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Gender and sexualities in the European far-right political discourse

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ABSTRACT

In the past decades there has been considerable advances of political far-right parties in Europe. Some far-right populist parties have strengthened their political position among youth, the working class, women and gay-and-lesbian rights people in the recent electoral moments by including gender issues and 'sexual emancipation' in their political programmes and public discourses. They have been progressing towards a new type of nationalism in which women's rights and sexual minorities' rights support are seen as advanced and progressive in opposition of immigrant communities, particularly from Muslim countries.

This dissertation aims to explore the use of gender and gay-and-lesbian issues through a qualitative analysis of anti-Islam political documents and speeches used by far-right parties in France (*Rassemblement National/Front National*) and The Netherlands (*The Party for Freedom*), where gender and sexual minorities issues have been explicitly visible in their political discourse in recent years.

KEYWORDS: Gender; Sexualities; Far-Right; Europe; Nationalism; Islam; France; The Netherlands.

RESUMO

Nas últimas décadas, têm-se observado avanços de partidos políticos de extrema-direita na Europa. Alguns partidos populistas de extrema-direita nos momentos eleitorais mais recentes têm fortalecido a sua posição política entre os jovens, trabalhadores, mulheres e pessoas gay e lésbicas, incluindo as questões de gênero e de "emancipação sexual" nos seus programas e discursos políticos. Os partidos em questão têm progredido em direção a um novo tipo de nacionalismo no qual os direitos das mulheres e o apoio aos direitos das minorias sexuais são vistos como progressistas em oposição às comunidades de imigrantes, particularmente vindas de países muçulmanos.

Esta dissertação tem como objetivo explorar a utilização das questões de gênero e das pessoas gay e lésbicas através de uma análise qualitativa de documentos e discursos políticos anti-islão, usados pelos partidos de extrema-direita na França (*Rassemblement National/Front National*) e nos Países Baixos (*The Party for Freedom*), onde as questões de gênero e das minorias sexuais têm sido explicitamente visíveis.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Gênero; Sexualidades; Extrema-Direita; Europa; Nacionalismo; Islão; França; Países Baixos.

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GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CNFE: *Cercle National des Femme d'Europe* (National Circle of European Women)

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

PVV: *Partij voor de Vrijehei* (Party for Freedom)

RN/FN: *Rassemblement National/Front National* (National Front)

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decades there has been considerable advances of far-right parties in Europe. They have been attracting the attention of many voters throughout an anti-establishment discursive approach, campaigning against immigration, the European Union elite and multiculturalism. By claiming to be the true voice of the people and the only alternative to the political system, European far-right political parties with electoral success have distanced themselves from the traditional fascism from the 1930s by adopting a post-industrial approach (Ignazi, 1995; Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017).

The success of the 'new' far-right in Europe is not momentary and consistent in every country. It does not spring from poor economic conditions in Europe, but rather from social and political structures in the societies. They have been arising in European countries in which the people appear to be discontent and distrustful with the mainstream political parties. Far-right parties tend to act in the gap left by the absence of real opposition within the mainstream politics, while claiming that the traditional right and left parties act politically alike (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017). Simultaneously, we have been witnessing some European far-right parties with an increasing populist and anti-EU approach (Vasilopoulou, 2018), and other far-right parties supported by anti-feminist (Petchesky, 1981), racist (Rydgren, 2008), xenophobic (Mudde, 2007) and especially anti-Muslim elements (Bartlett, Birdwell & Littler 2011).

In this way, far-right European parties have strengthened their position among youth, the working class but also women and non-heterosexual people (lesbian and gay people mostly) in the very recent electoral moments by including gender issues and 'sexual emancipation' in the programmes of far-right populist parties (Bilge, 2012; Puar, 2007; Farris, 2017; Lange & Mügge, 2015; Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2010; Bitzan, 2017; Farris & Rottenberg, 2017). This inclusion of gender in the ideology is hardly new but it has significantly changed in recent times. While far-right parties do not support feminist and LGBT movements, as they tend to defend traditional gender and family roles, they also have been progressing towards a new type of nationalism in which 'women's rights and gay-and-lesbian rights are deemed crucial civilizational values of the Western society, while migrant communities, particularly Muslims, are cast as menacing them' (Bilge, 2012).

As most western European countries recognize lesbian/gay legal and sexual rights by legalizing same-sex marriage or civil partnerships, and in some cases the legal adoption of children, gay-and-lesbian rights' support is seen as advanced and progressive culture in opposition of Muslim cultures and countries (Lange & Mügge, 2015; Hekma, 2011; Butler, 2008). Anti-Islam political positions from the far-right have been gradually linked to gender and

family since the middle 1990s. As part of this development, anti-immigrant political positions have not only become focused on Muslim immigrants, but have become explicitly gendered (Lange & Mügge, 2015).

As Europe is being pictured as the 'avatar of both freedom and modernity' (Butler, 2008:2), Muslim citizens are depicted as backwards, anti-gender equality, homophobic and thus, against the European culture. Islam, multiculturalism and gender and sexualities issues have become subjects of heated debates in numerous European countries. This dissertation aims to explore the use of gender and gay-and-lesbian issues in the anti-Islam political discourses used by far-right parties in France and The Netherlands, where gender and sexual minorities issues have been explicitly visible in their political discourse in recent years in their respective most well-known far-right parties: *Rassemblement National/Front National* in France and *The Party for Freedom* in The Netherlands.

Finally, throughout the dissertation it will be used the term "gender" as the socially constructed performative repetition of acts associated with being male or female (Butler, 1990), and also the term "sexual minorities" and gay-and-lesbian rights. The broader term of LGBT (or *queer* politics) does not apply in this dissertation as bisexuals and trans people play a minor role (or totally null) in the discourses that will be explored.

2. STATE OF THE ART

2.1 THE 'NEW' FAR-RIGHT

In recent years, Europe has witnessed the emergence of supporters and voters of powerful new far-right parties. While European far-right political parties have distanced themselves from the traditional fascism from 1930s and adopted a populist approach, 'new' far-right's existence in Europe is not momentary and consistent in every country. It does not spring from poor economic conditions in Europe, but rather from the discontent and distrustful feeling of the people with the mainstream political parties (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017).

Western far-right parties are complex. There has been a complex academic debate about their conceptualization as they can be divided in many types: while some are rooted in explicitly fascist and anti-democratic ways, others demand 'more democracy' as well as the protection of individual rights. While some support the free market, others advocate economic self-sufficiency and mercantilism (Goodwin, 2011). Others differ themselves for their anti-establishment strategy (Taggart, 1995). And finally, some target immigrants and Muslims as the dangerous nation-state enemies and others, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe countries, have a more anti-Roma approach (Goodwin, 2011 & Carter, 2005).

Nevertheless, Ignazi (1997) divided the far right into two groups: old traditional parties which link to Fascism and its heritage, and the newly emerged 'post-industrial' parties. The second group is what interests the most to this analysis: they reject Fascism, while they add present beliefs, attitudes and values characteristic to the post-industrial society (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017). Most of these post-industrial far-right parties developed in the 1980s on a post-WWII socio-political context. According to Ignazi, they are "the by-product of the conflicts of the post-industrial society where the material interests are no longer so central and bourgeoisie and working class are neither so neatly defined nor so radically confronted" (1995:6).

The post-war economic and cultural transformations have blurred the class identification with the development of the tertiary sector, the decline of the capability of the traditional labour relations to determine social relations, defined by more than material interests: values. Some of these new post-industrial values concern the defense of the natural community and the national identity from foreigners and immigrants, the claim for more law and order, and the search for a "charismatic" leader who express a desire of protecting moral standards and the traditional social bonds instead of over self-achievement and excess of individualism (Ignazi, 1995). In addition, most post-industrial far-right parties do not share any nostalgia for the old fascist experience, they nevertheless express criticism inspired by a "search for harmony, an

exaltation of natural community and a hostility towards foreigners, a faith in hierarchical structures and a distrust of democratic individual representation” (Ignazi, 1995:5).

Ignazi calls it a '*silent counter-revolution*' as an analogy to Inglehart's '*silent revolution*'. While Inglehart's idea is massively inclined in favour of the left-wing by producing new political alignments and new political movements on the left, the right-wing area has been revitalized (Rauta, 2012). The far-right parties tend to show themselves as the 'true voice of the people', especially of those affected and disadvantaged by globalization as the middle and the working class. These parties pose as a response for the need of identity from the disadvantaged people, relying themselves under the nationalist movement and posing 'other' cultures, particularly Muslim cultures, as the enemies causing loss of cultural identity and crime increase in the nation (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017; Rauta, 2012). In a sum, they nevertheless express distrust for multiculturalism throughout their political discourse, while playing by democratic rules and elections.

