

**The Limits of Our Language (Awareness) Mean the Limits of Our World:
Analysing the Rhetoric of Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet on National
Pride, Islam, Immigration and Ethnic Minorities**



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Introduction: The Controversiality and Success of Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet

“Of no other religion or cultural grouping can it be said so assertively as it is now said of Islam that it represents a threat to Western civilization.”¹ Said made this statement concerning the period between 1980 and 1990, when attacks by Hezbollah and Hamas started, and also the period in which the Iranian revolution took place. Interestingly, this citation might as well have been written now, since the recent European migration crisis and terrorist attacks in name of the Islam have led to both closer contact between Muslims and Europe, and to negative associations with the religion. It will come as no surprise that the Islam is thus also a much-discussed topic in Dutch politics. Pim Fortuyn’s political presence in the 1990s was crucial in changing “not only the political climate but also the political culture in the Netherlands” through “polarisation and confrontation.”² This legacy was carried on and taken further after Fortuyn’s murder in 2002 by Geert Wilders, who founded the *Partij Voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom)* in 2004. The political views of Fortuyn and Wilders include similar perspectives on the themes of national pride, immigration, Islam and ethnic minorities. A third and more recent politician for whom these themes are also important is Thierry Baudet, the leader of *Forum Voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy)*, founded in 2015. These three politicians have dominated and continue to dominate the Islam-debate in the Netherlands; they are known for their controversial, provocative statements on the religion. In this thesis, I will look at the way these three Dutch politicians speak or write about Islam, ethnic minorities, immigration and national pride – in other words, I will analyse their rhetoric. Sam Leith defines rhetoric as “the art of persuasion: the attempt of one human

1. Said, *Covering Islam*, lii.

2. Lucardie, “De Erfenis van Fortuyn”, [De erfenis van Fortuyn - Montesquieu Instituut \(montesquieu-instituut.nl\)](https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl/de-erfenis-van-fortuyn). Original text: “Mede dankzij Fortuyn en Wilders is niet alleen het politieke klimaat maar ook de politieke cultuur in Nederland de laatste tien jaar veranderd. De ietwat gezapige en deftige overlegcultuur maakte plaats voor polarisatie en confrontatie.”

being to influence another in words.”³ Naturally, persuasion is a skill that is crucial for politicians, but Leith argues that rhetoric is not merely intentional; it is all speech, even everyday speech: “practically any speech act can be understood, one way or another, as rhetorical – either in and of itself or in the context of its utterance.”⁴ He emphasises “the intrinsic ‘rhetoricality’ of all language,”⁵ and explains that “it’s precisely because it’s all around us that we don’t see it.”⁶ Even though the statements of the three Dutch politicians are experienced as influential, not many people are aware of the rhetorical strategies that make them so. The constant, deliberate choices of language are what determine the position of Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, and Thierry Baudet in Dutch politics. Since both their controversiality and success seem to be rooted in their linguistic exertions, it is useful to explore why this is the case. As philosophers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer have argued, things find their existence in language.

The primary sources I will analyse are mainly from three books in which the politicians express their political views: *De Islamisering van Onze Cultuur* (The Islamisation of Our Culture) by Pim Fortuyn; *Kies voor Vrijheid* (Choose Freedom) by Geert Wilders; and *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand* (Politics of Common Sense) by Thierry Baudet. I chose to focus on these three works, because I think they most clearly convey the politicians’ views. They focus on the themes of national pride, immigration, ethnic minorities and Islam, since these are the areas in which the politicians distinguish themselves from their opponents. The three politicians have very clear views on these themes, and it is also these opinions that they are most known for. The three books are written sources and therefore allowed the politicians more time to think about how they want to express themselves and edit the way in which they

3. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 1.

4. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 3.

5. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 5.

6. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 9.

do so, as opposed to spoken sources such as debates, which are usually responses to statements made by others, and can be nuanced or taken out of context later on. I will include one spoken source by Geert Wilders, however, as it concerns the widely controversial ‘Moroccans speech’, which is very cleverly constructed rhetorically, and still has lasting repercussions to this day. I will also include some tweets by Geert Wilders from the Twitter page he created for his cats, as these tweets show an important rhetorical strategy that Geert Wilders thus successfully employs. All the primary sources I use are Dutch, and I will provide my own translations, sticking as closely to the original meaning as possible.

Rhetoric on Islam is a widely researched topic; as are the reasons underlying it. Edward Said is a hugely important influence, and it is in his theory of Orientalist ‘othering’ that I wish to frame my thesis. Said argues that the West has opposed their notion of the Orient to the identity of the self, in order to help create this self-identity and express its superiority. His work *Covering Islam* further engages with contemporary media portrayal of the religion. Fortuyn, Wilders and Baudet diametrically oppose ‘Islamic values’ to Dutch society, and I will draw on sources that provide insight into the complex nature of these generalised values. Abu-Lughod’s “Do Muslim Women Need Saving?” and its discussion of the “Western obsession with the veil”⁷ will be helpful here. Another work which grapples with rhetoric as a means of legitimisation is *Imperial Eyes* by Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt illustrates several rhetorical mechanisms that serve to establish superiority over a subject, and justify control over it. Though these themes have been widely explored, they have not been applied to the more particular context of contemporary Dutch politics. As this is a real-world phenomenon that is going on now, my thesis will be a valuable contribution in recognising that these rhetorical strategies are not a thing of the past, but that they are applied in different

7. Abu-Lughod, “Do Muslim Women Need Saving?”, 787.

contexts, and with different reasons, to this day. As the strategies keep evolving, so must the analyses describing them.

While especially Geert Wilders has received a lot of attention due to his controversial statements, both in the media and in academic articles, the statements themselves have not been linguistically analysed. The book *Wilders Gewogen* (Weighing Wilders), for example, includes contributions by several historians, sociologists, and political and communication scientists; but does not include contributions by linguists. The authors all shed their light on Wilders's popularity, and explain in different ways how he has managed to establish it. In their contribution "Hard to Get and Hard to Neglect", communication scientists Ayt Damstra and Rens Vliegenhart attribute the politician's success to his clever interactions with the media, and to his connection with the 'immigration issue', which has also received a lot of media attention. It is remarkable that no linguistic analysis is offered, while the authors seem to agree that it is precisely his way of expression that ensures Wilders's political popularity. His provocative language makes him a controversial figure, and it is this controversiality to which he owes his prevalence in the media, and, through association with the 'immigration issue', also a percentage of his voters. The importance of his language is the reason that I intend to embark on a linguistic analysis of not only his political statements, but also those of the two other politicians my thesis covers. Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet are the focus of this thesis, because they are the three names most associated with the 'migration issue' in Dutch politics. All three figures stress the importance of the freedom of expression and national pride, and refer to Judeo-Christian, Western, and Dutch values. Pim Fortuyn was active before and during the events of 9/11, and his new style of political engagement with the Islam has influenced the later politicians. Thierry Baudet has recently become a rival of Geert Wilders, and briefly even threatened to surpass him in popularity. Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, and Thierry Baudet share the ability to provoke with their

words, and an analysis of their rhetoric would thus be a fruitful aid in explaining their success.

Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, and Thierry Baudet profess themselves to speak in the interest of ordinary Dutch people, and against the political elite, and are known for their position in the ‘immigration issue’. These are characteristics that qualify them as populist politicians. While the term populism has been used since the nineteenth century in reference to people’s parties or movements, it was only after Edward Shils’s publication in 1954⁸ that the concept became popular more broadly. Populism continues to be widely researched, such as in the collection of essays *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*.⁹ Though it will not be my exclusive focus, I will include sources on general strategies of populist, right-wing rhetoric to see whether such strategies are employed by the three Dutch politicians, and what role these strategies play within their rhetoric. In 1981, Margaret Canovan published a work entitled *Populism*. In it, she addresses an issue with the term: “[it] is exceptionally vague and refers in different contexts to a bewildering variety of phenomena.”¹⁰ She mentions that many attempts have been made to define the term, “but [that] the results are not encouraging.”¹¹ Canovan herself makes a distinction between seven types of populism, and I shall focus on the last: “politicians’ populism”;¹² which she defines as “the uses of populism as a political technique”¹³ and as “certain *styles* of politics that draw on the ambiguous resonances of ‘the people’.”¹⁴ Jan Jagers and Stefaan Walgrave argue in

8. Edward Shils, “A Slippery Slope” (Chicago: Routledge, 1954)

9. Ernest Gellner and Ghiță Ionescu, *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (New York: Macmillan, 1969)

10. Canovan, *Populism*, 3.

11. Canovan, *Populism*, 4.

12. Canovan, *Populism*, 13.

13. Canovan, *Populism*, 15.

14. Canovan, *Populism*, 260.

their “Populism as Political Communication Style: an Empirical Study of Political Parties’ discourse in Belgium” that

[i]n its thin conceptualisation, populism is totally stripped from all pejorative and authoritarian connotations. Populism, thinly defined, has no political colour; it is colourless and can be of the left and of the right. It is a normal political style adopted by all kinds of politicians from all times. Populism is simply a strategy to mobilise support, it is a standard communication technique to reach out to the constituency.¹⁵

In the article “Mobilizing Collective Hatred through Humour: Affective-Discursive Production and Reception of Populist Rhetoric”, Inari Sakki and Jari Martikainen provide the reader with a summary of populist rhetorical strategies. They begin by stating that “[s]ocial psychology has approached populism as an intergroup differentiation based on its vertical and horizontal dimensions”; “its vertical differentiation refers to the gap between ‘good people’ and a ‘bad elite’, its horizontal dimension concerns the confrontation between ‘in-‘ and ‘out-groups’, the latter often referring to refugees, characterized as ‘the dangerous Other’.”¹⁶ Sakki and Martikainen further point out that “[r]esearch on right-wing populist rhetoric has also shown that politicians commonly rely on the empiricist orientation, seeking to justify their anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric as logical, credible, and fact-based.”¹⁷ Linda Bos and Kees Brants show to what extent characteristics of populist rhetoric are present in Dutch politics in the article “Populist Rhetoric in Politics and Media: a Longitudinal Study of the Netherlands”. They conclude that “populist styles, ideas and policies are far less prevalent in media and political parties than often claimed.”¹⁸ Another study that explores this rhetorical style is “Speaking their Mind: Populist Style and Antagonistic Messaging in the Tweets of Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Nigel Farage, and Geert Wilders” by Gowela et al.. This study specifically looks at tweets by four international politicians (one of whom is

15. Jagers and Walgrave, “Populism as Political Communication”, 323.

16. Sakki and Martikainen, “Mobilizing Collective Hatred”, 1.

17. Sakki and Martikainen, “Mobilizing Collective Hatred”, 2.

18. Bos and Brants, “Populist Rhetoric in Politics”, 717.

Geert Wilders) and compares them, in order to establish which characteristics they have in common. Like many other studies, the ones mentioned in this paragraph offer a description of the extent to which populist style is used by politicians. They provide graphs representing the recurrence of certain words or themes. Since these studies are conducted on such a large scale, they are able to give a generalisation of characteristics that are found within populist rhetoric. They do not, however, give many actual examples to illustrate *how* politicians employ these strategies. A linguistic close-reading, that focuses not only on populist elements of style but also on other rhetorical elements, is thus useful. All these researchers agree that language is what ensures the politicians of their power; a claim which merits more attention to what is actually being said. Instead of providing a generalisation of rhetorical characteristics, as previous research has done, this thesis will provide linguistic close-readings of written and spoken expressions found in different forms of media. The focus will not only be on Geert Wilders, but also on Pim Fortuyn and Thierry Baudet (who do not occur as prevalently in international research). Taking three Dutch politicians as the object of my analysis could also lead to common observations that help establish characteristics specific to Dutch political rhetoric.

In my analysis, I not only intend to include sources on rhetorical devices and mechanisms of othering, but also wider frameworks relating to linguistic philosophy. I will engage with Hans Georg Gadamer's theoretical ideas to underpin the importance and power of language, and Michel Foucault's notion of discourse to explore the dynamics inherent to any form of utterance. This linguistic focus will add to an innovative perspective on politics. In our increasingly multicultural society, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of the linguistic dynamics defining and influencing this society.

In the first chapter, I will present a selection of written and spoken expressions by the three Dutch politicians, and point out characteristics of successful rhetoric as theorised by

Sam Leith in his book *You Talkin' to Me?*, in order to provide a rhetorical analysis that explains the success of these politicians. I will also look at sources on populist rhetoric in particular, to see if I can root these expressions within that tradition. In the second chapter, I will use Edward Said's and Mary Louise Pratt's work to identify mechanisms of othering that are at work in the rhetoric. I will strive to explain why this kind of rhetoric can be successful. Additionally, I will argue that this kind of rhetoric can be problematic, since it engages with an intangible concept (Islam), and attributes certain values to it that are not necessarily true. Pim Fortuyn, for example, equates the term 'Islam' to terrorism. In the third chapter, I will relate especially Geert Wilders's and Thierry Baudet's rhetoric to Foucault's concept of discourse. I will explore how they interact with Dutch political discourse and whether this places them within or outside of it. Knowing more about the dynamics of discourse in general will be interesting to analyse these politicians' rhetoric in particular. I will also try to engage with a wider framework of linguistic philosophy in the final chapter of my thesis. I would like to consider how language has the power to bring ideas into existence, as happens with othering. Questions in this chapter will be; to what extent is Islam-critical rhetoric a response to a societal issue? Is it possible that the rhetoric in fact linguistically *creates* an issue? Does a debate reflect on real-world issues, or can it also bring issues into existence in the real world?

