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Right-wing populism and xenophobia: beyond the urban/suburban dichotomy in the Netherlands

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Abstract

Scholars argue that there is currently a geographical, political dichotomy between cities and the periphery: the city is supposed to represent the tolerant vote while the periphery is portrayed as more prone to populism and xenophobia. By focusing on the Netherlands, in this paper we challenge this dichotomous thinking in two ways. Initially we argue that in the long run voting behaviour patterns in the Netherlands have diversified in city and suburb in accordance to demographic diversification. This observation points to voting being consistent even when people change spaces. Second, we discuss the relation between voting behaviour and issues of ethnic co-existence in depth by looking at residents of urban and suburban spaces. We show that (anti)immigration discourses and practices among the white Dutch liberal voters stay relatively constant in city and periphery.

Introduction

With the recent rise of right-wing populism in the West (the Netherlands, Italy, France, UK, US etc.) scholars argue that there is a polarization between liberal and conservative citizens (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). This polarization is often explained through and reflected in a geographical dichotomy between cities and the periphery (i.e. suburbs and rural areas): the city is supposed to represent the progressive, tolerant vote while the periphery is portrayed as more populist and xenophobic (Walks, 2006; Van Gent, Janssen and Smits, 2014). This is said to be particularly true in the Netherlands a country in which media representations, public discourse and debates between political elites tend to emphasize on such ideas of spatial polarization. The latter manifest in contexts of anti-urban discourses among right-wing populist parties[1] with potentially real consequences for urban policy (Maesschalck, 2011), while leftist parties tend to adopt an pro-urban rhetoric, considering that they are overrepresented in cities. However, when one looks in detail the voting geography of the Netherlands and the differences that do exist across space, the rigid dichotomy of liberal city/conservative suburb is found to be problematic. Focusing for instance on the biggest Dutch cities alone, in Amsterdam, Leiden and Utrecht the electorate may favour leftist/liberal parties (D66[2], GreenLeft[3]), yet in Rotterdam and The Hague the parties that have dominated the elections for many years are from the right or the extreme right (VVD[4] and PVV[5]).

Despite such counterfactual evidence, academic literature tends to reproduce such 'divides' without deeper inquiries, through simply 'mapping' electoral behaviour (Harris and Charlton, 2016) or by equating voting with political behaviour at large (McKee, 2008). Similarly, scholars

paint a picture of non-urban residents as simply uneducated and easy to manipulate (Frank, 2007) or, in the Dutch case, of radical populism rising due to an easy-to-manipulate mass of undereducated Dutch voters (Savelkoul and Scheepers, 2017). There are certain critical voices that problematize such claims for instance by referring instead to voting for right-wing populist parties as a result of identity politics among non-urban citizens (Gimpel and Karnes, 2006; Oliver and Ha, 2007). Schuermans and De Maesschalck (2010) moreover point to the general criminalization of immigration in the Belgian national discourse, while Rydgren (2008) emphasizes immigration skepticism as a more accurate explanation for radical right-wing voting instead of outright xenophobia. Nonetheless, we seem to be heading towards future representations of political polarization as a contrast between city and periphery, be it in Northern Europe's urban and suburban, ethnically diverse landscapes, or in Turkey's divided politics between city and countryside, or in the racial tensions in US and UK metropolitan neighbourhoods. With that future in mind it is important to avoid reducing issues of political representation to spaces that are taken as static and monodimensional causes of phenomena (De Vos and Deurloo, 1999; Van Gent and Musterd, 2016a), such as culturally 'tolerant' cities versus 'intolerant' ones (Van der Waal, de Koster and Achterberg, 2013).

The logic behind such a bifurcated understanding of tolerance, at least one aspect of it, is the assumption that diversity is lacking in suburbia and is very present in the city. This assumption is a traditional representation of urban and suburban environments and has been challenged for a while now (see for instance Li (1998) on US 'ethnoburbs' or Watson and Saha (2012) on London's suburban multiculturalism). Similarly there is evidence that Dutch suburbs are ethnically diversified (Tzaninis and Boterman, 2018) while cities like Amsterdam are actually homogenizing towards a white, more affluent middle class (Van Gent and Boterman, 2018).

Another argument is that the spatial arrangements in city versus suburb may determine the existence of discontent among native voters (Van Gent and Musterd, 2016b). The assumption here is that certain types of neighbourhoods contribute to the electoral success of right-wing populist parties, for instance due to 'ethnic competition' sentiments from the native working class towards low-educated migrants, or 'policy protest' whereby suburban residents disapprove urban social policy. Despite Van Gent and Musterd's (2016b) detailed spatial analysis of voting, we argue that settlements are more than neat spatial 'containers' of ways of life and political identifications. On the one hand there may be 'urban' and 'suburban' ways of life, but they are becoming increasingly complex and even reversing, i.e. suburbanisms in cities and urbanisms in suburbs (Keil, 2017; Tzaninis, 2015). On the other hand the role that interaction can play on political attitudes is not

straightforward and diversity does not necessarily lead to more openness. To understand views on immigration careful problematization is needed through temporal analysis of voting in combination with in-depth exploration of personal views. In other words, voting behaviour does not equate discourse or political behaviour (Dalton, 2008) and one may indeed vote for leftist, pro-immigration parties but adopt contrasting discourse or practice. Similarly King and Maruna (2009) show that punitive public attitudes ('penal populism') in the British public are not so much a result of experiences with crime or economic insecurity. Rather, it is anxieties behind the state of the 'economy' in general and low trust towards fellow (young) citizens that seem to fuel such attitudes, hence the symbol of right-wing populism is incorrectly assumed to be an angry white man. The understanding of views on immigration is thus truncated without taking into account the relevant vocabularies. The need to look into said vocabularies is accentuated due to the current normalization of anti-immigration discourses in the Netherlands and Northern Europe at large.