Electoral success appears to be an important opportunity for developing the far-right parties, and one key feature of successful far-right parties is to distance themselves from Fascism from the 1930s (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017). The overall discontent with the mainstream political parties, the dissatisfaction with the way democracy is being presented by their national government, and the distrust towards the official institutions of the European Union (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017) increase the chance of a good electoral performance. Moreover, the far-right takes advantage of the condition in which the voters feel discontented with the performance of mainstream parties, by portraying them as 'all the same' (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012:4) specially towards non-strict immigration policies, unemployment and decreased welfare measures in EU's positions. In this way, the far-right now articulates itself as the only alternative to change the current state of democracy in electoral moments with a catch-all dynamic (Kirchheimer, 1966). Voting is no longer the confirmation of the belonging to a specific social group but becomes an individual choice, an affirmation of a personal value system (Ignazi, 1995).

The far-right in their earlier stages recruited its voters usually among the '*petit bourgeoisie*', the small-scale self-employed (Harteveld, Van Der Brug, Dahlberg & Kokkonen, 2015). Then, the social base of far-right parties broadened to include the working and lower-middle classes, particularly among older and younger generations, classically the unemployed or the less educated working-class men living in industrial towns or farmers, who are cynical of their economic future (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017). Now, its social base has been broadening up to include as well non-traditional working-class voters who share middle level

of education and higher levels of job insecurity (Rydgren, 2013; Arzheimer, 2018), or even to include more highly educated, more women and younger people (Lancaster, 2019).

Recent electoral moments have increasingly enabled far-right parties to attract various types of support, often beyond the stereotypes of the traditional far-right voters. Where parties have been able to mark their distance from the traditional Fascism, they have modernized and convince new voters (Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012). According to Ignazi, the far-right attracts 'the losers of modernization' (Hainsworth, 2012:8), or 'angry white men' – notice the gendered connotation – who are feeling threatened by rapid changes in post-industrial societies, threatened by the new cultural interactions of globalization, threatened by the presumed 'proletarianization' of the established middle-classes, and thus, threatened by 'the Other' (Harteveld, Van Der Brug, Dahlberg & Kokkonen, 2015). This 'Other' individual in the new in most cases is linked to racialized foreigner bodies and Muslim immigrants, who may destroy the civic and cultural institutions established in Western and Catholic countries (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017; Rauta, R, 2012; Puar, 2007), causing a xenophobic and racist rhetoric. Citing Pierre-André Taguieff's contemporary racism theories, the 'new' right may critique Muslim cultures as a matter of defense of cultural identities, using the "the right to be different" (Taguieff, 1990:116). Contemporary racism's new modes of legitimation derive from the refusal of transforming specific cultures into multiracial societies losing the nations' cultural specificity (Taguieff, 1990;1988). The "right to be [ethnic and culturally] different" has been transformed into an instrument of legitimation for the 'new' right to be defending a "threatened" national or European identity (Taguieff, 1990; 1988).

Moreover, far-right European parties have also approached women and non-heterosexual voters in the very recent electoral moments by including gender issues and 'sexual emancipation' in the programmes of far-right populist parties (Puar, 2007; Farris, 2017; Farris & Rottenberg, 2017; Bilge, 2012; Lange & Mügge, 2015; Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2010; Bitzan, 2017; Lancaster, 2019). Lancaster (2019) calls this new far-right parties and supporters as 'sexually-modern nativists'. They are committed to gender equality, gay-and-lesbian rights for much of its existence, claiming this to be a bastion of Western society. They support strong government, strongly opposed to immigration and have likely younger, more highly educated, more female voters compared with other radical right supporters.

2.2 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY AND ITS CONNECTION TO WESTERN NATIONALISMS

Gender is characterized as the “mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized” (Butler, 2004:43). Re-acknowledging Beauvoir’s classic feminist argument “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (1989), which reveals the category of women as socially gendered and constructed from the absolute subject – the man – as kind of social formation determined by patriarchal ideology. The essence of what it means to be a man and a woman is defined by the male patriarchal society and not naturalized by born. By claiming that there is a “natural” division between women and men, we assume that the essence of “men” and “women” have always existed and will always exist in the same matter, naturalizing history and ignoring social changes (Wittig, 1992).

In other words, for Judith Butler (1990) gender is a complex concept that reflects the performance of the totality of acts and behaviors of a person supported by heteronormativity, which means the acceptance of heterosexuality as a ‘natural’ and social sovereign norm (Çınar, 2015). Gender becomes a performativity. It is not a singular act, but a repetition or a ritual, which achieves its effects through its culturally and temporally sustained naturalization (Butler, 1990). It is in this way that the historically established binary opposition between men and women has been socially constructed through narratives of compulsory heterosexuality. With *Gender Trouble* (1990) Butler understands heterosexuality as a powerful force that constitutes bodies and subjects, instead of merely as an intimate practice. Gendered, sexed bodies and female/male subjects are effects of a power formation called the ‘heterosexual matrix’ or heteronormativity (Butler 1990; Warner, 1991).

This existing sovereignty of heterosexuality is powerful enough to determine the functions of man and woman in a permanent established structure of gender binaries with gender constructed performative roles. Thus, people’s identities are an effect of a heterosexual power formation – not only ‘women’ and ‘men’, but ‘lesbians’ and ‘gays’ too. The historical disavowal of homosexuality is considered the precondition for the naturalization of heterosexuality (Warner, 1991), which reiterates gender and sexualities as political identities (Ludwig, 2011).

Demands from feminist movements and from the gay-and-lesbian movement for juridical recognition and equality of rights have been co-opted over the last decades. Legal discrimination and criminalization against gays-and-lesbian in West Europe have decreased. There is a rise of registered partnerships, coming-out of gay and lesbian politicians, as well as the increasing importance of the ‘pink economy’ – or pink capitalism (Ye, 2017; Cornwall, 1997)

– and the inclusion of gay or lesbian characters in mainstream soap operas, are all examples of how ‘the border between heterosexuality and homosexuality has become more open and that the continuum of ‘normality’ has expanded’ (Ludwig, 2011:48). However, this may not clearly mean the decrease of the power exercised by the ‘heterosexual matrix’ or heteronormativity in the constitution of intelligible subjects and the social order. These progresses are viewed again by Butler (1993) as only a transformation of heteronormativity. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Butler replaces the concept of the ‘heterosexual matrix’ with ‘hegemony’, as a formation of state of power that operates through ‘intellectual and moral leadership’ following Gramsci’s theory (Gramsci, 1985:57).

Approaching gender studies with a notion of hegemony enables us to put into the analysis family tax policies and social laws that only define female or male ‘beings’ within romantic, sexual and family relationships. Heteronormative hegemony is therefore a form of non-judicial violence, as it claims for a sense of coercion, order and ‘normality’ in which the individuals should be inserted. In neoliberal nation-states as in the West Europe, the increase of visibility and juridical equality of gay and lesbian ways of living, still means equality according to heterosexual and patriarchal norms of living. In this way, Lisa Duggan (2003) introduces the term ‘homonormativity’ in order to indicate how certain forms of gay and lesbian politics become part of hegemonic alliances in West Europe. This means lesbian and gay identities, gained individualized freedom at the cost of giving up on the ‘normalization’ of the bodies and struggles against other kinds of domination and violence, by being inserted in romantic relationships in the same normative rules heterosexual relationships are. For example, the bid for gay marriage accords an “equal but different” status: it gathers same-sex marriages as equal to heterosexual, monogamous and romantic relationships.

Furtherly, Jasbir Puar (2007) radicalizes the ‘homonormativity’ concept by focusing on racist violence, militarism and war that she names ‘homonationalism’ as the same kind of national mobilization of gay normative rights against Muslims immigrants and racialized Others. Puar (2007) claims that homonormativity is both disciplined by the nation and its heteronormative underpinnings. The author particularly analyses homonationalism dynamics after USA 9/11 terrorist attacks, where it was visible a parallel between the whiteness of gay and homosexual bodies accepted in the “us” (“us”: white, European, Western, Christian, civilized, “women-friendly”) and the nationalist rhetoric of “us-versus-them” presuming a compulsory heterosexuality of colored bodies of the threatening foreigners (“them”: non-white, non-European, non-western, Muslim, uncivilized Others). Puar’s homonationalism thus both describes the mobilization of gay-and-lesbian rights against Muslims and racialized Others within the nationalist framework, but also refers to the integration of “homonormativity” as domesticated homosexual politics.

Femininity, women and female bodies' link to the nation concept is complex. If in one hand, femininity is not considered patriotic, and it is either absent in discourses on nationalism or slighted as if it is linked to bad performance to not being a 'real man' (Christian, Dowler, & Cuomo, 2016), in the other hand, women in nationalist projects still develop strong cultural and symbolic roles by being the bearers of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997). According to Cas Mudde (2007) there was always consistent gender ideology in the far-right parties: the equating of women's politics with family and sexuality politics.

Following the same view as Puar's coined homonationalism, Sara Farris (2017) brought us a new element directly referring to the "convergence" between women's rights and anti-Islam politics, calling it "femonationalism". Farris describes it as the attempts of western European far-right parties to advance xenophobic and racist politics through the advertising gender equality, as well as the involvement of well-known feminists and femocrats in the current framing of Islam as essentially misogynistic religion and culture. According to Farris and Rottenberg (2017), there is a profound contradiction as feminists and femocrats urge non-western Muslim and migrant women to 'liberate themselves while channeling them towards the very sphere (domestic, low paying and precarious jobs) from which the feminist movement had historically tried to liberate women' (2017:10).