Right-wing politicians and their statements regarding immigration are topics which have been, and will continue to be, widely discussed. The contemporary forms of othering have a long history, and in that sense neither these statements nor responses to them are new. The fact that this Orientalist tradition continues to this day – albeit in new ways and contexts – shows, however, that responses are still necessary. I aspire to contribute to the debate with a collection of linguistic characteristics shared by these three Dutch politicians. I write this thesis indebted to many other existing works in the hope that my new perspective will be part

of a small step in further dismantling contemporary Orientalism, or at least in continuing to raise awareness of it.

Chapter One: An Analysis of Rhetorical and Populist Strategies

In his book *You Talkin' to Me?*, Sam Leith gives an overview of the history, uses and techniques of rhetoric. Theories of rhetoric originated in ancient Greece: Aristotle was the first to write on the subject with his *Rhetoric*¹⁹; followed by Cicero in *De Inventione*²⁰; and Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria*.²¹ Leith includes both these earliest ideas of rhetoric and its new uses and contexts today. *You Talkin' to Me?* encompasses the most important thoughts from the study of rhetoric very adequately and efficiently, and is useful for contemporary analyses. Hence, I shall exclusively refer to Leith's book in my discussion of the politicians' rhetoric. Leith identifies three branches of rhetoric: deliberative, judicial, and epideictic. I shall concern myself with the first kind in this chapter, since it "is associated with the future: to act or not to act."²² Deliberative rhetoric is the kind of rhetoric that politicians employ, as their purpose is one of "[p]ersuading somebody to believe something ... or persuading somebody to do something."²³ For successful deliberative rhetoric, "Aristotle identified two basic lines of attack: virtue or vice, and advantage or disadvantage. You can try to persuade your audience, in other words, that a given course of action is the right thing to do; or you can try to persuade them that it's in their interests. If you can press the case in both respects, so much the better."²⁴ In this chapter, I will look at rhetorical ways in which Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, and Thierry Baudet have tried to persuade their audience. I mainly make use of books they have written on their political views, but will also include one speech and some tweets. I will provide my own English translation of the Dutch texts, and will identify the rhetorical strategies the politicians employ to ensure successful expression. After giving a

19. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

20. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Inventione* (Galatina: Congedo, 1998)

21. Marcus Fabius Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* (London: Heinemann, 1920)

22. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 189.

23. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 189.

24. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 189.

general rhetorical analysis, I will use the second half of this chapter to emphasise characteristics of populist rhetoric that can be seen in the politicians' texts.

Rhetorical Analysis

Pim Fortuyn

Pim Fortuyn explained his political views on the Islam in his book *De Islamisering van Onze Cultuur* (The Islamisation of our Culture). The title speaks of “our” culture – a shared, Dutch culture which is changing due to “Islamisation”. Throughout the text, Fortuyn equates Islam to terrorism and violence by not distinguishing the religion from violent acts committed in name of the religion. I will return to the insufficient separation of the two in the second chapter, but in this chapter I will focus only on his rhetorical strategies. I have chosen three quotations for the rhetorical analysis, because they include appeals to emotion that inspire both fear of Islam, and national pride. The first quotation I would like to draw the attention to, makes use of pathos, which is one of the “three lines of argument, or persuasive appeal” that Aristotle defined: “Ethos, Logos and Pathos”²⁵: “that Tuesday evening September 11 2001, that meal in many an American family in New York or Washington or in one of their many suburbs: that empty place where father, mother, brother or sister, friend, boyfriend or girlfriend always sat so familiarly. Empty that place, not for a while, but forever and why, yes why, actually?”²⁶ “Pathos is the appeal to emotion – not just sadness or pity, ... but excitement, fear, love, patriotism or amusement”²⁷; and in this fragment Fortuyn clearly

25. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 47.

26. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van Onze Cultuur*, 6 (my translation). Original text: “die dinsdagavond 11 september 2001, die maaltijd in menig Amerikaans huisgezin of samenlevingsverband in New York of Washington of in een van hun vele voorsteden: die lege plek waar vader, moeder, broer of zus, vriend of vriendin altijd zo vertrouwd zat. Leeg die plek, niet voor even, maar voor altijd en waarom, ja waarom eigenlijk?”

27. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 66.

appeals to the emotions of his audience. He uses several rhetorical figures to strengthen this appeal, such as enargia, which aims to “paint a mental picture of a scene or person ... so vivid that the audience feels as if it’s actually there”²⁸ by making this scene personal, by referring not to the effects of 9/11 on a country, but on a home. He talks about family members and friends, people the audience also have and care about in their lives. “Empty that place” is an instance of hyperbaton, or “disruption in the expected word order.”²⁹ The regular word order would be “That place is empty”, and by bringing the word “empty” forward, it is emphasised and with it, its emotional appeal. The explicit statement that this is “not for a while, but forever” likewise reinforces the tragedy of the situation. Fortuyn ends with an erotema – “a question that implies but doesn’t expect an answer”³⁰ – to highlight the futility and catastrophic consequences of needless violence. Naturally, this is a very apt way to describe the tragic events of 9/11. However, by including this appeal to emotion in a text discussing the Islam in the Netherlands, Fortuyn encourages the audience to associate the religion with these negative emotions.

The second fragment I will consider, relates to the disadvantages of cultural relativism, and the importance of retaining a country’s cultural identity:

We are letting ourselves off easy with a kind of cultural relativism, in which we tell ourselves that it is no longer necessary to want something or to want to be something as a nation, in which we leave our own history behind us and don’t have to know it anymore, let alone live it. This undermines the experience of our own identity and thus affects it, and with it we lose in power and in creative ideas to solve the big problems, societal problems, with which we are confronted.³¹

28. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 283.

29. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 286.

30. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 285.

31. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van Onze Cultuur*, 16. Original text: We maken ons er nu van af met een soort cultuurrelativisme, waarbij we onszelf wijsmaken dat het niet meer nodig is om als volk iets te willen en iets te zijn, waarin we onze eigen geschiedenis achter ons laten en niet meer hoeven te kennen, laat staan te beleven. Daardoor ondergraven we de beleving van onze identiteit en tasten deze zodoende aan, en daarmee verliezen we veel aan kracht en aan creatieve ideeën om de grote problemen, samenlevingsproblemen, waarmee we worden geconfronteerd op te lossen.

By phrasing cultural relativism as a way ‘to let yourself off easy’, Fortuyn creates an association of something which is not complete, of an inferior way of doing things that could be done better. The Dutch verb ‘wijsmaken’ means that you are telling someone, or in this case yourself, something which is not true – you are fooling yourself. The use of this word implies that it *is* necessary to want and be something as a nation. “Our own history” emphasises a sense of self, of unity; it would also have been sufficient to say ‘our history’. ‘Own’ is a superfluous word, or a pleonasmus,³² as is the repetition of the word problems in the pleonasmus “big problems, societal problems”. This repetition focuses the attention on the existence of such problems, and communicates that the way to solve them is to increase national unity. *How* national unity helps solve these problems remains unclear; it is merely repeatedly stated that national unity is the solution. The objective presentation of facts without an underlying argumentation is a theme which will recur throughout the quotations by all three Dutch politicians.

The final text by Fortuyn that I will focus on in this section concerns the importance of national identity:

A nation without a consciously experienced identity will eventually degenerate into a collection of people, living within one state, in which cohesion will disappear and people will no longer be each other’s ‘brother’s keeper’. In short, such a nation will eventually not be a society anymore, but a loose association consisting of individuals and at best, of small, fluid communities. A powerless nation, without common ideals, without a consciously experienced set of standards and values. It will not end well for such a nation.³³

32. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 290.

33. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van Onze Cultuur*, 16-17. Original text: Een volk zonder bewust beleefde identiteit ontardt op den duur in een verzameling mensen, levend binnen één staatsverband, waarbinnen de samenhang verdwijnt en men elkanders ‘broeders hoeder’ niet meer is. Kortom, een dergelijk volk vormt op den duur geen samenleving meer, maar een los verband van individuen en op zijn best kleine fluide gemeenschapjes. Een krachteloos volk, zonder gemeenschappelijke idealen, zonder een bewust beleefd stelsel van normen en waarden. Met zo’n volk loopt het uiteindelijk niet goed af.

The Biblical expression ‘brother’s keeper’ invokes Judeo-Christian values on which Dutch society is based. The impossibility of being such a “brother’s keeper” thus implies the loss of certain Judeo-Christian values that will follow if the importance of national identity is not recognised. This is another instance of enargia, because Fortuyn paints a picture of what the country would look like if there is no “consciously experienced identity”. It is also another instance of pathos as it appeals to the audience’s emotions of patriotism and perhaps also of fear that national values will be lost. Similarly, the word “powerless” and the final line “It will not end well for such a nation” invoke fear and encourage the audience to vote for Fortuyn so that this fearful future can be avoided.

Geert Wilders

Wilders shares his political views in the book *Kies voor Vrijheid: Een Eerlijk Antwoord* (Choose Freedom: An Honest Answer). The title immediately does a few things; firstly, it emphasises the agency of the reader to vote for their own good; they have the power to choose freedom, and why would they not want to seize that opportunity? This phrasing is in line with the aim of deliberative rhetoric; to persuade the audience that what you are saying is in their interest. Secondly, the subtitle “An Honest Answer” presents the book as honest, appealing to the audience’s trust.

In this book, Wilders divides Muslims in the Netherlands into four groups. Group one consists of violent extremists, composing the smallest percentage of Muslims in the Netherlands. Group two is a larger group of Muslims adhering to radical Islam, but not committing any violent acts themselves. Wilders defines group three as ‘street terrorists’. The fourth group does not get a name or number, Wilders merely states: “with the remaining Muslims, so the vast majority, there are no problems regarding legal points or security.”³⁴

34. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 69. Original text: “Met de overige moslims, dus de overgrote meerderheid, is als het gaat om rechtsstatelijke punten en veiligheid geen vuiltje aan de lucht.”

Labeling these Muslims as the “remaining” individuals and not granting them a group identity, makes the regular Muslim citizens, although “the vast majority”, seem insignificant. The word “remaining” undermines the presence of good Muslim citizens, and thus emphasises the threat and fear associated with the smaller group of radical Muslims in the Netherlands. Further stating that “there are no problems regarding legal points or security” implies that there are still problems of a different kind, which Wilders in fact goes on to point out. This presents Muslims as a group of people that is always problematic in some way; if not dangerously so, they still do not deserve the same treatment that non-Muslim Dutch citizens merit. Wilders mentions integration issues with the remaining group and says: “this becomes clear from objective governmental numbers.”³⁵ Wilders does not clarify these “objective numbers” any further. He presents this vague statement as the objective truth, simply by using the word “objective”. He repeats this word when he says, “objectively, there is a big problem with the Islam in the Netherlands in different gradations.”³⁶ Again, Wilders confidently presents a ‘true’ conclusion based on his objective arguments. As Leith explains, “[r]hetoric deals with probabilities rather than certainties: with analogy and generalisation.”³⁷ This is an instance of the second appeal: “logos is persuasion, not proof absolute.”³⁸ Probabilities are presented as certainties by a politician persuading the audience that his arguments are objective proof. Later on in the text, Wilders assures the reader: “the group of radical Muslims, whether they are with fifty- or one-hundred-and-fifty thousand, can, I think, be reduced to practically zero.”³⁹ After inspiring fear in the audience, Wilders returns with another appeal to emotion, namely that of reassurance.

35. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 69. Original text: “[d]it blijkt uit objectieve cijfers van de overheid.”

36. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 69. Original text: “Objectief gezien ligt er een groot probleem met de islam in Nederland in verschillende gradaties.”

37. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 59.

38. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 61.

39. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 72. Original text: “De groep radicale moslims, of het er nu vijftig- of honderdvijfigduizend zijn, kan volgens mij tot vrijwel nul worden gereduceerd.”

Wilders makes repeated use of mycterismus, which is “an insult to one’s opponent”⁴⁰; for example when he says, “the perverse ideology of cultural relativism and their ridiculous ideas about the multicultural society.”⁴¹ Here, he uses negative value judgements such as “perverse” and “ridiculous” to indicate that his opponents’ ideas do not correspond to his own. This is a form of “belittlement and sneering.”⁴²

Another paragraph I will analyse addresses the difference between Islamic and Christian schools:

Because the Dutch suffer from an equality syndrome, all hell breaks loose when someone says he wants to ban Islamic schools. The immediate response is: then you also have to ban Christian and Catholic schools. If an Islamic school isn’t allowed, then a Christian school also should not be. That is a fallacy. As if a Catholic or Christian school is interchangeable with an Islamic one. Every Christian school, as it should, acknowledges the separation of church and state. These schools can thus not be treated the same way as Islamic schools, where this is not the case. Furthermore, Dutch culture is based on Judeo-Christian and humanist values and not on those of Islam. That is not discrimination but fact. I admit the problem is legally complicated, but still I think that unequal cases should not be treated equally.⁴³

Wilders here presents the critique of his opponents as a syndrome that they suffer from (“the Dutch suffer from an equality syndrome”), creating a negative connotation with the desire for equality. Using these terms implies that his opponents’ view is not the right view, and that their desire is a misapplied one. The idiom “all hell breaks loose” conjures up a violent,

40. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 288.

41. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 74. Original text: “de perverse ideologie van het cultuurrelativisme en hun belachelijke ideeën over de multiculturele samenleving.”

42. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 288.

43. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 85. Original text: Omdat Nederlanders leiden aan een gelijkheidssyndroom, breekt de hel los wanneer iemand zegt dat hij islamitische scholen wil verbieden. Meteen is de reactie: dan moet je christelijke scholen en katholieke scholen ook verbieden. Als een islamitische school niet mag, dan mag een School met de Bijbel ook niet. Dat is een drogredentie. Alsof een katholieke of christelijke school inwisselbaar zou zijn met een islamitische school. Op iedere School met de Bijbel wordt, zoals het hoort, een onderscheid gemaakt tussen kerk en staat. Die scholen kunnen dus niet op dezelfde manier worden benaderd als een islamitische school, waar dat niet het geval is. Bovendien is de Nederlandse cultuur gebaseerd op christelijk-joodse en humanistische waarden en niet op die van de islam. Dat is geen discriminatie maar een feitelijk gegeven. Ik geef toe dat het probleem juridisch heel moeilijk ligt, maar toch vind ik dat ongelijke gevallen niet gelijk behandeld moeten worden.

dramatic image that dismantles the rationality of his opponents' critique. Wilders also uses colloquial language, such as "As if", a characteristic to which I will return in the section on populism. He further makes use of a commonplace, when he says that a Christian school "*as it should*, acknowledges the separation of church and state" (italics mine). Commonplaces are "a piece of shared wisdom" which are "culturally specific", "deep-rooted", and which "pass for universal truths."⁴⁴ By saying that schools *should* acknowledge this separation, Wilders presents a culturally specific idea as a universal one. This piece of text is an example of logos, as its purpose is to "show that the conclusion to which you are aiming is not only the right one, but so necessary and reasonable as to be more or less the only one. If in the course of it you can make your opponents sound venal or even deranged, so much the better."⁴⁵ Leith also points out that "[i]f you characterise something as the opposite of your own proposition, and then attack it ...a dozy audience will think that by damaging the apparent opposition, you've proved your case."⁴⁶ Wilders states that equating Islamic schools to Christian schools "is a fallacy", suggesting that the opposite view is the truth – while in fact his argument might just as easily be described as a fallacy. By attacking his opponent, the attention is taken away from his own argument, and the attack is thus given as a justification for it.

Another interesting example of rhetorical strategy is the following paradoxical statement: "we have to learn to become intolerant against the intolerant. That is the only way to maintain our tolerance."⁴⁷ The argument that one would have to be intolerant against people who are themselves intolerant is fallacious in many ways. First of all, "the intolerant" is an extremely vague term to use in describing a group of people. Who qualifies as

44. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 65.

45. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 57.

46. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 100.

47. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 73. Original text: "We moeten leren om intolerant te worden tegen de intoleranten. Dat is de enige manier om onze tolerantie te handhaven."

intolerant? Can every individual from this diverse group be described as intolerant? And is it then justifiable to be intolerant against each individual on this ground? That brings us to the second, more philosophical point; is intolerance against an individual justified when this individual is also intolerant? Wilders is using the appeal to reason (logos) here, because he presents this argument as reasonable, and he offers not *a* solution, but *the only* solution, going back to Leith's argument that logos presents a conclusion "so necessary and reasonable as to be more or less the only one."⁴⁸ This solution is emphasised by its being a paradox; intolerance is the means to achieve tolerance. Wilders does not clarify how intolerance could lead to tolerance. The words are left to speak for themselves.

Furthermore, Wilders argues in favour of preventive arrests in certain situations. He mentions that his opponents deem preventive arrests unconstitutional. In his response, he uses *concessio* or "the conceding of a minor point in order to gain a more important one"⁴⁹: "maybe it is an extremely heavy measure, but in any case, it is not unconstitutional. And I think that the situation is bad enough and that there is much at stake in the Netherlands."⁵⁰ Wilders concedes that perhaps it is a heavy measure, and he uses this concession in order to establish that it is not an unconstitutional one. Interestingly, he does not have to explain why it is not unconstitutional because he uses the fact that it is in fact a heavy measure as proof of his point. By using the rhetorical figure of *concessio*, he avoids further explanation. He also uses vague, colloquial language when he says, "I think the situation is bad enough" and "there is much at stake". We do not get an elaboration on what is at stake to explain why the situation is so bad.

48. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 57.

49. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 282.

50. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 71. Original text: "Misschien is het een erg zwaar middel, maar het is in elk geval niet onconstitutioneel. En ik vind dat de situatie erg genoeg is en dat er veel in Nederland op het spel staat."

Before moving on to Baudet, I will discuss one last speech by Wilders that took place after the municipal elections in 2014, when Wilders asked his supporters three questions:

I would like an answer from everyone here to the following three questions. Three questions, please give a clear answer, that define our party. And the first question is: do you want more or less European Union? (crowd chants the answer: “less, less, less!”) The second, the second question is, maybe even more important: do you want more or less Labour Party (PvdA)? (crowd chants the answer: “less, less, less!”) And the third question is, and I am not actually allowed to say it, because you will be reported (crowd laughs) and perhaps there are even officers from D66 who will start a process against it, but freedom of speech is a great thing and we haven’t said anything which is not allowed, we haven’t said anything which is not correct, so I ask you: do you want in this city and in the Netherlands more or fewer Moroccans? (crowd chants the answer: “fewer, fewer, fewer!”) Then we will take care of that. (crowd laughs).⁵¹

This speech can be seen as an *argumentum ad populum*, as it appeals “to the authority of the crowd”⁵²; Wilders asks an answer from “everyone”. He asks for the opinion of his supporters, creating an ambiance of a referendum, where the people feel they have a direct say in a matter. The importance of the audience’s answers is particularly stressed when these three questions are said to “define” the party. Wilders then presents the three questions in a repetitive structure. First of all, he draws attention to there being three questions several times, and he enumerates all three of them. Secondly, he repeats the following sentence structure for every question: do you want more or less (in the last case fewer) X? In the place of the X he inserts three different phrases. This repetition causes a build up, as Wilders finds the second more important than the first, and devotes most attention to the third question. The

51. “PVV Aanhang Scandeert: Minder Marokkanen,” Youtube, March 19, 2014, video, [PVV aanhang scandeert: minder Marokkanen - YouTube](#) Original text: Zou ik van iedereen hier een antwoord willen hebben op de volgende drie vragen. Drie vragen, alsjeblieft geef een helder antwoord, die onze partij definiëren. En de eerste vraag is: willen jullie meer of minder Europese Unie? (publiek scandeert in antwoord: “minder, minder, minder!”) De tweede, de tweede vraag is, misschien nog belangrijker: willen jullie meer of minder Partij van de Arbeid? (publiek scandeert in antwoord: “minder, minder, minder!”) En de derde vraag is, en ik mag het eigenlijk niet zeggen, want er wordt aangifte tegen je gedaan (publiek lacht) en misschien zijn er zelfs D66 officieren die het een proces aandoen, maar de vrijheid van meningsuiting is een groot goed en we hebben niets gezegd wat niet mag, we hebben niets gezegd wat niet klopt, dus ik vraag aan jullie: willen jullie in deze stad en in Nederland meer of minder Marokkanen? (publiek scandeert in antwoord: “minder, minder, minder!”) Dan gaan we dat regelen (publiek lacht).

52. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 281.

language in the speech is simple, and the three matters are presented in dichotomous questions. It is thus easy for the audience to chant their one-word answers, and as these three questions reflect issues that the PVV has a clear perspective on, it is also no surprise that the audience chants the same answer. Wilders knows what his audience will say prior to posing the questions. He caters his speech to what his supporters want, in turn gaining him more support during the speech. The third question has a climactic build up preceding it. Wilders prefaces what he is about to say by stating that he is not “actually allowed to say it”. He then refers to the freedom of expression to argue that he in fact *is* allowed to say it. He again repeats the same sentence structure twice: “we haven’t said anything which is not X”, substituting the X with first “allowed” and then “correct”, including the audience in the first person plural, to emphasise that they too are allowed to chant their answer. This reference to the freedom of expression is interesting in itself, as this freedom is limited in the Dutch constitution to expression that is not discriminatory. Wilders cleverly evades this limitation, as he does not state that Moroccans are worth less than other groups, but simply asks his audience what they *want* (“do you want more or fewer Moroccans?”). He merely asks for an expression of opinion, knowing that this is not against the law, and leaves the implications of this opinion (e.g. that Moroccans are problematic) to the connotations of his audience. The final line, “Then we will take care of that”, extracts laughter from the audience. Wilders again appeals to the crowd by saying that he and his party will take care of what they want. There is an element of reassurance, and thus of pathos to this line. It is arguably the most shocking line of the speech, as it invokes a Hitlerian desire to get rid of certain ethnic groups and the determination to put this desire into action.

Thierry Baudet

The title of Baudet's *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand* (Politics of Common Sense) invokes a commonplace, which Leith describes as “the appeal to ‘common sense’.”⁵³ By describing his ideas as appealing to common sense, Baudet also implies that anyone who does not agree with him does not possess common sense. The title is printed on the cover in white, big, block letters – seeming to emphasise that his ideas are simple and evident. The cover picture is interesting as well, as it depicts an opening door that seems to show an incoming threat.

I will begin my rhetorical analysis of Baudet's text with two citations in which he expresses his dislike of such analyses: “whoever expresses fundamental criticism on a religion, an ideology or a political ideal, will not only have to deal with all kinds of societal exclusion mechanisms, but also with defense mechanisms that aim to hide the main matters from view”⁵⁴ and “one of the most vicious of these distracting manoeuvres is engaging merely with word use and tone of the person formulating the criticism, often combined with the remark that matters are ‘more nuanced’. The mean thing about this debate trick is its tautological character.”⁵⁵ The first citation was striking to me, since Baudet seems to be practising exactly that which he condemns in his opponents. His response does not elaborate on grounds for his criticism (arguably one of “the main matters”), but hides these from view by using vague notions such as “societal exclusion mechanisms” and “defense mechanisms” that he does not clarify. Unlike the other two politicians, Baudet does not use colloquial language but “inflated language” or auxesis.⁵⁶ His writing is often difficult to follow and has

53. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 65.

54. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 89. Original text: “[w]ie fundamentele kritiek uit op een religie, een ideologie of een politiek ideaal, krijgt behalve met allerlei maatschappelijke uitsluitingsmechanismen, ook te maken met verdedigingsreflexen die de hoofdzaken aan het zicht moeten onttrekken.”

55. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 89. Original text: “Één van de meest venijnige van deze afleidingsmanoeuvres is het louter ingaan op woordgebruik en toon van degene die kritiek formuleert, vaak gecombineerd met de opmerking dat de zaak ‘genuanceerder’ ligt. Het gemene aan deze debattruc is haar tautologische karakter.”

56. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 281.

to be reread several times before the convoluted sentences begin to make sense. The theme of accusing his opponents of ambiguity in an ambiguously written response can likewise be discerned from the second citation. Again, Baudet does not explain the reasons for his criticism; he only invalidates his opponents' response *to* his criticism. Baudet also does not explain what it means when a trick has a "tautological character". This is another ambiguous term which serves to make a point without needing any further clarification. This is logos that makes the own argument seem valid by opposing it to the opponents' invalid argument, as we have also seen in the examples for Wilders. Baudet further describes his opponents' responses as "words that have no other function than to play on the audience's gut feeling."⁵⁷ Baudet here expresses his dislike of rhetorical strategies, specifically of pathos, the appeal to emotion. He says that his opponents appeal to "the audience's gut feeling", which is the opposite of rationality. Leith points out that "[t]he most effective rhetoric is often the least obviously rhetorical"⁵⁸; which is interesting here since by stating that he is opposed to his opponents' use of rhetoric, Baudet is actually employing rhetorical strategies himself. Anger, dislike or indignation are also emotions that can be appealed to and that Baudet does appeal to by expressing his dislike of his opponents' rhetoric. The final example I will mention in which Baudet attacks an opponent is the following sentence, concerning Sigrid Kaag, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation: "She is stuck in her own belief that she is right, her own closed image of the world ... she herself preaches hate and intolerance."⁵⁹ While Baudet dislikes a word-focused response from his opponents, he does not offer a more in-depth response here either, but uses the fallacy of personal attack

57. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 152. Original text: "woorden die niets anders beogen dan het bespelen van de onderbuik van het publiek."

58. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 121.

59. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 158. Original text: "Ze zit vast in haar eigen gelijk, haar eigen gesloten wereldbeeld ... zichzelf predikt haat en intolerantie."

(argumentum ad hominem) in an attempt to accuse Kaag of what she has previously accused him of.

