hoofddoekjestaks [accessed 24/04/2015]

tr. "Ik sta voor een samenleving waarin we respectvol met elkaar omgaan" "We moeten niet mensen op één hoop gooien"

²⁷ A more gender-equal mosque, which allows women to join men in prayer

²⁸ Visser, 'Demise'

²⁹ ibid.; quote by Halim El Madkouri, program manager at FORUM, an institute for Multicultural issues

The third provocation to be discussed happened five years after the suggestion of *kopvoddentaks*, in March 2014 in the run-up to the European Union elections. It is arguably his most inflammatory provocation because of its more extreme nature. His infamous *Minder Marokkanen* speech, in which he asks a crowd of supporters of the PVV whether they want more or fewer Moroccans in the Netherlands, is considerably more nationalistic than his previous provocations because not only was there audience participation reminiscent of national-socialist rallies but, as stated by Gören Sluiter³⁰, his comments shifted the party's concentration from a faith (namely Islam) to a specific ethnic group.³¹

Once again, his provocation incited a great deal of responses. This time however the responses were notably unanimous in the sense that they all felt Wilders actions to be deplorable, with the majority outright referring to his comments as 'inciting hatred'. The former GL-MP Tofik Dibi drew a comparison to Hitler, suggesting that 'Hitler thought there should be fewer Jews [, which] we should never forget'. These actions similarly caused the CJO, as representatives of the Jewish community with many connections to other prominent Jewish organisations, to 'strongly [distance themselves] from his statements', a bold and telling move, considering Wilders' previously strong relationship with the Jewish community. This speech prompted Aissa Zanzen of the *Samenwerkingsverband van Marokkaanse***Nederlanders* to call on other groups affected by it to produce statements against Wilders. The speech also instigated an investigation and then a formal prosecution from the

_

³⁰ lawyer representing many Muslim organisations

³¹ [W.A.], 'Geert Wilders belooft 'minder Marokkanen' in Den Haag', *NU.nl* < http://www.nu.nl/politiek/3730669/geert-wilders-belooft-minder-marokkanen-in-haag.html> [accessed 24/04/2015]

³² ibid.; quote from Femke Halsema

³³ ibid

³⁴ [W.A.], 'Joodse organisaties verafschuwen uitlatingen Wilders', *RTL Nieuws* http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/binnenland/joodse-organisaties-verafschuwen-uitlatingen-wilders [accessed 24/04/2015]

³⁵ [W.A.], 'Den Haag'

government (*Openbaar Ministerie*) on grounds of discrimination and hate speech. ³⁶ Gören Sluiter released a statement on behalf of several organisations³⁷, affirming that they were 'very happy' with the decision to prosecute³⁸, as was Mohamed Rabbae (LBM), who said that it was a 'good sign for society' and to show that Wilders, and anyone like him, are not above the law and that 'in order to keep the country together, it's important that everyone is treated equally'. 39 Rabbae went on to praise the government for its handling of the situation and, while it was a long time coming, it was a sensitive issue that needed the appropriate amount of time to be sorted⁴⁰, indicating a good relationship between the government and the Muslim community. This relationship has evidently improved since the time of the kopvoddentaks proposal, when the government was criticised by the community. The reoccurring response was a call for more acceptance and equality between cultures. Along with Rabbae's remark on the subject, the now-PM Rutte stated that Wilders had gone 'yet another step further' and that his comments 'left a bad taste in [his] mouth', saying that distinguishing between people based on their background is unacceptable because he wants every child with some sort of "allochtoon" background to feel that they are welcome in the Netherlands. 41 These comments are in the same vein as former PM Balkenende, indicating that the message of multiculturalism from the government has not changed despite a change in leadership. Wilders released a statement in December 2014 as a clarification of his position in his *Minder* Marokkanen speech by saying he was not 'out to discriminate or to sow hatred [nor to] hurt or offend anyone' but simply that he did not want to mince his words. 42 Despite the fact this

_

³⁶ [W.A.], 'Geert Wilders vervolgd voor uitspraak over 'minder Marokkanen', z24

http://www.z24.nl/bijzaken/geert-wilders-vervolgd-voor-uitspraak-over-minder-marokkanen-523452 [accessed 24/04/2015]

³⁷ incl. LBM, Nederland Bekent Kleur and Platform Stop Racisme

^{38 [}W.A.], 'uitspraak'

³⁹ ibid.

⁴⁰ ibid.

⁴¹ [W.A.], 'Den Haag'

⁴² Geert Wilders, 'Verklaring Geert Wilders bij verhoor rijksrecherchie ten behoeve van de vervolgingsbeslissing van het Openbaar Ministerie', *Partij voor de Vrijjheid*

fits in with his personally-held belief that he is a patriot, not a nationalist, there is a discrepancy between this statement and his personal history of offensive speech and actions.