Puar (2007), Farris (2017) and Duggan (2003) concepts will lead us to the recent connection with the new far-right developed in the next chapters.

2.3 GENDER AND SEXUALITIES IN THE NEW FAR-RIGHT

The inclusion of gender and sexuality issues in the far-right ideology is hardly new but it has significantly changed in recent times as they actually feature remarkably in European political debates on multiculturalism and Islam. With the emergence of gay-and-lesbian liberation movements, new discourses and practices reshaped political agency, reinforcing an ethos of individual freedom and autonomy (Mepschen, Duyvendak, & Tonkens, 2010). If before the issues of sexual diversity, emancipation of women's sexuality and homosexuality were brought into position against the ideal of the white, traditional heterosexual family (Claus & Virchow, 2017), now, as Europe is being pictured as the 'avatar of both freedom and modernity' (Butler, 2008:2), sexuality topics are pivotal and gay-and-lesbian rights have been recast as an operative technology in the production and disciplining of other cultures as Muslim communities (Puar, 2007: xxi).

European far-right parties have been progressing towards a post-industrial type of nationalism in which "sexual rights are now advanced within secular critiques of religion, and in the recasting of citizenship within multicultural contexts" (Mepschen, Duyvendak, &

Tonkens, 2010:965), or used in order to criticize Muslim communities as backwards and enemies of the European culture. The progresses on women's and gay-and-lesbian rights are deemed crucial civilization values of the Western society (Bilge, 2012) and some parties supported by sexist, racist and especially anti-Muslim elements, disguised as progressive nationalism and 'real feminism' in their political discourse (Farris, 2017; Farris & Rottenberg, 2017 Puar, 2007).

Following Taguieff's (1990; 1988) considerations on contemporary racism, Muslim cultures are "devilized" as if they were presenting "real" sexism, patriarchy, intolerance and homophobia, while western European countries are presented as sites of 'superior' gender relations, enjoying liberal democratic values of individual freedom, emancipation of lesbians, gays and women, gender equality, freedom of expression and separation of church and state (Farris & Rottenberg, 2017; Lange & Mügge, 2015). What Bitzan considered "ethnicisation of sexism" (2017:72) is, thus, reinforced by the presence of immigrants: the foreign man represents a threat against women and against "racial pureness" of the next generation; simultaneously, young men face the need to celebrate their soldiership masculinity by protecting women in the service of the nation. In the same stance, Farris & Rotterberg (2017) that there are few high-profile women declaring themselves as feminists from left-wing to far populist right, as Marine Le Pen from *Front National* (now recalled as *Rassemblement National*) in France, who loudly applaud well educated middle class white women who struggle to cultivate careers and raise children at the same time going accordingly to her family's ethnic background.

The same discourse has been happening towards gay-and-lesbian communities: as the tolerance for gays and lesbians are increasingly become part of European's identity, the nation should "protect" them against Muslim 'villains'. Puar (2011) states that for the new far-right the 'Woman Question' is now being supplemented with the 'Homosexual Question'. To the question of 'how do you treat your women?' used since colonial times, it has been added 'how well do you treat your homosexuals?' (Puar, 2011:139).

This use of gay and women rights agenda have put progressive anti-racists, feminists and LGBT activists in an impossible position: taking up the defense of lesbian-and-gay rights and public gayness may become associated with Islamophobia, while solidarity with Muslims against Islamophobia is represented, especially by the populist right, as trivializing or even supporting 'Muslim' homophobia (Mepschen, Duyvendak, & Tonkens, 2010:965). Still, the far-right in Europe is different and it has mixed over recent decades. Different parties in different countries have experienced it in their own ways. The French *Rassemblement National* (RN) or the Dutch *Party for Freedom* (PVV) seems to have utilized gender parity and the defense of

the supposed 'natural' heteronormative family to further a racist and anti-immigrant agenda, constructing the European normative "heterosexual social order as the basis of the racial family" (Claus & Virchow. 2017:307), while supporting gay-and-lesbian homonormativity, equal to heterosexuals.

Foucault emphasized before: sexuality is "a field of vital strategic importance" (2003:251) since its disciplinary control is a form of permanent surveillance both in public and in private, and also because of the procreative effects, where sexuality does not only concern individuals but "the multiple unity of population" (Foucault, 2003:251). The conception of sexuality as heteronormative and homonormative, strictly regulated by state institutions as part of a biopolitical approach, is playing a decisive role in far-right politics (Claus, & Virchow, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

Parties' gender and sexualities political positions can be mainly reflected in official documents such as election manifestos, parliamentary proceedings, broadcast interviews, political speeches, constitutions or laws (Laver & Garry, 2000; Chilton, 2004). Communication is central to politics and typically involves persuasion and bargaining (Hague et al. 1998; Miller, 1991).

Methodologically, it will be qualitative analyzed the most recent election manifestos since 2000 (from 2000 to 2019) of the selected parties as they are authoritative documents since party leaders cannot easily depart from them and also they provide historical evidence of party poly positions over time (Laver & Garry, 2000; Lange & Mügge, 2015), official interviews and statements provided to media that have publicly acknowledge gender and sexuality issues in the same period of time. Also, it will be widely used literature review specific to gender and sexuality far-right discourse and policies.

For selecting the election manifestos, I will be using the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) online database. The MRG has developed for 20 years the largest source of data on party manifestos. They have compiled nearly all manifestos of political parties contesting nearly all elections in most post-war parliamentary democracies (Laver & Garry, 2000). After selecting and translating the party manifestos, I will select the main political speeches on broadcast or media interviews or online content on the parties' website on the issues of gender and sexualities, using literature review as a background. It will be important to identify the substantive positions of the parties on these issues to identify the way they are emphasized (Laver & Garry, 2000).

Following the research model of Lange & Mügge (2015), it will be explored the political positions the parties manifest in stances on ‘classical’ gender issues (such as the division between labor and care within men and women, gender roles and women reproductive rights) on the one hand, and on ‘newer’ issues related to gender, sexualities – as an adaptation to include sexual minorities’ issues to the model – immigration and ‘Islam’ on the other. In a sum, it will be explored texts that addressed gender issues, emancipation of women, men, women’s rights (including abortion), sexual diversity, gay-and-lesbian¹ rights, sexual emancipation, heteronormativity, family structure in opposition to Islam cultures (table 1). As the research method was inductive in nature and focused on the explicit content of the manifestos in Lange & Mügge (2015), I will follow the same model.

Table 1 - Party interest in Gender, Sexuality, Immigration and 'Islam Practices'

Issues discussed	
Classical Gender issues	Gender equality between men and women
	Childcare
	Marriage and Family
	Abortion
	Labour market participation
	Healthcare
	Gay-and-lesbian rights
Sexuality issues	Sexual emancipation
	Sexual violence
	Heteronormativity/Homonormativity
	Homonationalism
	Immigration
Immigration and Islamic practices	Segregation in public spaces
	Women’s rights within Islamic cultures
	Gay-and-lesbian rights within Islamic cultures
	The veil/headscarf

¹ As I mentioned in the Introduction chapter, I deliberately use the term gay-and-lesbian instead of LGBT or *queer* due to the invisibility of bisexuality, transgender issues and other forms of sexual diversity in the far right political agenda. However, lesbian issues face huge invisibility when comparing to gay men.

The parties taken into account to this analysis are those which have national political influence by entering the national or regional parliaments with electoral performance and they have the most relevant post-industrial discourse favorable towards women's and sexual minorities' rights. They are respectively, *Rassemblement National* in France and *the Party for Freedom* in The Netherlands. They all have explicitly exhibited political discourses related with gender and sexual minorities in recent years and the parties have all been covered widely by the media.

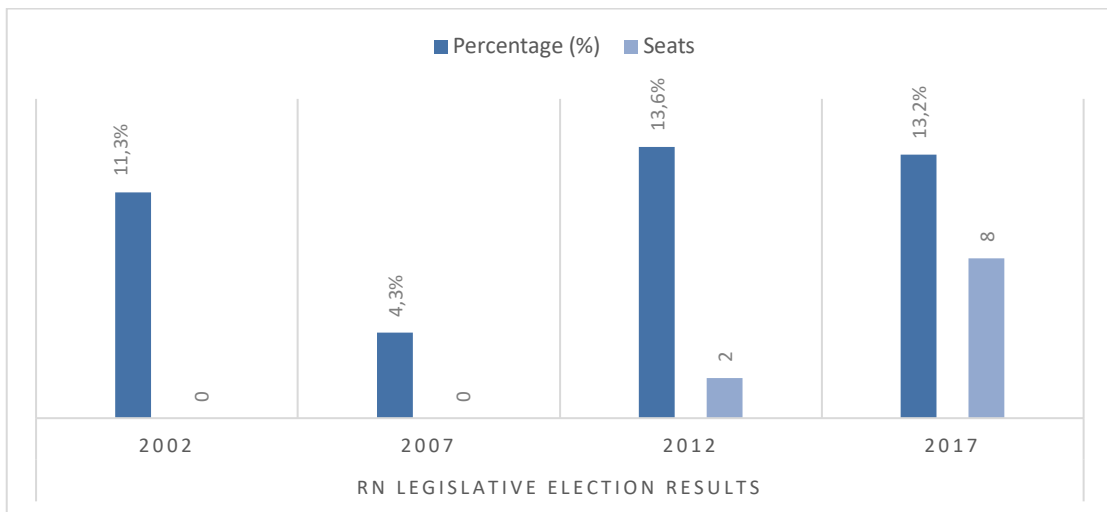
4. RASSEMBLEMENT NATIONAL (RN) IN FRANCE

“Le FN est pas ‘gay friendly’, ni l'inverse, il est french friendly”, Florian Philippot (RN)

In 2011, Jean-Marie Le Pen's daughter, Marine Le Pen, succeeded her father as leader of the French party of the Front National with the declared objective of transforming the party into a large mainstream party with a vocation to govern (Scrinzi, 2017). Front National, now recalled as *Rassemblement National* (RN) since 2018 has progressively risen and prevailed in France politics. After 2012 legislative elections, the far-right party became the third political force in France and thus it became not only tolerated, but also courted (Dubslaff, 2017) – refer to graph 2 below.