Baudet's lack of clarification is not only seen in response to his opponents, but also when he discusses his view on the immigration issue: "wanting to limit immigration in no way implies hatred of others or an angry world view which is filled with fears. By controlling who enters your country you can in fact prevent a xenophobic reaction. And a vital national culture that is carried out with pride can in fact welcome new-comers."⁶⁰ Baudet does not explain *how* controlling immigration could "in fact prevent a xenophobic reaction". He uses the second-person singular, which seems more authoritative than using first person plural (which he used in the other citations).

Another appeal to emotion that Baudet uses is the appeal to national pride. For example, when he asks, "what has *happened* to us that we have started to be ashamed of our holidays, our heroes, our history? That we, at one time the most feared captains of the world seas, now walk with our heads bowed close to the gables when a few rebellious furcollars pass by on a scooter."⁶¹ The passive formulation "what has *happened* to us" implies that the change he is about to describe is not an active choice, but something which has been instigated by the outside. Baudet names three elements to create a climax (evoking the power of a tricolon such as I came, I saw, I conquered) and repeats the word "our" before each one, emphasising that there is a shared, national tradition. He again uses the first person plural "we" to look back on a collective past as "feared captains", evoking colonial connotations

60. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 157. Original text: "Het willen inperken van immigratie impliceert op geen enkele manier een hekel aan anderen of een boos, van angsten doortrokken wereldbeeld. Door greep te hebben op wie je land binnenkomt kun je een xenofobe afweerreactie juist voorkómen. En een vitale nationale cultuur die met trots wordt uitgedragen kan nieuwkomers juist verwelkomen."

61. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 141. Original text: "Wat is er met ons *gebeurd* dat wij ons zijn gaan schamen voor onze feestdagen, onze helden, onze geschiedenis? Dat wij, ooit de meest gevreesde kapiteins van de wereldzeeën, nu met gebogen hoofd dicht langs de gevels lopen als er een paar rellerige bontkragen op een scooter voorbijkomen."

that I will elaborate on in the second chapter. Baudet also mentions walking past typical Dutch “gables”, serving as a reminder that the urban space belongs to the Dutch, but that the Dutch now walk with “heads bowed”, because they are intimidated by “furcoats”, which is a nickname associated in the Netherlands with youth from Moroccan descent. Baudet also invokes national pride when he says: “the most beautiful country in the world is losing its shine.”⁶² First, Baudet uses a hyperbole – he exaggerates the position of the Netherlands as “the most beautiful country in the world”. Then, he states that this country “is losing its shine”, implying that change is needed to make it shine again.

Populist strategies

In the introduction I briefly addressed Canovan’s definition of politicians’ populism as “the uses of populism as a political technique”⁶³ and “certain *styles* of politics that draw on the ambiguous resonances of ‘the people’.”⁶⁴ Canovan discusses why populism is more difficult to define than other concepts, and one of the reasons she provides is that other terms are used by “their adherents”, while populism is often also used as a label “from outside.”⁶⁵ The idea that populism is related to ‘the people’ could be applied as a label to diverse groupings, since it is not clear who ‘the people’ are. Canovan argues that “[i]t is precisely this combination of vagueness and emotional resonance that makes ‘the people’ such an effective battle cry, and a particularly useful one for politicians who seek to blur established differences, to unite

62. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 203. Original text: “Het mooiste land van de wereld verliest zijn glans.”

63. Canovan, *Populism*, 15.

64. Canovan, *Populism*, 260.

65. Canovan, *Populism*, 5-6.

followers across former party lines, and to spread their appeal as widely as possible.”⁶⁶ She further points out that

‘the people’ has two sets of connotations, one more inclusive than the other. It can mean either *the whole people*, everyone, or the *common people*, the nonelite. Naturally, populist politicians habitually blur the distinction in order to isolate their opponents, with the result that the term ‘populist’ is applied to parties sometimes because they appeal to *everyone*, sometimes because they mobilize the masses against the elite, and often when they try to do both at once, to attract the masses without actually alienating influential sections of the population.⁶⁷

Both the importance of ‘the people’ and the rebellion against the elite can be seen in texts by Geert Wilders. Though Fortuyn and Baudet also mention the elite and the disagreement with their views, this characteristic of populist rhetoric is most clearly seen in expressions by Wilders. In his book *Kies voor Vrijheid*, for example, he writes, “the people in the country do not belong to the Hague; the Hague belongs to the people.”⁶⁸ Wilders employs chiasmus or “four terms in a criss-crossed relation to each other – in the form ABBA”⁶⁹ to emphasise that the power should be with the people, and not the Hague (the political centre of the Netherlands). Wilders explicitly positions himself against the elite when he says, “the citizens in the cities and villages of our country are the ones it should be about and not the elite in the Hague consisting of self-absorbed and power-hungry job hunters.”⁷⁰ He asks the question, “the red thread has been returned to the Dutch citizen. The elite has to go, and how are we going to do that?”⁷¹ In this last quotation he even implies that getting rid of the elite is one of his political aims.

66. Canovan, *Populism*, 261.

67. Canovan, *Populism*, 277.

68. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 35. Original text: “[d]e mensen in het land zijn niet van Den Haag, maar Den Haag is van hen.”

69. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 282.

70. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 38. Original text: “[d]e burgers in de steden en dorpen van ons land zijn diegenen om wie het moet draaien en niet de Haagse elite van in zichzelf gekeerde en op macht beluste baantjesjagers.”

71. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 59. Original text: “De rode draad is Nederland teruggegeven aan de burger. De elite moet weg, en hoe gaan we dat doen?”

Canovan also states that while populist politicians do attach importance to it, “[s]pontaneous and lasting expressions of popular unity are rare, however. What is much more common is for politicians to use populist rhetoric.”⁷² Sakki and Martikainen mention “dramatization and emotion”, “simplified argumentation and rhetorical vagueness”, “appeals to common sense and colloquial language”, and “nostalgia for an idealized past” as characteristics of populist rhetoric.⁷³ These are characteristics that are used by all three politicians in the texts I analysed. I have identified instances of pathos (“dramatization and emotion”) in expressions by all three politicians; appealing to specifically emotions of national pride and the threat of a nation that is changing. Fortuyn, for example, creates a fearful image of a “nation without a consciously experienced identity” and says that it “will not end well for such a nation.”⁷⁴ Similarly, “simplified argumentation and rhetorical vagueness” was a recurring theme throughout the examples. The politicians used simple statements to convey a sense of objectivity, and did not clarify their statements. One of the abundant examples was that Wilders argued “we have to learn to become intolerant against the intolerant. That is the only way to maintain our tolerance.”⁷⁵ He did not clarify how intolerance could lead to tolerance, or even provide definitions of these vague terms. The title of Baudet’s *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand* (Politics of Common Sense) is the most obvious example of “the appeals to common sense”. Interestingly, however, Baudet does not use colloquial, but inflated language, as was pointed out in the previous section. He does refer to his readers as “best friends”⁷⁶ or “friends”⁷⁷; colloquial forms of address that inspire ideas of unity, trust, and the sense that Baudet has his readers’ best interest at heart. His inflated language does set him apart from Geert Wilders, who uses colloquial ways of expression

72. Canovan, *Populism*, 268.

73. Sakki and Martikainen, “Collective Hatred through Humour”, 2.

74. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van Onze Cultuur*, 16-17.

75. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 73.

76. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 159. “Beste vrienden”

77. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 185. “Vrienden”

such as “as if”. The texts by Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders are easier to read, as they are written in clear language. The text by Thierry Baudet is more convoluted, and makes use of many complex metaphors such as this one: “in a way, we all consist of the material that ice crystals are made of; and our life is surrounded by music.”⁷⁸ This is an unexpectedly poetic comparison to come across in a political text. It is difficult to see the connection between this line and Baudet’s political ideas, and arguably it may have the effect of obscuring rather than clarifying his words. The final characteristic, “nostalgia for an idealized past”, is illustrated by Baudet’s question of what has happened to the Dutch people, once “the feared captains of the world seas” and when he says that “the most beautiful country in the world is losing its shine.”⁷⁹ Both these quotes refer back to a shared history that, according to Baudet, should be upheld with pride, but that is now stigmatised as shameful. All three politicians continually use the possessive pronoun of the first person plural, “our”, to emphasise shared, national qualities that should invoke a sense of pride.

Ordinariness

Canovan points out an additional populist strategy; emphasising the “own ordinariness.”⁸⁰ This is a strategy which is especially employed by Geert Wilders, who shares anecdotes about his wife and cats in his political work *Kies voor Vrijheid*, and who has even created a Twitter account for his cats. On this page, he shares pictures of his two cats, endearingly called Snoetje and Plusje, which are the Dutch diminutive forms of Snout and Fluff. The page includes a picture of the cats while they are taking their afternoon nap (See *Fig. 1*). There are also tweets in which the cats wish their followers happy holidays, or send their get well wishes to cats belonging to other PVV-party members. Sharing these pictures

78. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 143. Original text: “in zekere zin zijn wij allen van de stof waar ijskristallen van gemaakt zijn; en is ons leven omgeven van muziek.”

79. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 203.

80. Canovan, *Populism*, 272.

of his cats allows Geert to present himself as an ordinary man, engaging with not only political but also personal aspects of life. That this seemingly innocent personal page can also express political views, however, becomes clear from a tweet depicting Snoetje as Sinterklaas in a picture wishing their followers a happy Sinterklaas, which is a Dutch festive tradition for children (See *Fig. 2*). In the middle of the picture, there is a black cat wearing a hat traditionally worn by the ‘pieten’ during the Dutch festivities. Wilders here subtly communicates his stand in the Dutch Black Pete debate in favour of retaining the Dutch tradition of Black Pete despite the controversiality regarding racist black-facing surrounding this tradition.

In this chapter I have shown that Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet make use of both general rhetorical strategies, and more specific populist strategies in their political writing. These strategies do a number of different things. The rhetorical strategies as discussed by Leith can serve either to emphasise or to hide certain points, and they can be used to convince the audience that what the politicians are saying is correct. The populist strategies inspire ideas of unity and trust in the audience, appeal to nostalgia and pride for an idealised national past, and portray the politicians as ordinary men who have the people’s best interest at heart.



Fig. 1 “Dinsdagmiddagslaapje zzzzzz” (“Tuesday Afternoon Nap zzzzzz”; @Wilderspoezen)



Fig. 2 “Fijne Pakjesavond ook voor alle katten van Nederland!!” (Happy Present Eve also to all the Cats in the Netherlands!!) @Wilderspoezen)

Chapter Two: Mechanisms of Othering and Establishing Superiority

In this chapter, I will use Edward Said's acclaimed work as a framework for engaging with the concept of othering in the rhetoric of the three Dutch politicians. Said identifies Orientalism as three things; as the study of the Orient, as the opposite of the Occident (or the West), and as a technique of cultural domination – "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient."⁸¹ In *Covering Islam*, Said discusses the specific place Islam holds in the image of the Orient: "its particular fate within the general structure of Orientalism has been to be looked at first of all as if it were one monolithic thing, and then with a very special hostility and fear."⁸² In *Orientalism*, Said further explores how Orientalism was historically constructed, and how this tradition is perpetuated. He argues that the Other is a crucial element in defining the self: "European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self"⁸³, and this image of the Other thus "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world."⁸⁴ Describing the Orient simultaneously allowed Western fantasies to unfold, and opposed these fantasies to Western values. There is an inherent idea of superiority of the self as opposed to the Other, that makes use of "racial, ideological, and imperialist stereotypes."⁸⁵ The diametrical opposition between Self and Other can be seen clearly in expressions by Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, and Thierry Baudet. Their rhetoric includes many appeals to pathos that emphasise the importance of national pride, and that inspire fear of the Other. It is precisely this combination of emotions that opposes the Self to the Other, as it presents the Other as a threat to the national Self. National pride is encouraged to keep the Other out. The idea of othering thus underlies the rhetoric of these politicians, and it is therefore a crucial

81. Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

82. Said, *Covering Islam*, 4.

83. Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

84. Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

85. Said, *Orientalism*, 328.

aspect of the rhetoric that merits further investigation. As this chapter will show, a large part of the othering mechanisms used by the politicians are concerned with Islam. This specific type of othering is termed Islamophobia, a term which was “coined in the late 1980s, its first known use in print being in February 1991, in a periodical in the United States.”⁸⁶ The Runnymede Trust published a report on Islamophobia in 1997, entitled “Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All”, which, as Imhoff and Recker point out in “Differentiating Islamophobia: Introducing a New Scale to Measure Islamoprejudice and Secular Islam Critique”, “remains the most ambitious effort to explicitly define Islamophobia.”⁸⁷ The Runnymede Trust states that Islamophobia “refers to unfounded hostility towards Islam [and] to the practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities, and to the exclusion of Muslims from mainstream political and social affairs.”⁸⁸ The term has been criticised because it potentially “stifles legitimate criticism of Islam”, but the Runnymede Trust explains that there is “a key distinction between *closed* views of Islam on the one hand and *open* views on the other. Phobic dread of Islam is the recurring characteristic of closed views. Legitimate disagreement and criticism, as also appreciation and respect, are aspects of open views.”⁸⁹ The Runnymede Trust identifies eight characteristics of a closed view of Islam, and thus of Islamophobia: a “static” view of Islam; Islam “as other”; Islam “as inferior”; Islam “as an aggressive enemy”; Muslims “[being] seen as manipulative”; the rejection of “Muslim criticisms of ‘the West’”; defending “discriminatory behaviour against Muslims”; and “anti-Muslim discourse [being] seen as natural.”⁹⁰ This chapter will show that Fortuyn, Wilders and Baudet describe Islam as the Other, and as inferior to values of Dutch society; and that they do not adequately distinguish

86. “Islamophobia”, 1.