In conclusion, the development in the responses to Wilders' provocations has been a significant one, both from a political level and a societal one. The evidence suggests that, as Wilders' rhetoric became more outwardly nationalistic and extreme, despite his internal beliefs remaining the same as they always had been, the response from political opponents and those affected by his statements became affirmative statements of embracing equality and a more multicultural society. Politically, support for the Muslim and Moroccan communities, specifically, from other parties and politicians in Dutch parliament has generally been consistent, becoming more asserted and passionately expressed in light of more instances of radical Islam as well as Wilders' aggravations, in order to actively separate the radicals from the regular members of society. In stark comparison, the response from the Muslim community, particularly, has been one of learning to defend itself, while still standing for the same ideals as the government as well as fellow members of society. It evolved from a people too afraid to react to such defamatory declarations to a community, who not only responds effectively and appropriately, but one that works with other people and communities in order to achieve their intended outcome of acceptance and equality. This transition has been noteworthy as a respectable example of how to respond to people with incendiary opinions and methods of communicating said opinions.

Bibliography

Liphshiz, Cnaan, 'Dutch Jews louder than Muslims in condemning 'Fitna' film', *Haaretz* http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/dutch-jews-louder-than-muslims-in-condemning-fitna-film-1.243203 [accessed 24/04/15]

Pake, Francis, 'Global forces and local effects in youth justice: The case of Moroccan youngsters in Netherlands', *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 38 (2010) http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1756061610000315?np=y

Soutphommasane, Tim, The Virtuous Citizen: Patriotism in a Multicultural Society, Cambridge Books Online

http://ebooks.cambridge.org/pdf_viewer.jsf?cid=CBO9781139177740A008&ref=true&pubCode=CUP&urlPrefix=cambridge&productCode=cbo>

Soutphommasane, Tim, The Virtuous Citizen: Patriotism in a Multicultural Society, Cambridge Books Online

http://ebooks.cambridge.org/pdf_viewer.jsf?cid=CBO9781139177740A009&ref=true&pubCode=CUP&urlPrefix=cambridge&productCode=cbo>

Traufetter, Gerald, 'Niederlande: Koranfeindliches Video veröffentlicht - Protest gegen Rechtspopulist Wilders', *Spiegel Online* http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/niederlande-koranfeindliches-video-veroeffentlicht-protest-gegen-rechtspopulist-wilders-a-543855.html [accessed 24/04/15]

van Bruggen, Anne, 'The Rise of Dutch Neo-Nationalism: Three Explanations for the Recent Upsurge in Nationalist Mobilization', *The Yale Review of International Studies* http://yris.yira.org/essays/311> [accessed 24/04/2015]

Visser, Mare S., 'Nationalist-populist rhetoric & the demise of Dutch multiculturalism: What future for Muslim minorities' (unpublished MA, The American University of Cairo, 2011)

[W.A.], 'Balkenende verwerpt 'hoofddoekjestaks', *NRC.nl* http://vorige.nrc.nl/binnenland/article2362768.ece/Balkenende_verwerpt_hoofddoekjestaks [accessed 24/04/2015]

[W.A.], 'Dutch Relief Over Muslim Reaction To Anti-Islam Film.', *LiveLeak* http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=005_1206712774 [accessed 24/04/15]

[W.A.], 'Geert Wilders belooft 'minder Marokkanen' in Den Haag', *NU.nl* < http://www.nu.nl/politiek/3730669/geert-wilders-belooft-minder-marokkanen-in-haag.html> [accessed 24/04/2015]

[W.A.], 'Geert Wilders vervolgd voor uitspraak over 'minder Marokkanen', *z24* http://www.z24.nl/bijzaken/geert-wilders-vervolgd-voor-uitspraak-over-minder-marokkanen-523452 [accessed 24/04/2015]

[W.A.], 'Government's reaction to Wilders' film', *Ministry of General Affairs* http://www.minaz.nl/english/News/Press_releases_and_news_items/2008/Maart/Government_s_reaction_to_Wilders_film [accessed 24/04/2015]

[W.A.], 'Joodse organisaties verafschuwen uitlatingen Wilders', *RTL Nieuws* http://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/binnenland/joodse-organisaties-verafschuwen-uitlatingen-wilders [accessed 24/04/2015]

[W.A.], 'Political parties react to Fitna', *Expatica* < http://www.expatica.com/nl/news/country-news/Political-partiesreact-to-Fitna_113295.html> [accessed 24/04/2015]

[W.A.], 'Wilders wil 'kopvoddentaks'', *De Verdieping Trouw* http://www.trouw.nl/tr/nl/4324/Nieuws/article/detail/1166140/2009/09/16/Wilders-wilkopvoddentaks.dhtml [accessed 24/04/2015]

Warman, Richard, 'Fitna as criminal hate propaganda' http://www.richardwarman.ca/files/Fitna.pdf [accessed 24/04/2015]

Wilders, Geert, 'Verklaring Geert Wilders bij verhoor rijksrecherche ten behoeve van de vervolgingsbeslissing van het Openbaar Ministerie', *Partij voor de Vrijjheid* http://pvv.nl/images/Verklaring_Geert_Wilders_zoals_afgelegd_bij_de_rijksrecherche_-_8_december_2014.pdf> [accessed 24/04/2015]

2/7_16 september 2009: Algemene Beschouwingen Termijn 1 Geert Wilders (PVV). Pres. Geert Wilders. YouTube. 2009.