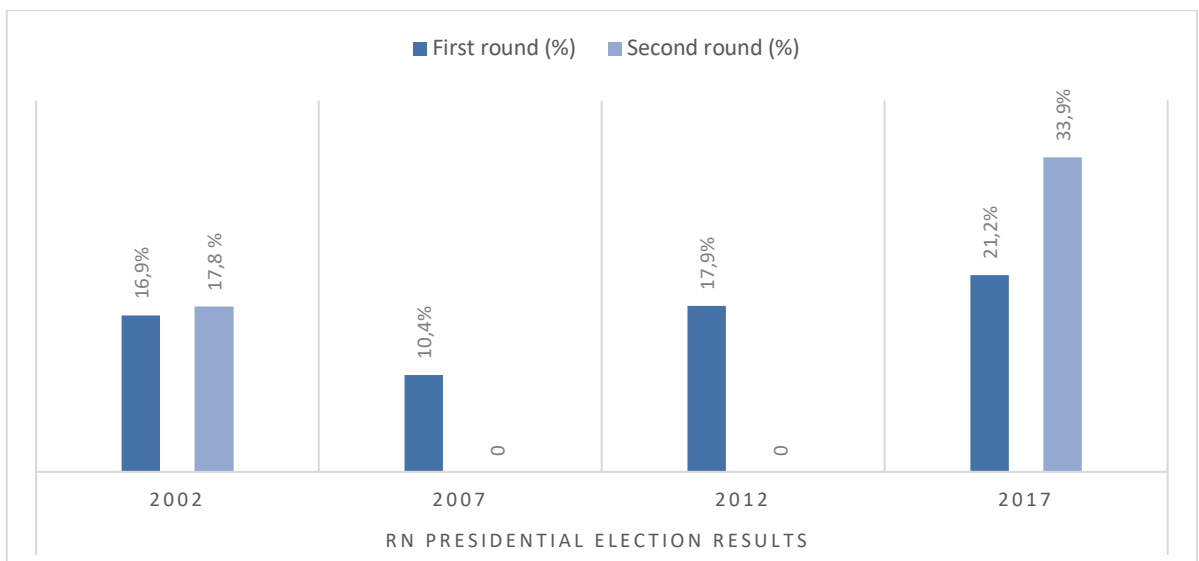
Rassemblement National has been enjoying an upward trend and can count on tens of thousands of supporters (RN has gained a record of 7.6 million votes in the first round of the 2017 presidential election, and an incredible record of more than 10 million votes in the second decisive round of the same election (*Ministère de L'Intérieur*, 2017) - it was the first time a candidate from RN continued to the second round since 2002) and has undergone a stronger feminisation in the last few years.

Figure 1 - RN Legislative Election Results



Source: Adapted from Party and Elections database. Retrieved from: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/france.html>

Figure 2 - RN Presidential election results



Sources: 2017 results adapted from Statista database, retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/887844/french-presidential-election-results/>; and 2002 – 2012 results adapted from European Election database, retrieved from https://nsd.no/european_election_database/country/france/presidential_elections.html

Between 1980s and 2012, the women's proportion had increased to 45% by 2012 (Dubslaff, 2017) with the influencing presence of its female leader. Le Pen has engaged in a strategy of 'modernisation' and 'de-demonisation' (*dédiabolisation*) of the party's public image,

attracting a great deal of attention in the media, and building a novelty in the context of the French far-right (Scrinzi, 2017). Nonna Mayer, states that RN can be viewed as 'magnifying glass of the far right's evolution in Western Europe' to comprehend contemporary developments in the ideology and electoral support of far-right parties (Mayer, 2013:161)

The emergence of RN is a clear example of radicalization of discourse, since the party found a right-wing attitude of the public after the politicization of particular issues by the previous governing parties (Rauta, 2012). This modernization strategy has proved to be effective in France. Even the formal change of the party's name is an evidence of such emergence: a page turns to the National Front (Le Monde, 2018). In the first round of the 2017 presidential elections, Marine Le Pen won a record 17.9% of the vote securing more support among young voters than any other age group (Mohammadi & Nourbakhsh, 2017:152). In the 2019 European elections, it was the most voted political force, gaining over 23% of the French votes (European parliament, 2019). Also, survey data indicate that the traditional 'gender gap' between the number of men and women voting for the NF is narrowing (Mayer, 2013).

Since Marine Le Pen took over the leadership of the party, she has largely opened the party especially to women to recruit sympathisers from beyond the formerly targeted audience, working hard on the party's credibility and respectability (Perrineau, 2014). *Rassemblement National* provided some women with access to political positions and therefore granted them a certain empowerment, especially with Marine Le Pen as the party leader and one deputy party leader, Marie-Christine Arnautu, which was also a member of the European Parliament in 2014. Marine Le Pen explicitly appealed to the female electorate during her campaign, presenting herself as a woman who they could identify with. The more the party feminises its political profile, the more it recruits women who agree to run for elections and to take political responsibilities. It seemed to be effective: while in 2007 only 9% women voted for Jean-Marie Le Pen, in 2012 almost 18% voted for Marine (Dubslaff, 2017:162).

Additionally, *Rassemblement National* and its older version, Front National, have been advanced their presence in female organizations. In 1985 National Circle of European Women (*Cercle National des Femme d'Europe*, CNFE) was created by its long-term party member Martine Lehideus. The CNFE was a think-tank female organization directly affiliated to the FN, which aimed to ensure the enlightenment of women by enabling them to fulfill their social destiny in the education of their children, implied by being stay-at-home mothers (Fourest & Venner, 2011). The CNFE members were also told that Europe would only flourish through their support and women and their families needed to honour their position (Laroche, 1997:153). Some of their activities are still active today: CNFE and RN yearly participate in Joan of Arc march celebration on the 1st of May, which it's been doing since 1988; also both

view Olympe de Gouges² as a symbol of struggle for national liberation, the truly representative of women's emancipation - in opposition of actual feminist movements - which is interesting to analyze since their celebration of 1st May in 2015 was interrupted by the feminist group FEMEN. By means such female organizations, the far-right parties are able to recruit and politicize women and to use them as a vehicle for propaganda (Dubsloff, 2017).

The dominant discourse on this RN new far-right era has been highly gendered. Besides the feminisation of the party, gender and religion have been holding a key position affecting 'anti-immigration' politics across Europe, in the context of a rising hostility towards Muslim migrants (Betz 2004, Mudde 2007). In France, right since the 1980s, State funded programmes and agencies that aim to promote the integration of migrants were informed by normative representations of feminine migration in terms of a supposed move from tradition (especially Muslim tradition) towards modernity, including gender modernity (Morokvasic, 2008). The inclusion of migrants in the labour market, specifically in flexible and non-skilled jobs where migrant women are overrepresented (Chaïb, 2008), is supposed to be emancipatory in France: female migrants tend to be seen as passive and subaltern women with no previous experience of employment. Conversely, migrant men tend to be stigmatised as patriarchal and oppressive.

Over the past decade, conservative politicians and representatives of right-wing governments, including during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, have declared gender equality as a defining value of the French national identity, as opposed to the patriarchal 'cultures' attributed to the Muslim migrants (Scrinzi, 2017). Today, the same gendered issues have remained central to the dominant discourse on the integration of migrants: the defence of women's rights and also gay-and-lesbian are used to support the argument that immigration must be controlled and limited, and that immigration constitutes a threat to French republican values (Cette France là, 2009). This is also characterised by the intense mediatization of acts of sexual violence committed in the *banlieues* inhabited predominantly by working-class racialised French and Muslim Berber migrants. Guénif and Macé (2006) have denounced the media focus on the figure of the '*garçon arabe*', the young male of immigrant origin, as racialised men of the suburbs tend to be depicted as potential rapists. Additionally, it is interesting to analyze the stigmatised version of the ' *beurette emancipée*' (emancipated young woman of immigrant origin), who synthesizes the republican model of integration and is seen

² Olympe de Gouges was a French playwright, abolitionist and women's rights activist. She is well known for writing *Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen* in 1791 challenging the notion of male-female inequality. She was executed by guillotine during the Reign of Terror (1793–1794).

as its typical beneficiary (Scrinzi, 2017): the migrant woman can be emancipated with the French gender equality policies. The idea of 'sexual democracy' as we previously analyzed in this dissertation (with regard to women's and gay-and-lesbian rights) is thus used to trace a distinction between the French city and the *banlieues* (Fassin, 2006).