87. Imhoff and Recker, “Differentiating Islamophobia: Introducing a New Scale to Measure Islamoprejudice and Secular Islam Critique”, 812.

88. “Islamophobia”, 4.

89. “Islamophobia”, 4.

90. “Islamophobia”, 4.

between Islam and violence – characteristics that connect their rhetoric to Islamophobia, perpetuating “anti-Muslim discourse [being] seen as natural.”⁹¹ The first chapter explored how the politicians’ rhetoric is successful; this chapter shows how their rhetoric can be problematic, since the opposition between Self and Other is used as a justification of superiority. Said argues that when studying elements of Orientalist othering, the “things to look at are style, figures of speech, setting, narrative devices, historical and social circumstances.”⁹² In this chapter I will look at the style and devices the three Dutch politicians employ in order to identify these mechanisms of othering.

Although *Orientalism* is an acclaimed work, it has been criticised; for instance by Bernard Lewis in the chapter “The Question of Orientalism” from the book *Islam and the West*. Lewis argues that “[t]o prove his thesis, Mr. Said rearranges both the geography and the history of Orientalism.”⁹³ Lewis also points out that Said excludes important contributions to Orientalist scholarship by German and Russian scholars.⁹⁴ I am interested in *Orientalism* because it provides a framework from which a general understanding of Othering arises. This framework is not determined by time or place, but shows a tradition rooted in historical power-dynamics that is perpetuated today in different ways and contexts. *Orientalism* does more than explain the interest in the Orient (an explanation which Lewis deems “inadequate”⁹⁵); it explains the human tendency to establish the identity of the Self as opposed to an Other. This observation captures the importance of *Orientalism*, as it raises awareness of how domination does not only exist politically, but also in language.

Important to note is that the opposition within Orientalist othering is often between Islam and the West, and not between Islam and Christianity – while this would arguably

91. “Islamophobia”, 4.

92. Said, *Orientalism*, 21.

93. Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 108.

94. Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 112.

95. Lewis, *Islam and the West*, 117.

make more sense since you are comparing similar entities (religions). Said addresses this issue in his work *Covering Islam*:

it is always the West, and not Christianity, that seems pitted against Islam. Why? Because the assumption is that whereas ‘the West’ is greater than and has surpassed the stage of Christianity, its principal religion, the world of Islam – its varied societies, histories, and languages notwithstanding – is still mired in religion, primitivity, and backwardness. Therefore, the West is modern, greater than the sum of its parts, full of enriching contradictions and yet always ‘Western’ in its cultural identity; the world of Islam, on the other hand, is no more than ‘Islam’, reducible to a small number of unchanging characteristics despite the appearance of contradictions and experiences of variety that seem on the surface to be as plentiful as those of the West.⁹⁶

Many different countries are ‘Islamic’ or have Muslim citizens. As Said points out, these countries are as varied as ‘the West’ and cannot solely be defined by the word ‘Islam’. The opposition between Islam and the West is thus often an unfair equation. A possible reason for the negative associations with Islam in the West and for its being presented as the Other is also provided by Said in *Covering Islam*, explaining that a fear of Islam could thus be a reason for politically motivated othering:

Other great civilizations of the East – India and China among them – could be thought of as defeated and distant and hence not a constant worry. Only Islam seemed never to have submitted completely to the West; and when, after the dramatic oil-price rises of the early 1970s, the Muslim world seemed once more on the verge of repeating its early conquests, the whole West seemed to shudder. The onset of ‘Islamic terrorism’ in the 1980s and 1990s has deepened and intensified the shock.⁹⁷

Opposition

In his book *De Islamisering van Onze Cultuur* (The Islamisation of Our Culture), Pim Fortuyn opposes Islam to modernity when he writes, “an ideological battle with Islam, with as its purpose convincing the adherents that they are better off, if they loyally and royally

96. Said, *Covering Islam*, 11.

97. Said, *Covering Islam*, 5.

embrace the core norms and values of modernity.”⁹⁸ Stating that adherents of Islam would be “better off” if they embraced these modern values – associated with the West – indicates an idea of superiority. Fortuyn discusses Islamic culture as a “culture that is diametrically opposed to ours.”⁹⁹ He also addresses the importance of “a good insight into the differences between the (fundamental) Islam and the traditional Judeo-Christian humanist culture.”¹⁰⁰ Fortuyn repeatedly lets ‘Islam’ be preceded by the bracketed qualifier ‘fundamental’, diminishing the difference between Islam and fundamental Islam. He again opposes Islam, this time to specifically Judeo-Christian, humanist values. Said argues that the opposition between the Orient and the West “was reinforced ... by the rhetoric of high cultural humanism”, referring to values which are “liberal, humane, correct.”¹⁰¹ References to humanist values are amply found in writing by all three politicians.

In his *Kies voor Vrijheid* (Choose Freedom), Wilders also diametrically opposes Islam to an element of Western civilisation; “the question is whether the naive Netherlands will wake up to the fascist excesses of the Islam, a religion which is intrinsically irreconcilable with democracy.”¹⁰² Another way of othering is described by Said as

the culturally sanctioned habit of deploying large generalizations by which reality is divided into each category being not so much a neutral designation as an evaluative interpretation. Underlying these categories is the rigidly binomial opposition of ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, with the former always encroaching upon the latter (even to the point of making ‘theirs’ exclusively a function of ‘ours’).¹⁰³

98. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van onze Cultuur*, 9. Original text: “een ideologische strijd met de islam, met als doel de aanhangers daarvan ervan te overtuigen dat zij beter af zijn, indien zij loyaal en royaal de kernnormen en -waarden van de moderniteit omarmen.”

99. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van onze Cultuur*, 89. Original text: “cultuur, die haaks op de onze staat.”

100. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van onze Cultuur*, 13. Original text: “een goed inzicht in de verschillen tussen de (fundamentalistische) islam en de traditionele joods-christelijk humanistische cultuur.”

101. Said, *Orientalism*, 227.

102. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 44. Original text: “Het is de vraag of het naïeve Nederland wakker zal worden als het gaat om de fascistische excessen van de islam, een religie die intrinsiek onvereenigbaar is met democratie.”

103. Said, *Orientalism*, 227.

We have already seen emphasised repetitions of the Dutch traditions, nation and history being preceded by the personal possessive pronoun ‘our’. The binomial opposition between ‘we/us/our’ and ‘they/them/their’ is further employed by Wilders in his writing, when he says about violent extremists: “*we* know who *they* are. So I say: just arrest *them*, and let the safety of the Netherlands and of Dutch families prevail above the rights of these extremists. Arrest *them* before *they* destroy all *our* constitutional principles.”¹⁰⁴ The opposition is very clearly established with the line ‘we know who they are’. ‘Their’ interests are further opposed to ‘ours’ – ‘they’ are a threat to ‘our’ safety. About the second group of Muslims, non-violent adherents of radical Islam, Wilders says: “they should get the opportunity to choose for our society and for our constitutional state. And in order to do this, they need a hand. These people can be brought to the right path.”¹⁰⁵ This is another instance of a binomial opposition. ‘Our’ state is considered the superior one; ‘the right path’. ‘These people’ need ‘our’ help.

In *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, the othering opposition between ‘we’ and ‘they’ is again employed, when Baudet mentions “unbridled amounts of immigrants who brought *their* culture and *their* customs which are *diametrically opposed to ours*, *their* Islam with all consequent problems...”¹⁰⁶

Appeals to Pathos and Logos

A recurring theme in *De Islamisering van Onze Cultuur* (The Islamisation of our Culture) is invoking emotions of fear in its audience (pathos), and with it the reassurance that

104. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 70. Original text: “We weten wie ze zijn. Dus zeg ik: pak ze dan gewoon op, en laat de veiligheid van Nederland en de Nederlandse gezinnen prevaleren boven de rechten van deze extremisten. Pak ze op voordat ze al *onze* grondrechten om zeep helpen” (italics mine)

105. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 72. Original text: “Zij moeten de gelegenheid krijgen om te kiezen voor onze samenleving en voor onze rechtsstaat. En daar moeten ze een handje bij worden geholpen. Deze mensen kunnen op het goede spoor worden gezet”

106. Baudet, *Politiek van Gezond Verstand*, 168. Original text: “ongebreidelde hoeveelheden immigranten, die *hun* cultuur en *hun* gebruiken meenamen *die haaks staan op de onze*, *hun* Islam met alle problemen van dien...” (emphasis added)

Fortuyn's ideas are the solution to avoiding this fear (logos). Fortuyn emphasises the presence of Islamic fundamentalism in the Netherlands:

Fundamentalism from Islamic countries is extremely easy to be imported, and is also imported because of a breeding ground for it which is not only present, but growing by the day. If we do not (sufficiently) succeed to integrate these groups economically, societally and culturally, we will undoubtedly be confronted with militant fundamentalism in the own society.¹⁰⁷

Fortuyn here creates a fearful image of fundamentalism as being easily brought to the Netherlands, and in fact already being brought there increasingly 'by the day'. He writes that if these groups are not sufficiently integrated (if his policies are ignored), it will 'undoubtedly' lead to militant fundamentalism. Fortuyn confidently presents this as an objective fact, as previously seen with appeals to logos. The description 'these groups' is vague and could thus be interpreted broadly; possibly also to mean all Muslims. Another fearful image can be seen in the following:

Here, there are also clearly identifiable groups, clearly identifiable by culture and religion (Islam), country of origin and socio-economic circumstances, that are in a deprived and hopeless state. The negative energy that has built up in this situation will here too find a way out, particularly among youth. We recognise the problem insufficiently and are not doing enough about it, until, yes, until...¹⁰⁸

The repeated word 'until' followed by three dots invokes fear in an appeal to pathos. Fortuyn does not specify what might happen if we do not take action, but leaves it up to the reader to

107. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van Onze Cultuur*, 102. Original text: Fundamentalisme uit islamitische landen kan buitengewoon gemakkelijk worden geïmporteerd, en wordt ook geïmporteerd omdat de voedingsbodem daarvoor niet alleen aanwezig is, maar met de dag groeit. Slagen we er niet of onvoldoende in om deze groepen economisch, maatschappelijk en cultureel te integreren, dan worden wij in de naaste toekomst ongetwijfeld geconfronteerd met militant fundamentalisme in de eigen samenleving.

108. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van onze Cultuur*, 102. Original text: Ook hier verkeren duidelijk aanwijsbare groepen, duidelijk naar cultuur en godsdienst (islam), land van herkomst en sociaal-economische omstandigheden, in een gedepriveerde, uitzichtloze situatie. De daarin opgebouwde negatieve energie zal ook hier een uitweg zoeken, met name onder de jongeren. We onderkennen het probleem mondjesmaat en doen er veel te weinig aan, totdat, ja, totdat...

conjure up the worst scenario they can imagine. Finally, Fortuyn emphasises the need for his policies when he writes:

Fundamentalism in the Netherlands is still under the surface, but it is there and it is developing. Disadvantaged neighbourhoods could transform into hotbeds of such movements. When they are powerful enough, they will also manifest in the public domain and present themselves as a political power which one cannot simply ignore; then we will be in trouble. It is better to prevent this development and to nip it in the bud by a focused and forceful spreading and integration policy.¹⁰⁹

The policies Fortuyn is suggesting are here presented as the solution to prevent fundamentalism. Fortuyn implies that without these policies, Islamic fundamentalism will increase in the Netherlands. This is another appeal to pathos – inspiring fear in the audience that the fundamentalism which is still ‘under the surface’ could come out at any minute. Fortuyn characterises disadvantaged neighbourhoods as ‘hotbeds’ (in Dutch ‘broeinesten’), a word which has negative connotations, and which invokes a dehumanised image of a source from which a large quantity of evil could spring.

While Wilders repeatedly mentions the superiority of Dutch culture over Middle Eastern culture, he simultaneously draws on governmental rules in the MENA-region to justify implementing them in the Netherlands. For example when arguing that people from other nationalities should be evicted after committing a crime: “it will have an enormous influence on behaviour if one knows that eviction is one of the consequences of heavy violent crimes. It can be explained with mentioned reasonable arguments, because the measure is also in place for other crimes and is applied in exactly the same way in the country of

109. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van onze Cultuur*, 111. Original text: Het fundamentalisme in Nederland speelt zich nog onder de oppervlakte af, maar is er wel en ontwikkelt zich ook. Achterstandswijken kunnen zich ontpoppen tot broeinesten van dergelijke bewegingen. Op het moment dat zij dan krachtig genoeg zijn, zullen zij zich ook manifesteren in het publieke domein en zich aandienen als een politieke kracht die men niet zomaar kan negeren; dan hebben we de poppen aan het dansen. Beter is het om deze ontwikkeling voor te zijn en in de kiem te smoren, door een gericht en krachtig spreidings- en integratiebeleid.

origin.”¹¹⁰ Stating that it “can be explained with mentioned reasonable arguments” is an appeal to logos. I would argue that this is an instance of fallacious argumentation, however, because the existence of a rule in the country of origin does not necessarily justify its presence in the Netherlands; this is a case of erroneous generalisation, Wilders inconsistently critiques MENA governments (in this case specifically that of Morocco), and simultaneously uses this government he professes to disagree with as argument for his own political ideas.

