THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

NATIONALIST-POPULIST RHETORIC & THE DEMISE OF DUTCH MULTICULTURALISM: WHAT FUTURE FOR MUSLIM MINORITIES

MARE S. VISSEER

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

FEBRUARY 2011
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I am grateful to the American University in Cairo (AUC), which has partially funded this study through a graduate research grant. Further, without the efforts of many people this thesis would not have had the same quality. For this reason, I would like to thank a number of people in advance, who have encouraged and helped me along the sidelines. First of all, my advisor at AUC, Dr. Pandeli Glavanis, for his availability, flexibility and optimism. His critical comments and suggestions have been a large influence upon the end result of this thesis and his continuing interest has kept me motivated. Dr. Ibrahim Elnur (AUC) and Dr. Scott Hibbard (De Paul University in Chicago) have read the entire manuscript and provided me with numerous detailed comments and pointed the way to a number of improvements. Mr. Halim El Madkouri, program manager religion & identity at FORUM in Utrecht has been of great practical support during my field work in the Netherlands. The conversations with Halim were inspiring and kept me focused. Further, through the goodwill Moheb el Wakiel and Yassmine El Ksaihi, respectively youth imam and chair women of the Polder Mosque in Amsterdam West many doors were opened in my search of finding participants for this study. Also Sabi El Moussaoui of Moroccan youth center Argan in Amsterdam, and Farid Aouled-Lahcen of the Berber cultural center in The Hague receive my gratitude for assisting me in organizing the focus-groups. I am indebted to all the discussion-group participants, survey-respondents and interviewees, without whom this study would not have been possible. Further, I have received a great deal of help from a number of other people. They are; Abdelhak Belkasmi (PvdA), Bob Plantinga (VVD), Cihan Urugal (GL), Andries Tijssens (D66) and Kees Diepenveen (GL) from the district council Amsterdam North and Roemer van Oordt (Zasja), Zakariya Lyousoufi, (Project manager social cohesion, city district Amsterdam West) Ewoud Butter (ACB Kenniscentrum), and Dr. Renee Boomkens (University in Groningen). Lastly, I would like to thank my friend Kais Torchani for his unrelenting support. The long hours of studying together at university have left me with many pleasant memories.
ABSTRACT

This research sets out to explore the implications on Muslims following the demise of multiculturalism and the rise of nationalist populist rhetoric in the Netherlands. For decades the Netherlands enjoyed a stable political system, a lengthy tradition of liberalism, tolerance and more recently multiculturalism. The apparent ease with which the Netherlands integrated immigrants in Dutch society through its ambitious policy of multiculturalism attracted the attention of many other European states experiencing problems assimilating ethnic minorities. But since the emergence of Pim Fortuyn in 2002, populist parties emphasizing anti-immigrant feelings have taken up an important position within the Dutch political landscape. Today, Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party (PVV) whose objective is fighting the Islamization of the Netherlands and restoring the Dutch national identity is the third largest political party in the country and xenophobia and Islamophobia have reached unprecedented heights in recent years. These developments challenge the legitimacy of Muslim presence and citizenship in the Netherlands. This raises the question of how deep the roots of Dutch multiculturalism and tolerance have been in the past. In other words: did multiculturalism in the Netherlands ever take root? The fact that the above described developments not only occur in the Netherlands but are part of a larger trend in Europe raises the question whether a multicultural Europe in times of a financial and economic downturn can exist and what this means for the future of Muslim minorities in Europe and in the Netherlands in particular. In order to answer questions raised above, this study has made use of secondary literature (including a review of the media) regarding the developments of the debate on Islam, immigration and integration and employed a case-study based upon interviews, focus-groups and surveys in Amsterdam among Muslim youth focusing upon the future of race-relations in the Netherlands in the context of Geert Wilders rise to power.