According to feminist and antiracist intellectuals, this 'State feminism' ideology (Tissot, 2008) that has been increasing in *Rassemblement National* as well is instrumental in countering immigration and legitimising its association with issues of 'law and order'. Further, through these representations, sexism is racialised and attributed to migrants, while sexism in French society is made invisible (Hamel, 2005). This right-wing 'State feminism' (Tissot, 2008) was particularly visible at the time of the law passed in 2004, banning the wearing of religious affiliation and 'conspicuous signs' in public schools (Sciolino, 2004). In public debates around this law, there were profound divisions: on the one hand French activists claiming to defend women's rights and an ambitious vision of 'liberating' migrant women towards the French republican values of secular liberalism to achieve greater gender equality for all women; and, on the other hand, anti-racist activists the right to wear headscarves/hijab concerning a more cultural relativism perspective and against of what they called a 'neo-colonialist' approach (Scott, 2007).

The rejection of Muslim migrants, especially, is justified on the basis of arguments, such as the defence of women's and gay-and-lesbian rights, as migrants are associated with conservatism with respect to gender and sexuality. While the far-right 'modernisation' strategy of the RN implemented by Marine Le Pen highlights some specificities of the French context – in which the idea of secularism as a republican value has a long history – it can be inscribed within this international trend. Marine Le Pen presents herself as the defender of secularism and the 'republican model of integration' (Baubérot, 2012). For example, she compared public Muslim prayers to the Nazi occupation of France. The RN female leader has even mobilised the legacy of the French revolution, traditionally unpopular with the French far right, drawing imagery from the traditional French left-wing political forces. In 2007, two RN political posters displayed women, one of whom was a young woman of African origin, with the words 'nationality', 'assimilation', 'social mobility' in one case and 'secularism', 'security', 'public service', 'purchasing power' and 'equality' in the other, strongly indicated that the party is now appealing to young, female and racialised voters (Scrinzi, 2017).

However, this message of State Feminism from RN can be seen very paradoxically. Marine Le Pen statements alters between defending women's liberation and defending the traditional family, the latter viewed as the basis of the nation's welfare throughout her political programmes and media statements. For instance, RN's statements regarding abortion. In the

past, the far-right party was highly known for its fight for the repeal of the legislation on abortion. During the 2012 campaign, Marine Le Pen changed the party's course by repeating in the media that she is personally in favour of the right to have the abortion, and at the same time she argued in favour of women's free choice not to abort (Dubslaff, 2017). While defending the women's free choice, she argued that abortion costs should no longer be covered by the French public health insurance and it could undermine French demographics and demanded a popular referendum to decide on this matter (Le Pen, 2012; Dubslaff, 2007; Scrinzi, 2017). For Le Pen, women are not given a 'real choice' on various women's rights subjects - for her the real choice for women would be not to have an abortion and not to work if they so wish (Farris & Rottenberg, 2047:14)

Further, Le Pen has supported the burqa ban, in the name of women's rights and made an explicit association between sexual violence and insecurity and migrant racialised men (Scrinzi, 2017). This is especially evident when reading the 2017 electoral programme in the measure n°9 "*Défendre les droits des femmes*". The party purposes to defend the rights of women, by fight against Islamism which undermines women fundamental freedoms and wants to put in place a national plan for equal pay for women and men and fight against job and social insecurity (Le Pen, 2017:2). Women and the family (always presented as a joint unit) are seen as potential victims of immigration and it is the women in the family who are assigned the responsibility of reproducing the 'natural' social order. This bring us an interesting conclusion: while the victimization of white women and the family is central in RN discourse, the stigmatisation of racialised men gain a wider visibility through discourses of fear and violence, alongside the image of racialized women being as symbols of feminine oppression in the debates about the burqa, the Muslim headscarf, and sexual violence (Cette France là, 2009; Scrinzi, 2017)

Additionally, other traditional topics for RN have suffered critical change from Le Pen's paradox thinking. For instance, Family and marriage topics. While RN considers Family as the main pillar institution of society which aims to support the patriarchal and heterosexual, 'natural' social order (Lesselier, 1997) and a 'a protective frame for moral norms and racial continuity' (Dubslaff, 2017:165), Le Pen presents herself as a divorced woman whose experience as a single mother is publicly and proudly known. Also, RN in the past has fought intensively against the civil solidarity pact - PACS - as a form of Civil Union alternative to marriage which aimed to support same-sex couples. Later, in 2012, the party accepted PACS for same-sex partnerships. However, even if this news were surprisingly positive by the time, RN still fought against the "marriage for everyone" proposal. In the 2012, electoral programme, the party specifically mentioned that "the family must be based exclusively on the union of a man and a woman in order to receive children born of a father and a mother (...) We will

therefore oppose any request for the creation of a same-sex marriage and / or of adoption by same-sex couples” (Le Pen, 2012:11).

RN believed voting against same-sex marriage would prevent “‘other perversions’ as polygamy, incest and zoophilia’ (Dubslaff, 2017:165), which needs to be analyzed as strong homophobic stances and to preserve biological, heteronormative filiation. Nevertheless, Marine Le Pen never explicitly identified herself as homophobic, but rather defends that homosexuality is an individual private matter that shouldn’t be a political and public matter of France - by doing so, she defends the inequality between heterosexuals and homosexuals (Dubslaff, 2017:165).

In another topic, regarding parental policies, since the time of the party’s foundation in 1970s, the RN supported the idea of implementing a mothers’ salary (*revenu maternel*) as a measure to compensate for the national mother’s responsibility to provide education and upbringing of French children. Today, this measure idea extends to both mother and father (*revenu parental*) who may choose who is going to raise the children. For instance, in 2012 electoral programme this measure was a direct proposal for ending immigration in France, by establishing the national priority for social assistance and helping French families (Le Pen, 2012:11). This measure is no different from the ones Jean-Marie Le Pen had proposed before: fierce politics of deportation of immigrants and clear pro-birth policy, to reverse the trend (Front National, 2002). Additionally, Marine Le Pen shows herself in favour of expanding childcare and developing nurseries in order to allow women to conciliate work and private life (Dubslaff, 2017:165). While, these two measures can be seen as rather liberal, modern and ‘feminist’ proposals, it is also analyzed by Dubslaff (2017), as a measure to ‘liberate’ women from the workplace and bring them back inside their homes (Venner, 1997). RN still suggests the ‘function of bearing the family institution to be deeply connected to the traditional gender roles imposed to women’ (Dubslaff, 2017:166).

Rassemblement National seems to combine this apparently gender-equitable family model with the principle of ‘national preference’ throughout racist and anti-globalization thoughts (Dubslaff, 2017:167). RN is no longer posing the national idea of France as a racial question but also making it a question of gender and sexuality. RN presents today an idea of ‘sexual whiteness’, which means that in the name of freedom and equality between the sexes there is a sexual racialized border between “us” (Europeans) and “them” (Muslim communities), as “we” would treat our women and homosexuals well on contrary to “them” who are not free to conceive divorces, free marriage, abort and even allows polygamy (Fassin, 2010).

In the perspective also Tevanian (2007) and Scrinzi (2014) have thought of feminism being used as a 'metaphor of racism' and a racialisation of sexism. Since 2011, Marine Le Pen has continued her father's anti-multiculturalism offense, intensifying the anti-Islam aspect. She exploited the Arab Spring to represent herself as the herald of Islamophobia, conjuring up the vision of millions of Muslim North Africans (in particular former French colonies in Africa) to invade France to impose their values. Muslims are clearly viewed by RN and Marine Le Pen as reactionary forces, set up against French values of progress, liberty and laicism. Families, women and minorities as gays and lesbians, need to be protected by law against Muslim brutality: '*Dans certains quartiers, il ne fait pas bon être femme, ni homosexuel, ni juif, ni même français ou blanc*' (Fassin, 2010), said Le Pen, defending women, homosexuals, Jews and french white people living especially in Muslim-dominated neighborhoods where they were supposedly ostracized and persecuted (Crépon, 2012). In the same stance, in Le Pen's speech in Lyon in 2010 while she was campaigning for the leadership of the party, she claimed 'More and more I hear testimonies about the fact that in some parts of town it is not good to be a woman or a homosexual, a Jew, let alone a French or a White' (Fassin, 2010), that these people are suffering from religious Muslim laws that replace the laws of the French Republic. Florian Philippot, who was the RN vice-president between 2012 and 2017, explicitly claimed "*Le FN est pas 'gay friendly', ni l'inverse, il est french friendly*" (Franceinfo, 2014).