As we have already seen in the first chapter, Baudet invoked a sense of pride concerning the colonial past: “what has *happened* to us that we have started to be ashamed of our holidays, our heroes, our history? That we, at one time the most feared captains of the world seas, now walk with our heads bowed close to the gables when a few rebellious furcollars pass by on a scooter.”¹¹¹ Baudet emphasises that these are ‘our’ holidays, heroes and history. ‘We’ should not be ashamed of them, because we were once ‘the most feared captains of the world seas’. Baudet presents being feared as something to take pride in; a stance which is arguably problematic, since colonialisation meant perceived superiority over and exploitation of the colonies. Baudet is referring to the Dutch Golden Age, that took place from 1588-1672. During this time, the VOC (Dutch East India Company) and WIC (Dutch West Indies Company) were established and started engaging in trade, colonisation and slavery. This was a very lucrative time for the Netherlands, but a horrible one for its colonies. Baudet still establishes superiority over the “few rebellious furcollars”, a stereotypical nickname for Moroccans. Characterising the Dutch as “feared captains” and the Other as “a

110. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 81. Original text: “Het zal een enorm gedragseffect hebben als men weet dat uitzetting tot de consequenties behoort van zware geweldsmisdrijven. Het is met genoemde redelijke argumenten uit te leggen, omdat de maatregel ook voor andere misdrijven geldt en in het land van herkomst precies zo wordt toegepast.”

111. Baudet, *Politiek van Gezond Verstand*, 141. Original text: “Wat is er met ons *gebeurd* dat wij ons zijn gaan schamen voor onze feestdagen, onze helden, onze geschiedenis? Dat wij, ooit de meest gevreesde kapiteins van de wereldzeeën, nu met gebogen hoofd dicht langs de gevels lopen als er een paar rellerige bontkragen op een scooter voorbijkomen.”

few rebellious furcollars” creates an image of the Dutch as strong and powerful as compared to the small group of rebellious youth. The Cambridge Dictionary states that “[i]f a group of people are rebellious, they oppose the ideas of the people in authority and plan to change the system, often using force.”¹¹² The word thus invokes the idea of opposing a group which is in the right, such as rebellious teenagers opposing their parents while they in fact know what is best for them. It diminishes fear of this group of “furcollars”, since they are nothing that “feared captains” could not handle.

Rhetoric of Presence

Another useful approach that explores how superiority is established through stylistic strategies is Mary Louise Pratt’s book *Imperial Eyes*. In the chapter “From the Victorian Nyanza to the Sheraton San Salvador”, Pratt introduces three strategies used to naturalise the colonial perspective in travel narratives. These are estheticising the landscape, density of meaning (produced by an overuse of adjectives), and establishing mastery. Pratt terms this “a rhetoric of presence.”¹¹³ By employing these strategies, the author brings a place into existence that of course already existed prior to the narrative. The creation of a place through this narrative, however, succeeds in expressing superiority and justifies power over the place that is described. Even though Pratt’s book focuses on Victorian imperialism, the mechanisms she discusses are still relevant to contemporary Orientalist expressions and mechanisms of othering. Pratt addresses how a “non-event”¹¹⁴ is assigned meaning by meticulous observations that do not have any value themselves. These types of long descriptions devoid of meaning were prevalent in the quotations discussed in the first chapter, where the politicians used vague descriptions to prove a point without actually providing

112. “Rebellious.” The Cambridge Dictionary, [REBELLIOUS | meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary](#)

113. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201.

114. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 202.

arguments. Mary Louise Pratt's strategies are also applicable in the preceding text by Baudet. There is an unequal power position since Baudet is a politician, and as such the one in a position of authority, while the youth on the street do not have the power to identify themselves in this rhetoric. Baudet is the one describing them and in doing so, he is establishing mastery.¹¹⁵ He naturalises the perspective of the Dutch as superior through a density of meaning, created by adjectives such as "feared", "bowed", "few", and "rebellious". He also describes a 'landscape' or a setting and hereby brings it into existence through language. He paints a very detailed picture of the feared captains walking with bowed heads "close to the gables when a few rebellious furcollars pass by on a scooter". This linguistically creates a situation in which the powerful Dutch citizens are intimidated in their own space by an 'Other' which in fact does not belong there; they are merely "passing" through this Dutch space (identified with the word "gables"). Pratt argues that it is precisely such a description which allows the narrator to naturalise superiority over the object which is described.

A further example of this "rhetoric of presence"¹¹⁶ can be found in Baudet's explanation of why he went into politics, in *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*:

I went into politics in order to prevent the ruin of this country. I went into politics to serve the interests of people in the Netherlands and those of coming generations. Because I saw that the established parties were not doing so. Because they put our country on sale and gave it away to the European Union, to managers and anonymous bureaucrats, and especially to unbridled amounts of immigrants who brought their culture and their customs which are diametrically opposed to ours, their Islam with all consequent problems... I saw that, and together with the other people in Forum for Democracy I started trying to stop it.¹¹⁷

115. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 204.

116. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201.

117. Baudet, *Politiek van Gezond Verstand*, 168. Original text: Ik ben de politiek ingegaan om te voorkomen dat dit land naar de knoppen gaat. Ik ben de politiek ingegaan om de belangen van de mensen in Nederland te dienen en die van de volgende generaties. Omdat ik zag dat de gevestigde partijen dat niet deden. Omdat ze ons land in de uitverkoop gooiden en weggaven aan de Europese Unie, aan managers en anonieme bureaucraten, en vooral aan ongebreidelde hoeveelheden immigranten, die hun cultuur en hun gebruiken meenamen die haaks staan op de onze, hun Islam met alle problemen van dien... Ik zag dat, en samen met de andere mensen van Forum voor Democratie ben ik in beweging gekomen om te proberen dat te stoppen.

Density of meaning is created with the line “unbridled amounts of immigrants”, in which “immigrants” are qualified with both an adjective and a descriptive noun. The statement “I saw that” is reminiscent of Pratt’s analysis of discovery rhetoric. Baudet establishes mastery over the object he is describing by stating that it was in fact discovered by him. Presenting the situation as a problem serves as a justification for his response. He naturalises his perspective of superiority by using the third strategy (establishing mastery) of the “rhetoric of presence.”¹¹⁸

And while this cabinet already established an absolute immigration record the past year, and let 235.000 people come to the Netherlands, now she also wants to give an open invitation to the whole of Africa to dare the crossing. President, this is just about the most imprudent thing we can do at this moment. Visa or not. Good intentions or not. The Marrakech Migration Pact will directly or indirectly find its way to national regulation and legal rulings, and surrender our land to an uncontrollable influx of immigrants.¹¹⁹

Density of meaning is employed when the word “thing” is qualified by the long line “just about the most imprudent”. Immigrants are again dehumanised and presented as a mass which cannot be controlled: “an uncontrollable influx”. Describing immigrants in such a way presents them as a threat to the country and arouses negative associations in connection to them.

Veiling

A topic that is often referred to within the rhetoric of othering is the topic of veiling.

In “Do Muslim Women Need Saving”, Abu-Lughod explains that the “Western obsession

118. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 201.

119. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 172. Original text: En terwijl dit kabinet reeds het afgelopen jaar een absoluut immigratierecord vestigde, en 235.000 mensen naar Nederland liet komen, wil zij nu ook nog eens een open uitnodiging doen aan heel Afrika om toch vooral maar de oversteek te wagen. Voorzitter, dit is zo ongeveer het meest onverstandige wat we op dit moment kunnen doen. Inlegvelletje of niet. Goeie bedoelingen of niet. Het Marrakesh Immigratiepact zal direct of indirect zijn weg vinden naar nationale regelgeving en rechterlijke uitspraken, en ons land uitleveren aan een onbeheersbare toevloed van immigranten.

with the veil"¹²⁰ is not a new phenomenon. She traces it back to colonial times, when the oppression of women was used as a legitimisation of the colonial rule. A focus on veiling can thus be politically motivated. Abu-Lughod also addresses the visibility of the Islamic religion and how this can create uneasiness in people who are not used to a visual expression of religion. The connotations of the veil with oppression are not always based on sufficient knowledge, since the veil can actually function as a status symbol or as a way for women to feel protected and in fact liberated through their choice to cover themselves. Abu-Lughod further elaborates that as long as it is the woman's choice, veiling is not a passive but an active act – even if it is one that a Western woman might not be able to understand. She argues that "[w]hen you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her *to* something"¹²¹; to "the liberal West."¹²² Western ideals are not ideal for everyone, even though this might be difficult to understand from a Western perspective.

The visibility of the religion is one of the aspects of Islam that can make Dutch non-Muslims uncomfortable. In his chapter "Being Young, Muslim, and American in Brooklyn", Bayoumi approaches the visibility of veiling as an advantage of Islam. Islamic dress, both for men and women, is a way to make your faith overt. This explicitness of religion could offer more protection than hiding your faith does. When your religion exists visually for other people, they are more likely to ask you about it and consequently learn more about the religion from your answers. With regard to women and veiling, Bayoumi refers to Jeannette Jouili, who argues that "[v]isibility is considered a source of power whereas its opposite, invisibility, becomes a sign of oppression."¹²³ With this statement, she means that by making

120. Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving", 787.

121. Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving", 788.

122. Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving", 789.

123. Bayoumi, *Being Young and Muslim*, 171.

their religion visible, women are claiming a place in the public space that is otherwise denied to them as a minority group.

An example of the veil being interpreted as a sign of oppression can be found in Fortuyn's *De Islamisering van Onze Cultuur*: "the 'costume' these women wear, that is an expression of suppressing prescriptions and their inferior position, prevents them from participating fully in the public domain, to develop themselves and to acquire a social and economic position that is equal to that of the man."¹²⁴ Fortuyn connects the veil to an "inferior position" that prevents full participation in society and that cannot be equal to a man's position. By presenting the veil in such a way, Fortuyn himself attaches an inferior status to the veiled woman which is not necessarily true. He does not account for it possibly being the woman's own choice, and thus does not assign agency to her. He presents her as a passive victim of male oppression. Fortuyn also does not include the role of the veil as a possible status symbol or way of protection. He views the phenomenon from a Western perspective, which does not take into consideration that not everyone views Western values as superior. As was pointed out before, Abu-Lughod argues that "[w]hen you save someone, you imply that you are saving her from something. You are also saving her *to* something"¹²⁵; to "the liberal West."¹²⁶ Not everyone wants to be saved to the liberal West, and saying that they do implies superiority of the West as opposed to the inferior Other. Fortuyn again opposes an element of Islam to modern society; stating that wearing a veil is irreconcilable with a public position, while he is actually the one denying veiled women public participation, when the two in fact do not have to exclude each other.

124. Fortuyn, *Islamisering van onze Cultuur*, 88. Original text: "De 'klederdracht' van deze vrouwen, die een uitdrukking is van de onderdrukkende voorschriften en hun tweederangspositie, verhindert hen intussen om volwaardig te participeren in het publieke domein, zichzelf te ontplooien en om zich een sociale en economische positie te verwerven die evenwaardig is aan die van de man."

125. Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving", 788.

126. Abu-Lughod, "Do Muslim Women Need Saving", 789.

Wilders also addresses his objections to veiling in *Kies voor Vrijheid*:

A point for discussion is also the separation of church and state that is so essential for the Netherlands. I think that religious expressions should belong more to the private domain and should not be allowed to fulfill a societal role. The same goes for wearing headscarves or burqa's. Wearing them is irreconcilable with a public function, in which everyone should be treated equally regardless of their origins, sexual orientation or religion. I do not want to ban headscarves in their totality. I am primarily concerned with a ban to wear headscarves in public functions.¹²⁷

Like Fortuyn, Wilders opposes wearing a headscarf to occupying a public function.