What is interesting to analyze is that these stances are not incongruous according to the experiences of gay white men mainly. In an interview for Associated Press, a gay male artist who planned to cast his ballot for Le Pen said "Faced with the current threats, particularly from radical Islam, gays have realized they'll be the first victims of these barbarians, and only Marine is proposing radical solutions" (Adamson, 2017). It especially important to emphasise that this interview occurred after the Islamic extremist attacks at home and at an Orlando gay nightclub. In a second interview for the BBC's Newsbeat, another gay man living in the known LGBT friendly neighborhood in Paris - Le Marais - said "Where are the gays most in danger? In Islamic countries (...) Gay people are being crucified — it's a danger and I don't want it coming to France, definitely not." (Chalk, 2017, April 20). Furtherly, the same journalists went ahead and interviewed a non-white DJ where there were these interesting questions and answers: "The FN [RN] supporters you spoke to, were they white?" house DJ Kiddy Smiles asks us, "Yes? I'm not surprised (...) I don't want to say this, but I feel like a lot of LGBT people are very selfish. They feel like they're not targets for the FN any more so they think it's OK to vote for them" - truly meaning that since [white] LGBTs are not the main target for RN anymore, it should be good for them to vote for Le Pen, without concerning the party's past, or other people being its racist target (Chalk, 2017, April 20).

All things considered, according to Dubslaff (2017), by 'the victimisation of minorities the RN never defended before, Le Pen constructs the image of a sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-French Muslim enemy, who only she and her party can contain (2017:168). By putting anti-Muslim racism in the place of anti-Semitism, Le Pen has officially broken away from her father's vision of the party and old ideological French far-right (Dubslaff, 2017: 169), giving a sexist, gendered dimension to islamophobe, nationalist and racist programmes.

5. PEOPLE FOR FREEDOM PARTY (PVV) IN THE NETHERLANDS

"Islam and freedom are not compatible", Geert Wilders (PVV)

The Netherlands is a very particular gender case study in politics. The country scores relatively high in the United Nations gender emancipation index³. In no other country have discourses of gay-and-lesbian rights and sexual freedom played such a prominent role in recent years, particularly after the dramatic murders of the openly gay far-right populist politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 right before parliamentary elections by a left-wing animal rights activist and after the murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 by a young Dutch-Moroccan Islamist (Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2010). They both were notorious for their opposition to multiculturalism, by expressing clear disgust towards the cultural habits and religious convictions of Muslim citizens and argued that Dutch cultural and sexual freedom were in danger. They embodied an aversion to the "backward" other (Buruma & Margalit, 2004; Van der Veer, 2006).

The Netherlands has transformed from one of the most religious societies in the world to one of its most secular nations (Van Rooden, 2004), as a historical process of 'de-pillarization' after World War II (Lijphart, 1968; Parolin, 2017). All institutions associated with the old order were commended as traditional and interpreted as a break from oppressive paternalistic structures (Duyvendak, 1999; Tonkens, 1999; Verkaaik, 2009). Today, years after the beginning of the 'de-pillarization' process, the Dutch feel that 'they have recently freed themselves from Christian conservatism only to be confronted again by Islamic injunctions' (Van der Veer, 2006:120; Verkaaik, 2008, 2009). According to Van der Veer (2006:118), Muslim communities remind the Dutch of the 'Calvinist ethos of frugality and moral strictness' of their own past.

³ Gender Development Index (GDI): <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GDI>; Gender Inequality Index (GII): <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>.

Afterwards, new social movements in the 'long 1960s' (Righart, 1995) had significant results in Dutch society particularly in terms of morality or sexuality that led to the country's liberal turn on drug policies, euthanasia, abortion, women's rights and lesbian-and-gay rights (Kennedy, 1995; Meijer, 1996; Righart, 1995). The percentage of Dutch citizens who supported homosexual rights and same-sex marriage was 82% which exceeded other European countries, as the European average was only 38% (Gerhards, 2010:12). As the Netherlands becomes even more a supporter of its 'traditions of tolerance', homosexuality support also becomes one of the country's cultural values (Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2010). When in 2001, Khalid El-Moumni, a Moroccan Imam working in Rotterdam, insisted on national television that homosexuality was a dangerous and contagious disease and that Europeans were less than dogs and pigs because they condoned same-sex marriage (Hekma, 2002; 2011), there was a widespread commotion. Homophobia was against Dutch values of tolerance and Dutch cultural self-representation. When most imams interviewed in the media, made it clear that same-sex behavior was a sin in Islam (Hekma, 2002), the public embrace of gay rights in the country rapidly become entangled with anti-Muslim discourse.

Gay-and-lesbian and women's sexual rights became symbolic of sexual liberation reinforcing an imaginary of Dutch liberated modernity versus Muslim oppressed tradition. Gay rights discourses become so powerful precisely because gay men – as unattached and autonomous subjects – stand for the ideal citizen of neoliberal modernity (Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2010) and they are part of the well-integrated Dutch homonormativity (Duggan, 2002). As a result of generation change after 9/11 attacks, as well other national or international terrorist incidents, Dutch far-right parties have reshaped their agenda by adding a gendered view of immigrant and Islam (Akkerman, 2005). Also, in the 1990s Muslim youngsters appeared to be overrepresented in crime statistics, including those for rape and sexual harassment of Dutch women or gay men. The culprits were young men predominantly seen just as Muslim and not from their nationality as Moroccan or Turkish (Hekma, 2011). It was disrespect for women and for gays and lesbians that many Dutch felt the new immigrants expressed. Muslims were seen as representative of this attitude (Gijsberts & Dagevos, 2009).

The Dutch *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV), in English, Party for Freedom, was established in the 2000s and it is considered by the Manifesto Project database and political science authors (Lange & Mügge, 2015; Mepschen, Duyvendak & Tonkens, 2010) as a neoliberal populist nationalist party in The Netherlands, and one of the most prominent far-right parties in Europe with its notorious leader Geert Wilders – the de facto successor of the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Akkerman, 2005). Wilders claims to despise the self-sustaining political system which stood isolated from society and aims to listen to ordinary people's problems in every-day life

(Wilders, 2005). Populist proclamations like these would remain a lasting and recurring feature in Wilders' rhetoric and his party's documents (Van Kessel, 2015).

Lange & Mügge (2015) analyzed PVV stands on gender issues on manifestos and party documents from 2005 to 2012. They realized PVV avoid inconsistency by mentioning only gendered issues related to immigration or Islam, instead of focusing on their views on classical gender issues such as division between labor and care within men and women, gender roles, women reproductive rights and abortion. PVV appears to be in favor of equality between men and women, remaining silent under classical polemical gender issues and defending that emancipation cannot lead to the preferential treatment of one sex over the other (Lange & Mügge, 2015; Van Kessel, 2015). The party hardly mentions ethical or family issues. It does not encourage women into job market nor discourages and the same in terms of traditional family views as a strategic ideological consideration. On the other hand, PVV aims all its gendered positions towards sexuality and women's emancipation to its hard critics concerning immigration, Muslim communities and Islam.

The PVV focus much more on Islam and gender issues on its party manifestos when compared to other neoliberal or populist parties in the Netherlands (Lange & Mügge, 2015). The Geert Wilder's party emphasizes the disadvantaged position of immigrant descent and the importance – or the urge – of their emancipation: 'Mass immigration has enormous consequences for all facets of our society and it flushes decades of women's emancipation down the drain' (De agenda van hoop en optimism, 2010:6). In *De agenda van hoop en optimism* (2010) political manifesto, the PVV is committed to the traditional Judeo-Christian and humanistic values that have made the Netherlands the success in terms of tolerance it is today, in clear opposition to the Qu'ran: 'The Qur'an prescribes behavior that is incompatible with our constitutional state, such as antisemitism, discrimination of women' (De agenda van hoop en optimism, 2010:13). Wilders' comparison of Qu'ran to Hitler's autobiography *Mein Kampf* – "The Koran [Qu'ran] is a fascist book which incites violence. That is why this book, just like *Mein Kampf*, must be banned" (BBC News, 2010) – and the comparison between Muslim mosques to Nazi temples (Damhuis, 2019) are significant proofs of PVV new far-right party identity, distinct from traditional 1930s far-right ideology. Wilders has even been very clear how distant he identifies from old 1930s fascism: "We'll never join up with the fascists and Mussolinis of Italy. I'm very afraid of being linked with the wrong rightist fascist groups" (Traynor, 2008).

The PVV stands explicitly in their manifesto for the 'rights of women and gay men' (De agenda van hoop en optimism, 2010:6) against the hatred of *jihad* terrorism. In this sentence, it is notable the explicit mention of homosexual men in the same statement as women (read

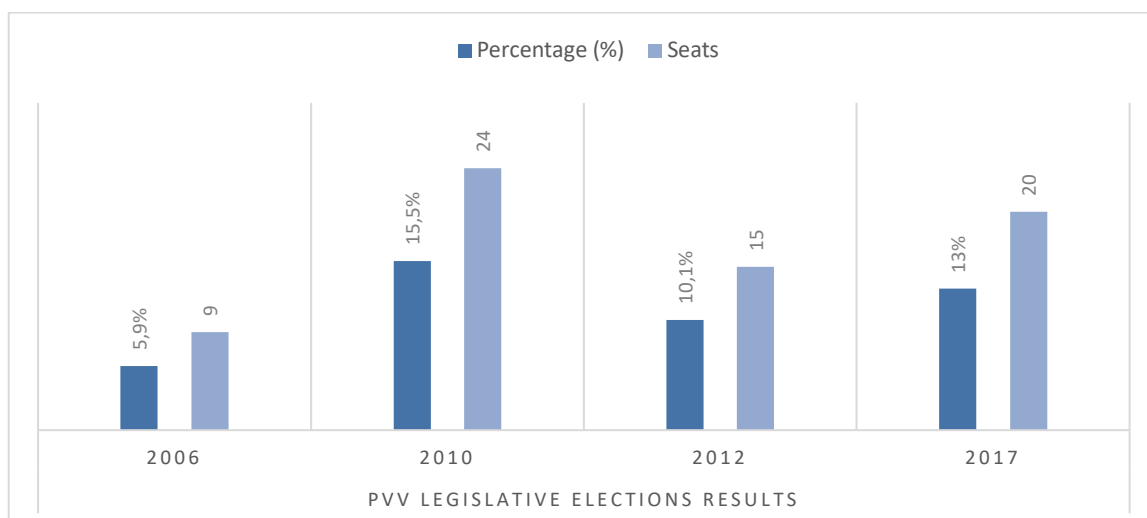
as 'heterosexual women') and an invisibility of gay women explicit on their discourse. The PVV focus on 'Islamic practices' that violate women's rights such as genital mutilation, honor killings, the prohibition against girls attending secondary school, early school leavers, the segregation of men and women in public spaces, opposition to integration courses, violence against gay men and women and the wearing of the veil and headscarves (De agenda van hoop en optimisme, 2010:13; Lange & Mügge, 2015:17). Wilders strongly defended an immediate ban on headscarves, claiming for women to "get rid of that woman-humiliating Islamic symbol" (Wilders, 2010). In this way, the PVV tends to combine an emancipatory agenda for immigrant Muslim women while defending liberal values for national women.

Geert Wilders states that mass immigration has brought consequences by negatively affecting the country's economy, the quality of their education and it has increased insecurity on the streets which leads to 'an exodus from our cities, expels Jews and gays and flushes women emancipation for decades down the toilet' (De agenda van hoop en optimisme, 2010:6) in a way that leads its position for opting for substantial extra money for security. While emphasizing Theo van Gogh's views, the PVV urges the people to opt between Islam and the Netherlands.

Other interesting point emphasized by the PVV in the 2010 agenda is the highlight of the health sector: 'even health care is Islamizing at a rapid pace' (De agenda van hoop en optimisme, 2010:6). The party criticizes Muslim women who refuse treatment by male doctors or do not want to be washed by them, Muslim elderly people who demand *halal* food⁴ from the cooks in their care home and who need an interpreter which is paid by taxpayers. The PVV roughly criticizes this as an 'Islamic gender apartheid' specific from 'Islamic totalitarian regime'. Another issue raised by the PVV is the export of child benefits to the immigrant's countries of origin. The PVV stated that there should be no export of social welfare payments outside the EU as opposition to immigrant large families (Lange & Mügge, 2015:16). The PVV is on the side of the ordinary people, as it is 'time to choose the defense of fundamental elements of our culture: the freedom of homosexuals and the equality of men and women' (De agenda van hoop en optimisme 2010:33). This resulted in a crushing victory in June 2010's elections (refer to graph 1 below). The PVV became the third political force in the Netherlands with 24 seats in the parliament and supported a minority coalition between the Liberals (VVD) and Christian Democrats (CDA).

⁴ *Halal* food, it is the dietary standard prescribed in the Qur'an.

Figure 3 – PVV Legislative Election results



Source: Adapted from Party and Elections database. Retrieved from: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/netherlands.html>

In the next parliamentary election of September 2012, Geert Wilder's anti-Islam rhetoric did not wane, but he guaranteed that 'Europe', the socio-economic situation of the Netherlands, and several imposed austerity measures were the central themes of the campaign, both in election debates and in the political manifesto (Van Kessel & Hollander, 2012; Van Kessel, 2015). PVV's Eurosceptic manifesto "*Hún Brussel, óns Nederland*" ('Their Brussels, Our Netherlands') explicitly linked its position on socio-economic issues to the issue of European integration and the bailouts to Mediterranean countries in particular: Wilders wondered why the Dutch people had to suffer from cuts in the welfare system, whilst the origins of the crisis lay abroad (Van Kessel & Hollander, 2012). Wilders still considers Islam as frightening ideology, diametrically opposed to freedom and the entire Western World and the Netherlands must be prevented from the triumph of Islam in their streets. The PVV remained its position on the ban of minarets, mosques, burqas or headscarves in public spheres of the state as healthcare and education, as well as the ban of Islamic schools and mosques.

Mass immigration, now claimed to be directly propagated by the European Union and not only Muslim countries, is considered to be intensely damaging to the Netherlands. The PVV reinforced that the Dutch are facing an overrepresentation of non-Western immigrants in terms of benefit dependency, anti-Semitism, gay hatred, discrimination against women, crime, nuisance, school dropout and honor (*Hún Brussel, óns Nederland*, 2012:36). The PVV also explicitly reinforces its focus on the defense of '(...) our homosexuals against encroaching Islam' (*Hún Brussel, óns Nederland*, 2012:45). As a result, the PVV remained as the third

political force in the Dutch parliament, even though it lost 9 seats in 2012's elections (Van Kessel & Hollander, 2012)

At last, '*Nederland Weer Van Ons!*' ('The Netherlands again ours') for parliamentary elections in 2017 is a very short listed one-page political manifesto succinct around the will to de-Islamize the country and highlighting the previous proposals of banning headscarves in public, closing mosques and Islamic schools, banning the Qu'ran, the prohibition of other Islamic expressions that are contrary to public policy, as well as to take the Netherlands out of the European Union. During the electoral campaign, Wilders told USA Today: "You see it in almost every country where it [Islam] dominates. There is a total lack of freedom, civil society, rule of law, middle class; journalists, gays, apostates — they are all in trouble in those places. And we import it" (Hjelmgaard, 2017). As a result of 2017 elections, Geert Wilders' party won the second political force position with 33 of parliament's 150 seats.

Mass immigration, anti-Islam and Eurosceptic PVV's discourse is still on today while Wilders reinters his party values as "not Islamic, but based on the Jewish, Christian, and humanistic civilization" (Wilders, 2016), which Damhuis (2019) interpreted as an echo from Samuel Huntington's "clash" idea between Islamic civilization and "our Judeo-Christian heritage." And this is clear on Wilder's posts on Twitter⁵.

In the last elections for the European Parliament, on 23 May 2019, the PVV lost its seats in Brussels (Pieters, 2019). Wilders keep its anti-Islam discourse without any further political manifesto is a clear opposition between "Us" (national Dutch citizens) and "Them" (Muslim immigrants). However, he defends himself against racist and White Nationalism arguments by saying "I don't hate Muslims. I hate Islam," (Traynor, 2008, February 17). In opposition, Thierry Baudet, arises a new Dutch populist leader is claimed to be taking votes from Wilders using a harsh defense of women's rights against the religious intolerance of fundamentalist Islam, but at the same time using very conservative language towards gender issues (Shaart, 2019) different from Wilders' more liberal views. Baudet's discourses are possibly worth of a new research on further years by being more associated with White Nationalism than Wilders as for example his encounters with USA white supremacists (The Week, 2019) or his strong protection of what he calls "Boreal Europe" coming from the from the myth that Europeans are of Aryan and polar descent and is used to envision an ethnically white space north of the line from Gibraltar to Vladivostok (Kleinpaste, 2018).

⁵ Geert Wilder's Twitter account retrieved from here: <https://twitter.com/geertwilderspvv>

In opposition, PVV does not have an explicit White Nationalist agenda towards their belief of what ethnicity Europe should be, focusing their discourse solemnly on anti-Islam and mass immigration as they see as corruptive. It is believed by the PVV that Muslim foreigners are not acquainted with values like equality between men and women, and the support of homosexual rights, freedom of speech, separation between church and the state, which are also believed as the foundations of western democracies. Regardless of the year and the political manifesto, [heterosexual] men and masculinity have not been mentioned at all in party manifestos or programs, even though they have all been written by men and for men (Lange & Mügge, 2015:20). While PVV's focus on women's emancipatory liberal agenda and the defense of gay men is clearly explicit, the authors probably did not see the need to address explicitly their own needs or roles, as masculine men and patriarchy are the norm (Lange & Mügge, 2015). Thus, the PVV is relatively liberal towards gender issues, emancipation of women and gay people (directing the discourse particularly to gay men), highly concerned with the alleged threats of Islamisation (Akkerman, 2005), while left-wing elite parties shied away from controversial issues that might have a negative impact upon their immigrant voters (Hekma, 2011).