Ironically, he follows this opposition by saying that in a public function “everyone should be treated equally regardless of their origins, sexual orientation or religion”. He contradicts his own statement within the same paragraph, since with a headscarf-ban, women are not free to both express their religion in the way they want and have a public function. It is the ban that limits them, and not veiling itself. If veiled women are allowed to inhabit public spaces; they can. Wilders connects a headscarf-ban to the Dutch separation of church and state and thus opposes veiling to Dutch values. Wearing a veil to work does not have to mean that church and state are not separated. It is simply a choice of dress that should not otherwise have to influence a woman's functioning in her professional position. Furthermore, the view on covering part of the face in a professional setting has drastically changed due to Covid-19, which in fact obliges people to cover their face with a mask in many professional situations. This shows that it depends more on the reason behind veiling than on veiling itself whether it is accepted or not. Similarly, handshakes are no longer the normative way of greeting but in fact advised against due to the epidemic. If women refuse to shake a man's hand because of

127. Wilders, *Kies voor Vrijheid*, 84. Original text: Een punt van discussie is ook de scheiding van kerk en staat die voor Nederland zo van essentieel belang is. Ik vind dat religieuze uitingen meer tot het privé-domein moeten behoren en geen maatschappelijke rol mogen vervullen. Dat geldt ook voor het dragen van hoofddoekjes of burka's. Het dragen daarvan is onverenigbaar met een openbare functie, waarin iedereen gelijk moet worden behandeld ongeacht zijn afkomst, seksuele geaardheid of religie. Ik wil hoofddoekjes niet in zijn algemeenheid verbieden. Het gaat mij nadrukkelijk om een verbod op het dragen van hoofddoekjes in openbare functies.

religious reasons, it is often taken as an insult or seen as a lack of integration. The pandemic has shown that shaking hands is not the only possible way of greeting people, but a Western tradition that can easily be disposed of when the situation does not allow for it.

In this chapter, I have shown that Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet oppose Islam to elements of modern or Western society, which they consider to be superior. They thus present Islam as a “static” whole, as “other”, as “inferior”, and occasionally even as violent or “aggressive.”¹²⁸ Through appeals to pathos, the rhetoric inspires “dread of Islam”, which “is the recurring characteristic of closed views.”¹²⁹ These are all characteristics of Islamophobia, as defined by the Runnymede Trust, and thus show that the rhetoric of the politicians is problematic. A large issue the politicians have with Islam is the visibility of the religion. They view veiling as an element of oppression, while it is in fact their statements that are imposing limits on a free society in which people can live together despite their differences.

128. “Islamophobia”, 4.

129. “Islamophobia”, 4.

Chapter Three: Engaging with Discourse

Hans-Georg Gadamer stresses the importance of language in his work *Truth and Method*. He sees language as a view of the world, and argues that language is intrinsically connected to thought:

Only by breaking with the conventionalist prejudices of theology and rationalism could Herder and Humboldt learn to see languages as views of the world. By acknowledging the unity of thought and language they could envision the task of comparing the various forms of this unity. We are starting from the same insight but going, as it were, in the opposite direction. Despite the multiplicity of ways of speech, we are trying to keep in mind the indissoluble unity of thought and language as we encounter it in the hermeneutical phenomenon, namely as the unity of understanding and interpretation.¹³⁰

Since it is due to language that we are able to understand and interpret texts, thought could not exist without language. Establishing meaning is a reciprocal process: “[t]he text brings a subject matter into language, but that it does so is ultimately the achievement of the interpreter. Both have a share in it.”¹³¹ Meaning thus only exists when it is successfully conveyed by the writer or speaker to the interpreter. Language here has a crucial role in bringing an idea into existence. Gadamer describes language as “not just one of man’s possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature.”¹³² This relationship between language and the world is a reciprocal one: “[n]ot only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it. Thus, that language is originally human means at the same time that man’s being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic.”¹³³ We have already come across the creative power of language in the second chapter with Mary Louise

130. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 421.

131. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 406.

132. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 459.

133. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 459.

Pratt's notion of discovery rhetoric. Language has the ability to create a world; a world that existed prior to its description but that can be altered and dominated through this description. When looking at how rhetoric reflects on or engages with real-world issues, as this thesis has been doing, it is important to bear in mind that our whole world exists linguistically. Michel Foucault is famous for his concept of discourse, and how the power-dynamics inherent to this concept are omnipresent, since our society is based on them. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, the book which I will draw on in this chapter, Foucault identifies politics and sexuality as the two fields in which these power-dynamics are most present and therefore most dangerous:

I will note simply that the areas where this web is most tightly woven today, where the danger spots are most numerous, are those dealing with politics and sexuality. It is as though discussion, far from being a transparent, neutral element, allowing us to disarm sexuality and to pacify politics, were one of those privileged areas in which they exercised some of their more awesome powers. In appearance, speech may well be of little account, but the prohibitions surrounding it soon reveal its links with desire and power.¹³⁴

This chapter will engage with Foucault's ideas of discourse and power, and Gadamer's linguistic world-view in order to explore how Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet position themselves or can be positioned within this broader linguistic and philosophical context. This chapter will not focus on Pim Fortuyn, since he is no longer active within discourse, and because he does not directly engage with the concept as the other two politicians do. Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet are contemporary politicians and it is therefore relevant to study how they engage with the current Dutch political discourse. They are aware of the discourse and employ this awareness in their rhetoric.

Foucault argues that it is prohibition which links discourse and power. He elaborates on "the three great systems of exclusion governing discourse – prohibited words, the division

134. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 216.

of madness and the will to truth.”¹³⁵ All three systems of exclusion can be seen in the discussed texts by Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet. The first system of exclusion entails that “we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything.”¹³⁶ The second system, the division of madness, ensures that a person outside the discourse is stigmatised as a madman, and treated as mere noise. The only place this madman can speak is in a symbolic role at the theatre. The fact that this madman is outside the discourse, however, does allow him to communicate “masked truth.”¹³⁷ The final system of exclusion is the will to truth. This is the most important and dangerous one, because discourse “is incapable of recognising the will to truth which pervades it.”¹³⁸ The search for truth in discourse is also explained by Gadamer:

The reader experiences what is addressed to him and what he understands in all its validity. What he understands is always more than an unfamiliar opinion: it is always possible truth. This is what emerges from detaching what is spoken from the speaker and from the permanence that writing bestows. This is the deeper hermeneutical reason for the fact, mentioned above, that it does not occur to people who are not used to reading that what is written down could be wrong, since to them anything written seems like a self-authenticating document.¹³⁹

Wilders points out his awareness of the first system of exclusion in the speech discussed in the first chapter; “PVV-Following Chants: Fewer Moroccans”. In this speech, he precedes the question “Do you want more or fewer Moroccans” with the line, “I am not actually allowed to say it”. This line communicates his awareness of certain rules concerning public speech. Wilders knows that what he is saying violates the constitutional prohibition against discrimination, but he justifies this by emphasising another constitutional element;

135. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 219.

136. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 216.

137. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 217.

138. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 219.

139. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 412.

freedom of speech. He continues: “freedom of speech is a great thing and we haven’t said anything which is not allowed, we haven’t said anything which is not correct”. While Wilders plays on the prohibitions of discourse by saying what is actually not allowed (thus trying to place himself outside of or opposed to this discourse), he actually remains within it through a justification that highlights a crucial element of discourse in the Netherlands: freedom of speech. He uses this justification to conclude that he has not in fact said anything which is not allowed – and is thus still within the limits of discourse (specifically, political discourse in the Netherlands).

Baudet also addresses systems of exclusion present in discourse: “it is not easy to start substantial discussions in our country about big, essential matters. Whoever expresses fundamental criticism on a religion, an ideology or a political ideal, will not only have to deal with all kinds of societal exclusion mechanisms, but also with defense mechanisms that aim to hide the main matters from view.”¹⁴⁰ Baudet writes that it is difficult to engage with important topics in the Dutch political discourse, and that people who attempt to do so critically are excluded through societal mechanisms (as also mentioned by Foucault). By referring to these difficulties and elements of exclusion, Baudet can be seen as placing himself outside of discourse. This opposition to discourse continues in the following paragraph:

one of the most vicious of these distracting manoeuvres is engaging merely with word use and tone of the person formulating the criticism, often combined with the remark that matters are ‘more nuanced’. The mean thing about this debate trick is its tautological character. Whoever is seriously concerned – whoever wants to address an important issue – will inevitably use an involved, emotional tone. When someone does not do that, moreover, he is unconvincing. It is thus nonsensical to reject someone *precisely because of this tone*. But, people then smirkingly remark, *c’est le ton qui fait la musique!* Nonsense. It is first and foremost the notes that make the

140. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 89. Original text: “[h]et is niet makkelijk om in ons land inhoudelijke discussies te entameren over grote, wezenlijke kwesties. Wie fundamentele kritiek uit op een religie, een ideologie of een politiek ideaal, krijgt behalve met allerlei maatschappelijke uitsluitingsmechanismen, ook te maken met verdedigingsreflexen die de hoofdzaken aan het zicht moeten onttrekken.”

music. Of course tone is important. But let's not exaggerate. You really have to get the composition right, before it becomes useful to dispute dynamic differences. Just as taunting and nonsensical – but unfortunately often even more successful – is the remark that 'you are not allowed to generalise'. Every thought, every designation is *per definition* a generalisation. Whoever is denied generalisation, is denied thought, to remark on reality. When I say: 'your piano is out of tune', I'm generalising. After all, not every string, not every element of the piano is out of tune. When I say that it is raining today, I am generalising. It is not actually raining the whole day, everywhere in the country.¹⁴¹

First of all, Baudet expresses his frustration with a rhetorical focus, a frustration that was already discussed in the first chapter. Baudet argues that his opponents often do not focus on the substance of his speech, but on its style. By positioning himself against rhetoric, however, he is in fact also being rhetorical. Sam Leith points out "the intrinsic 'rhetoricity' of all language"¹⁴², and that "it's precisely because it's all around us that we don't see it."¹⁴³ This does not have to be either good or bad; it simply means that speech is inherently rhetorical. Leith further explains that "the plain style to which we're accustomed is no less a rhetorical strategy than the high style that will strike us as hammy or false"¹⁴⁴, and that "[b]eing anti-rhetoric is, finally, just another rhetorical strategy. Rhetoric is what the other guy is doing. Whereas you: you're just speaking the plain truth as you see it."¹⁴⁵ Whenever you write a text, you are engaged in a rhetorical process, a process in which the text you are reading now

141. Baudet, *Politiek van het Gezond Verstand*, 90. Original text: Eén van de meest venijnige van deze afleidingsmanoeuvres is het louter ingaan op woordgebruik en toon van degene die kritiek formuleert, vaak gecombineerd met de opmerking dat de zaak 'genuanceerder' ligt. Het gemene aan deze debattruc is haar tautologische karakter. Wie zich serieus zorgen maakt – wie een belangrijk probleem wil aankaarten – zal onvermijdelijk een betrokken, geëmotioneerde toon aanslaan. Doet iemand dat niet, dan is hij bovendien ongeloofwaardig. Het is dus onzinnig om iemand *juist vanwege die toon* af te serveren. Maar, zo meesmuilt men dan, *c'est le ton qui fait la musique!* Onzin. Het zijn in de eerste plaats de noten die de muziek maken. Natuurlijk is toon belangrijk.. Maar laten we niet overdrijven. Je moet toch echt de compositie goed krijgen, voordat het zinvol wordt om over dynamische verschillen te redetwisten. Al even treiterig en onzinnig – maar helaas dikwijls nog succesvoller – is de opmerking dat je 'niet mag generaliseren'. Elke gedachte, elke aanduiding is *per definitie* een generalisatie. Wie ontzegt wordt te generaliseren, wordt ontzegt om na te denken, om een uitspraak over de werkelijkheid te doen. Wanneer ik zeg: 'uw piano is vals', generaliseer ik. Immers, niet elke snaar, niet elk onderdeel van de piano is vals. Wanneer ik zeg dat het vandaag regent, generaliseer ik ook. Het regent namelijk heus niet de hele dag, overal in het land.

142. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 5.

143. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 9.

144. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 12.

145. Leith, *You Talkin' to Me*, 15.

is of course also a participant. This ties in to Foucault's notion that discourse is all around us, and that we are not able to escape its power-dynamic. Baudet uses French without translating it in this paragraph ("*c'est le ton qui fait la musique*"), and uses very specific, musical metaphors to explain the phallacy of generalisation, which in itself are rhetorical elements that have the ability to exclude as well, since not every reader will be able to understand French or to comprehend the musical references Baudet makes. The use of metaphors is a rhetorical strategy. He is thus also participating in a form of discourse that is not open to all. Perhaps he is simultaneously trying to escape certain rules of Dutch political discourse by relating generalisation to music and rain instead of to people. This takes away the hurtful or discriminatory elements that can be invoked through generalisation and allows him to present it as a regular and natural process – not as something 'bad'. He also argues that if you are not allowed to generalise, you are not able to think or to remark on reality. He is here presenting his remarks as direct responses to an already existing reality, and thus to truth – which is the third way of exclusion found in discourse as theorised by Foucault – "the will to truth."¹⁴⁶ Baudet employs an opposition to rhetoric as a rhetorical strategy that makes it seem he is telling the truth – he can thus be said to place himself outside of discourse in order to participate successfully within it. This escape bases itself on one of the excluding elements of discourse, however, namely communicating "masked truth."¹⁴⁷ He is trying to escape the rules of discourse but the systems of exclusion inherent to discourse are still present in his text. He is thus not able to escape it, but finds himself within a discourse which in fact also has the potential of excluding others.

Foucault identifies three groups of rules that serve to control discourse: "the mastery of the powers contained within discourse", "averting the hazards of its appearance", and

146. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 219.

147. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 217.

lastly “determining the conditions under which it may be employed, of imposing a certain number of rules upon those individuals who employ it, thus denying access to everyone else.”¹⁴⁸ This last group of rules consists of restrictive systems that dominate discourse:

Exchange and communication are positive forces at play within complex but restrictive systems; it is probable that they cannot operate independently of these. The most superficial and obvious of these restrictive systems is constituted by what we collectively refer to as ritual; ritual defines the qualifications required of the speaker ... it lays down gestures to be made, behaviour, circumstances and the whole range of signs that must accompany discourse; finally, it lays down the supposed, or imposed significance of the words used, their effect upon those to whom they are addressed, the limitations of their constraining validity.¹⁴⁹

Politicians are in a position to participate in discourse, because they have the power necessary to do so. There are certain rituals within political discourse, such as governmental debates and how they are generally structured. This is the realm of gestures, behaviour and circumstances. The word choice and its effect on the audience is an element that differs between individual politicians and parties, as they generally strive to reach a different audience or to appeal to different desires in the audience. We have seen that Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet employ populist strategies, aiming to reach ‘the ordinary people’, and use vocabulary invoking nationalist pride, and creating fear for a loss of this nation in order to convince their audience.

The questions I had posed for this chapter were: to what extent is Islam-critical rhetoric a response to a societal issue? Is it possible that the rhetoric in fact linguistically *creates* an issue? Does a debate reflect on real-world issues, or can it also bring issues into existence in the real world? Gadamer’s perspective of the human world as existing linguistically confirms the great power of language to create the world as we experience it. Other linguistic philosophers, such as Roland Barthes, have also expressed the linguistic

148. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 224-225.

149. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 225.

nature of things – theorised in the field of semiotics as the relationship between signifier and signified.¹⁵⁰ That which is signified receives meaning in our mind because of its signifier. A table (the object, or signified), to take an easy example, becomes meaningful to us through its name (the word ‘table’, or signifier), which carries associations and connotes functions that are understood by many people. The signifier serves as a way of communicating shared knowledge. Foucault discusses discourse as a system consisting of signs: “discourse is really only an activity, of writing in the first case, of reading in the second and exchange in the third. This exchange, this writing, this reading never involve anything but signs. Discourse thus nullifies itself, in reality, in placing itself at the disposal of the signifier.”¹⁵¹ This idea was already present in Gadamer’s work. He invokes the theories of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, and explains: “[w]hatever [Greek thought] conceives as existent emerges as logos, as an expressible matter of fact, from the surrounding whole that constitutes the world-horizon of language. What is thus conceived of as existing is not really the *object* of statements, but it ‘comes to language in statements’. It thereby acquires its truth, its being evident in human thought.”¹⁵² The first chapter of this thesis included logos as one of the three rhetorical appeals. It is the appeal to reason, and is used to persuade others that something is either right or wrong. This ability is one that separates humans from animals. Gadamer explains that it is not the object itself that carries meaning in the human mind, but that the language describing the object conveys its meaning – complying with the relationship between signified and signifier respectively. Through language, the signified object is subsequently experienced as true and even “evident”. Foucault likewise identifies this connection between logos and perceived truth:

At first sight it would seem that, to discover the movement of a logos everywhere elevating singularities into concepts, finally enabling immediate consciousness to

150. Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology* (London: Atlantic Books, 1997).

151. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 228.

152. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 462.

deploy all the rationality in the world, is certainly to place discourse at the centre of speculation. But, in truth, this logos is really only another discourse already in operation, or rather, it is things and events themselves which *insensibly* become discourse in the unfolding of the essential secrets. Discourse is no longer much more than the shimmering of a truth about to be born in its own eyes.¹⁵³

These theories argue that a world-view can be created through language. It is important to bear in mind that our society is structured by discourse, and that an inescapable truth is here linguistically created. Debates and opinions are all brought into existence through language – a language which is defined by power. In analysing politicians’ rhetoric, we should acknowledge it as part of a larger discourse, which is “no longer much more than the shimmering of a truth about to be born in its own eyes”.

This chapter has summarised the main ideas implicated by Foucault’s concept of discourse, and Gadamer’s perspective of language as a view on the world, and shown how Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet fit into this broader framework of linguistic philosophy. Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet are aware of certain rules inherent to specifically Dutch political discourse. They use this awareness in order to either place themselves outside of the discourse, and hereby enable themselves to communicate “masked truth”¹⁵⁴; or to place themselves within the discourse by arguing that what they are saying is in fact not against the rules – for example, when Wilders mentions that he has not said anything which is not allowed by freedom of speech, or when Baudet argues that generalisation is not a bad thing, but necessary to thought. Baudet further uses French quotes and ample musical metaphors that establish a particular form of discourse not open to everyone. The politicians thus simultaneously place themselves within discourse, and oppose themselves to it – both

153. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 228.

154. Foucault, *Discourse on Language*, 217.

strategies are inherently rhetorical, however, and still include rules of exclusion which means that they do not successfully escape discourse but remain within it.

Conclusion: Uniting the Perspectives

This thesis set out to analyse the rhetoric of Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet – specifically on the themes of Islam, ethnic minorities, immigration and national pride. It provided close-readings of primary sources by the three politicians, and aimed not only to identify individual characteristics but also common points that might tell us more about this specific rhetorical style in Dutch political discourse. The linguistic analyses showed how the politicians make use of rhetorical strategies to emphasise the value of what they are saying, to create emotional responses in the audience, and to hereby make their arguments more convincing. The strategies used ranged from general rhetorical devices such as an appeal to pathos, and populist characteristics such as simple language, to mechanisms of (Islamophobic) othering that established the own identity as superior to the Other. Placing these texts within a context of linguistic philosophy, it became clear that the politicians play with their awareness of discourse in order to place themselves outside it and convey a sense of forbidden truth, or to participate successfully within the political discourse by emphasising that what they are saying is in line with the Dutch constitution.

Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet are well-known for their perspectives on Islam, ethnic minorities, immigration and national pride; areas in which their standpoints are also the most controversial. I identified and described these four main themes in primary sources by the politicians, and discovered that the themes are in fact all connected. All three politicians emphasise the importance of national unity and attempt to excite the emotion of pride in their audience, using appeals to pathos and personal pronouns to convey that this national identity belongs to the Dutch citizens. The Dutch national identity is described in positive, occasionally hyperbolic, terms, but Dutch values and traditions are also presented as changing. The rhetoric creates feelings of nostalgia for an idealised past in which the Dutch were powerful and thriving. In the present, this great nation is threatened by immigration,

ethnic minorities taking over, and the growing presence of Islam in the Netherlands. The rhetoric thus presents the nation as endangered by external factors that are diametrically opposed to the national values which created greatness and unity. The threatening groups are presented as the Other, in opposition to which the Self gains an ideal identity. The personal pronouns ‘we/us/our’ are here starkly opposed to ‘they/them/their’. The rhetorical connection between these four themes in a way constitutes a vicious circle, because an emphasised national pride leads to a fear of the Other that might change or endanger the nation, and this fear of the Other leads to a desire of returning to the nation of which one is proud. The politicians reassure their voters that under their leadership, the threatening Other will be kept out and the great nation will be restored.

As expected, many general rhetorical strategies were present in the politicians’ rhetoric. This is a logical finding, as all language is inherently rhetorical, especially political language, and it is precisely these common strategies, the presence of which we no longer notice, that make speech successful and convincing. I had also expected to find populist strategies and mechanisms of othering in the politicians’ rhetoric. Interestingly, Thierry Baudet’s rhetoric makes use of more complicated language, instead of the simple language commonly associated with populist rhetoric. This opposes his rhetoric to that of Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders. Since Thierry Baudet’s texts do display many other populist rhetorical characteristics, his inflated language raises the question of what his objective is. This is a question which does not occur in previous research on populist rhetoric. How could inflated language still present him as a politician supporting the rights of ‘the ordinary people’? I have suggested that obtuse language could potentially serve to confuse Baudet’s audience as to what it is he is saying, and through doing so to make it sound important and true. Leith argues: “[i]f you characterise something as the opposite of your own proposition, and then attack it ...a dozy audience will think that by damaging the apparent opposition, you’ve

proved your case”¹⁵⁵; and this could very well be what Baudet is doing when responding to his opponents’ attack of his words by attacking theirs in return. Baudet moreover employs musical metaphors, leading to an interesting discussion of whether he is establishing his own kind of discourse – potentially allowing him to escape certain rules, and to bring his points across more efficiently. I had also not expected to find such clear examples of Wilders and Baudet engaging with the concept of discourse themselves, thus playing with their placement within it. It was striking to see how they simultaneously (try to) fit outside and within discourse. I have not come across other research in which Foucault’s famous theory is applied to close-readings of actual examples by specific politicians. This is an interesting perspective, as individual politicians do participate in a power-dynamic as described by Foucault.

This raises the question of how other leaders or parties in the Dutch government fit into the dynamics of this political discourse, and how they engage with one another – for example, left-wing versus right-wing parties. Further research employing a similar method to the one used in this thesis would be fruitful in order to create a large data base from which a general model can be derived for analysing Dutch political discourse. More engagement with linguistic-philosophical frameworks such as those of Michel Foucault, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Roland Barthes would be an advisable further step in reinforcing the initial observations made in this thesis. It would also be useful to include theories on legal language in order to explain how discriminatory statements can be made without receiving punishment under Dutch regulations.

Considering the great media attention that these kinds of political expressions receive, and taking into account that both the controversiality and success of the politicians are rooted

155. Leith, *You Talkin’ to Me*, 100.

in their language, it struck me that a linguistic approach was lacking. Especially Geert Wilders has been prevalent in research, but his popularity has mainly been explained from a socio-political perspective. This thesis has added to knowledge about these particular politicians, and about this type of rhetoric more generally in a few regards. Firstly, it has provided a linguistic approach in an area of research that had not previously included it. Secondly, it has been based on close-readings that directly engage with a wide sample of texts from primary sources (as opposed to a general or computer-based methodology that identifies general characteristics without providing in-depth analyses). Thirdly, it has included two additional politicians (instead of solely focusing on Wilders, being the most popular one) in order to derive common characteristics as a step towards describing this area in Dutch political rhetoric. Even though Pim Fortuyn is no longer active, he is an important figure to include since as Paul Lucardie explains: “the rise of the PVV (Party for Freedom) and the polarisation in Dutch politics would probably not have occurred without him, at least not to this extent.”¹⁵⁶ In the elections following Pim Fortuyn’s death, Geert Wilders received thirty percent of his votes from voters previously belonging to Fortuyn’s party LPF. This is not surprising, since the same themes occur in Fortuyn’s and Wilders’s political ideas, although Wilders takes them a bit further, and expresses himself in a more controversial way. It is also especially advantageous to focus more on Thierry Baudet, as his position in the government has quadrupled from two to eight seats after the last election (2021), and he is thus currently an active and influential force in Dutch politics. The parties led by Geert Wilders (PVV) and Thierry Baudet (FvD) together, moreover, constitute almost one-fifth of the House of Representatives of the Netherlands, showing that they are widely supported and have an influential position within Dutch politics. It is thus important to know how these

155. Lucardie, “De Erfenis van Fortuyn”, [De erfenis van Fortuyn - Montesquieu Instituut \(montesquieu-instituut.nl\)](https://www.montesquieu-instituut.nl) Original text: “de opkomst van de PVV en de polarisatie in de Nederlandse politiek zouden zonder hem waarschijnlijk niet zijn opgetreden, althans niet in deze mate.”

politicians are able to communicate their views successfully, and to gain such widespread support despite their controversiality. Some of their expressions border on the offensive and even though they have been called out on discrimination (and in Wilders' case, also taken to court for it), they have thus far escaped complete social prohibition or legal punishment. My analysis has shown how Fortuyn, Wilders and Baudet make use of many different strategies in order to achieve these different goals: convince their audience, gain their support, and simultaneously other a certain group in an ambiguous way that still allows them to participate within Dutch political discourse. Finally, my thesis has added a linguistic-philosophical framework to reflect on the rhetoricality of all language, the world as linguistically created and discourse as a power-imbued structure that cannot be escaped. It is interesting to see how real-world, everyday examples fit into these grand theoretical frameworks in order to better understand both the dynamics underlying and structuring societal debates, and examples of these influential philosophical theories in practice. The combination of all these different aspects of rhetoric has not occurred in previous research, and this thesis has thus attempted to provide a more in-depth discussion of the reasons behind both the success and controversiality of these politicians. This method can be applied to other persons and texts as well and could be a helpful aid in gaining a more complete understanding of (political) discourse.

Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet express their political views both provokingly and successfully. They manage to do so, first of all, by relying on rhetorical devices to strengthen the effects their arguments have on their audience. Secondly, they employ populist strategies to communicate that they are representatives of the ordinary people and their interests. Thirdly, there are mechanisms of othering present in their texts that point to the existence of a threatening Other to the ideal state of the Self: the Dutch national identity. Finally, especially Wilders and Baudet refer directly to Dutch political discourse in

order to place themselves outside it and convey the truth lacking from the existing discourse, or to place themselves within it and justify that what they are saying is not breaking any rules. Language is powerful, and the language of Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet has been especially powerful in filling in the political landscape of the Netherlands, in excluding minority groups and in creating a world-view that invokes fear, pride and reassurance in their followers. Their rhetoric is thus influential in many ways and this thesis has demonstrated why.

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