Simultaneously, the ultra-protectiveness of the liberal elements of Dutch culture could also be interpreted as an interesting form of cultural conservatism (Van Kessel, 2015). As long as lesbians and gays (and perhaps bisexuals) behave 'homonormative' and remain quiet, they will be defended by the white Dutch from right-wing to left-wing. Society has become pro-gay, but not pro-LGBT or pro-queer (Hekma, 2011). While the "normal" gays and lesbians who create their own little families of choice are always more accepted – and, indeed, may become the standard, as they are more demonstrably "equal" than their heterosexual compatriots – the queer community may become ever more marginalized and pressured by both "white" majority that sees its own sexual ideology as normative and from ethnic minorities that coalesce with the old Dutch on sexual and gender norms (Hekma, 2011).

6. CONCLUSION

In Europe, while we simultaneously witness the emergence of supporters of far-right parties we also testify the increasing genderization of political agendas. The generalization of gender equality and sexual minorities rights as bastions of Western society, European values and human rights, has opened a door towards more progressive far-right agendas.

By analyzing the structures of new far-right parties in which we can include the freshly re-structured French *Rassemblement National* and the powerful Dutch Party for Freedom, we can clearly identify the inclusion of gender and sexuality issues alongside with strong anti-immigration and anti-Muslim feelings. This inclusion can be seen as a normalization of gender topics within XXI century political agendas as public debates in this regard have been highly increasing.

In another stance, these two far-rights parties analyzed seem to be committed to defend gender equality and gay-and-lesbian rights and putting it as strong opposition as multiculturalism to gain more political support and voters in elections. This is especially important when we analyze parties as RN and PVV which have been highly benefited by elections in the past decade. Their social base has been broadened up with non-traditional working-class voters, highly educated workers and more women and younger people comparing to the 'old' nationalist parties from the 1930s (Rydgren, 2013; Arzheimer, 2018; Lancaster, 2019; Wilson & Hainsworth, 2012).

The two parties analyzed in this Dissertation demonstrate their commitment in defending gender equality and gay-and-lesbian in different matter but with the same objective: a patriotic defense of national voters against multiculturalism. In the Netherlands, Party for Freedom (PVV) presents itself as a far-right party total in favor of individual freedom, free from the Christian conservative values that the country was released with the de-pillarization' process and strongly willing to confront Islam conservatism.

PVV supports the tradition of Dutch tolerance towards sexual liberation, drug policies, women's rights and homosexuality as country's cultural values. PVV expresses clear disgust towards the cultural habits and religious convictions of Islam and argued that Dutch cultural and sexual freedom were in danger. What is interesting to analyze is how PVV stands in their manifesto for the 'rights of women and gay men' (De agenda van hoop en optimisme, 2010:6) against the hatred of Islam, explicitly connecting both heterosexual women with homosexual men. This means a clear relation with Puar (2017) theory that for the new far-right the 'Woman Question' is now being supplemented with the 'Homosexual Question'. While PVV are against violence towards national women, Muslim women and gay men, the party tends to combine an

emancipatory agenda for immigrant Muslim women while defending liberal and normative values for the nationals. For example, the ultra-protectiveness of the liberal elements of Dutch culture could also be interpreted as an interesting form of cultural conservatism: as long as (heterosexual women) and gays behave 'normative' according to the cultural patterns of Dutch society, they will be understood and supported.

Another interesting stance in this study, is that there is a clear absence regarding non-heterosexual women, bisexuality and transgender people). This does not mean that there is any kind of agenda non-heterosexual women or trans people, but it shows how invisible they are in PVV's political agenda. PVV's pro feminist agenda only includes homonormative (Duggan, 2003) bodies as they are a group of people easily compared with heterosexual couples. As long as gays behave 'homonormative' and remain quiet, they will be defended by the white Dutch (Hekma, 2011). Also, there is another clear absence in its electoral programmes regarding heterosexual men. The programme male authors probably didn't see the need address explicitly their own roles, as masculine men and patriarchy are the norm (Langue & Mügge, 2015) of the clear opposition between "Us" (national Dutch citizens) and "Them" (Muslim immigrants).

In France, *Rassemblement National* (RN) presents itself as an advanced face of the national far-right, willing to gain more support with historic references of French republicanism and state's laicism. RN is specially more obvious on the femonationalism topic and increasing feminization (Farris, 2017; Farris & Rottenberg, 2017) of the far-right since Marine Le Pen succeeded her father as the leader of the party. Le Pen with the declared goal of transforming RN into a large mainstream party has undergone a stronger feminization of RN over the past years. She has put into her political agenda, the defence of women's rights and also gay-and-lesbian rights to support the argument that immigration must be controlled and limited (Cette France là, 2009). The strong believe that immigration constitutes a serious threat to French republican values is also characterised by the intense mediatisation of sexual violence committed in *banlieues* predominantly inhabited by Muslim Berber racialized migrants. While defending basic women's rights as French values (such as abortion or equal pay), Le Pen's RN stands against the use of burqa or headscarves in public spaces since it is undermining French and non-French Muslim women and making an explicit association between sexual violence and insecurity and migrant racialised men. RN political agenda equates (French) women and the family institution as a joint unit, seen as the major victims of (male) Muslim immigration.

Additionally, regarding gay-and-lesbian people, Le Pen's RN has as well a paradox situation. RN has fought intensively against civil union and equal marriage, mentioning that

family is based exclusively between men and women in order to generate children, and Marine Le Pen has made very explicit homophobic stances comparing homosexuality with zoophilia and incest. However, Le Pen never explicitly identified herself as homophobic, she proposes to defend gays-and-lesbians need to be protected by French law against Muslim so-called 'brutality'. Nevertheless, Philippot, who was the RN vice-president between 2012 and 2017, explicitly claimed that the party is not gay-friendly but only French-friendly. This means a couple of things: 1) RN is willing to tolerate French non-heterosexuals' existence against a common enemy; 2) at the same time Le Pen's RN does not see gay-and-lesbian couples as equal as heterosexuals and not rightful to be seen as families; 3) and finally it means that RN sees homosexuality as an individual private matter that should remain homonormative (Duggan, 2003; Puar, 2007) and invisible in political matters of France.

In this sense, the far-right 'modernisation' strategy of Le Pen, highlights some specificities of the French far-right context – in which the idea of secularism as a republican value has a strong importance – and it can inscribe international gender and sexualities trends into their political agenda. By the victimisation of white and Muslim women and sexual minorities the RN never defended before, Le Pen constructs a new image of the party breaking away from her father's traditional far-right: an image of a sexist, homophobic, and anti-French Muslim enemy, who only she and her party can contain (Dubslaff, 2017)

In conclusion, while these two analyses may be seen as socially progressive within the far-right political scope, it is also very problematic and interesting to witness. Very clearly, the French *Rassemblement National* or the Dutch *Party for Freedom* have defended heteronormative family to further a racist and anti-immigrant agenda while supporting basic women's rights and gay-and-lesbian homonormativity, equal to heterosexuals (Claus & Virchow, 2017). In both parties, white national women are only respected in their rights if they still manage to accomplish their nationalist duty by being family bearers of the nation and perform heteropatriarchal actions; and immigrant women are only victimised and seen in need of white savior action. Regarding sexual minorities, the only group directly addressed by the parties is gay men. Lesbians specifically were never mentioned, as well as bisexuals or trans people due to their invisibility in political agendas. Also, sexual minority identities are tolerated if they go along with normative rules as accepted heteronormative relationships: cisgender and binary bodies, monogamous loving relationships, discrete in public, praising family values, sexuality as a private matter instead of a political identity. Established binary oppositions that exist in the society's mindset, such as man-woman, masculine-feminine, rich-poor, strong-weak, bring regulations to nation states, societies and people's lives, not giving the opportunity to make visible other queer bodies as lesbians, bisexuals, trans and non-binary people (Çınar, 2015). When considering heterosexual men, while in both political parties Muslim men are

seen as violent agents, white national men are never mentioned because they are already the personification of the system and cannot be considered individually. Male sexuality is only considered taking the construction of female sexuality, depending on each other (Claus & Virchow, 2017), either on a 'positive' sight (heteronormative white relationships) or negative (oppressive Muslim relationships and violent aggressors).

Themes of gender equality and sexual minorities rights have become the common currency in the name of new racists and imperialists configurations of power (Farris, 2017). As they are current very relevant political issues, they can quite easily be used opportunistically by these parties to contribute to the consolidation of the nationalist projects (Farris, 2017). Nevertheless, agreeing with Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens (2010) conclusion, this debate have put progressive anti-racists, feminist and LGBT activist groups in an sensitive stance: taking up the defense of gender equality and lesbian-and-gay rights (even if normative) may become associated with Islamophobia, while solidarity with Muslims against Islamophobia is represented, as supporting 'Muslim' homophobia and misogyny. This can make us agree even more with Foucault's (2003) stances on how political sexuality is, and how it plays a decisive role in biopolitical restrictions of state institutions (Claus, & Virchow, 2017), very important to be analysed in future occasions. Peterson (1999) already had analyzed how the western nation-state type has been materializing privileged colonial heterosexual gender binaries within the national and ethnic groups while normalizing hierarchies of power between groups. It seems current, only appealing to new discourses and supporters in far-right.

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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