Hence, focusing on the Dutch case, in this paper we challenge this dichotomous thinking in two ways. Initially we argue that in the long run voting behaviour patterns in the Netherlands have not remained static but have diversified in city and suburb in accordance to demographic diversification. This observation points to voting being consistent even when people change spaces, thus empirically challenging the assumed role of space in terms of the aforementioned simplistic spatial dichotomy. Second, we suggest that (anti-)immigration discourses among the white Dutch liberal voters stay relatively constant in city and periphery. Maintaining that a restricted focus on voting behaviour can obscure how immigration discourses can be pervasive across different spaces and class fractions, the paper thus discusses the relation between voting behaviour and immigration discourses by looking at both urban and suburban spaces.

Methods – Amsterdam and Almere

In order to elaborate on the presence of right-wing populism between city and suburb, this paper focuses on the metropolitan area of Amsterdam. In particular we investigate Amsterdam and its satellite New Town Almere. Our paper is based on the following methods: first we look at electoral data in both cities from past municipal elections between 1982 and 2018. Our aim is to show how voting behaviour remains rather consistent in relation to specific population categories and does not change considerably due to spatial change. Second, we employ segregation indexes in order to demonstrate how everyday practices of mixing may contradict expectations. We measure segregation in terms of ethnic backgrounds, class and education in schools and neighbourhoods in Amsterdam and Almere between 2008 and 2015. Lastly we rely on material collected through in-depth interviews with native Dutch residents of Amsterdam and Almere regarding their views

on immigration, drawn from research conducted between 2012 and 2014 regarding experiences of life in urban and suburban spaces. From a pool of 30 native Dutch persons we focus here on nine respondents selected on the basis of their dissociation from the anti-immigration PVV but while still mobilizing vocabularies and repertoires that are ostensibly migration-skeptic.

Although Amsterdam is currently discussed as a global city, a cultural hub and an international center, until the 1980s it had a fairly homogeneous, white, working- and lower-middle-class population, living alongside working class migrants primarily from Morocco and Turkey and the former colonies (Surinam, the Caribbean). It is the city that hosts the most nationalities in the world (around 180), a super-diverse place, with 50% of its residents having a minority background. Amsterdam's demographics have formed for decades through labour migration, post-colonial migration, intra-EU migration and more. Especially from the 1970s and 1980s suburbanization took place towards towns like Almere, leading to a decrease of its population. Its electoral geography is also quite diverse, especially between its different districts. Alongside the tendency to vote for leftist/liberal parties (almost 40% voted for GreenLeft and D66 in 2017), Amsterdam center and several inner suburbs are increasingly becoming unaffordable for many without the advantages of wealth, especially due to gentrification, a trend represented also in the voting patterns in said areas (Van Gent and Boterman, 2018). Major gentrification projects undertaken in the 1990s onwards have transformed the city which now ranks among the top 20 cities with the most expensive real estate in the world ('nested', 2017 index). Interestingly the population has also been steadily growing the past 20 years, many newcomers currently being affluent, native Dutch.

Almere was inspired by the Garden City movement and planned in the 1970s as a suburban, modernist alternative to accommodate former residents of Amsterdam (Constandse, 1989; Jantzen and Vetner, 2008). Developed in 1976 and a separate municipality in 1984, Almere became a suburb of Amsterdam in all respects, retaining the characteristics of New Towns that were planned to dictate a certain (suburban) way of life for a certain kind of population (white, low-middle-class, native Dutch). Nonetheless Almere has become one of the most diverse places in the Netherlands, with more than 150 nationalities, its current population consisting of many kinds of ethnic categories: almost 50% of Almere's residents have some familial connection originating from outside the Netherlands. Meanwhile Almere has had a rather large presence of right-wing populist parties in the local and national elections, having shown already in the early 1980s signs of a rising xenophobic vote, giving more than 9% in the 1983 municipal election to Centrumpartij (Centre Party), the first successful, explicitly anti-immigration party in the Netherlands.

In the following section we discuss the (local and national) electoral results in the two settlements since the early 1980s. Thereafter we analyse school segregation indexes in Amsterdam and Almere in terms of education levels, ethnic background and income levels. In the final empirical section we discuss the interviews on issues of diversity and coexistence.

Elections

As noted, in Almere's electoral history there was already in 1983 a relatively large success of the anti-immigration Centrumpartij (CP) (figure 1). The CP, founded in 1980, was the first explicitly anti-immigration party in the Netherlands, with an ethno-centric discourse bordering to racism and xenophobia (Meloen et al, 1988). The party made it to the parliament in 1982 with one seat, bringing a shock to Dutch society that had traditionally seen itself tolerant and open to diversity. The other political parties of the time isolated the CP and even initiated legal action against it. Its success was not long-lasting and in 1986 it went bankrupt. Its successor Centrumpartij '86 was eventually deemed illegal in court in 1998. In Almere's first ever held municipal election in 1983 the CP got 9.1%, an extraordinary percentage considering its 0.8% nationally in 1982, showing that some residents of Almere already had anti-immigration sentiments before ethnic minorities moved there. One of the explanations suggested back then was the 'anti-Amsterdam' feeling among those who left for Almere (De Vos and Deurloo, 1999). Ostensibly a fair percentage of populist voting has remained constant in Almere since the early 1980s, with 10% to 20% always supporting anti-immigration parties or at least right-wing parties in the 1990s. Interestingly in the recent 2018 municipal elections the PVV came third, from first place previously. The VVD is currently the biggest party followed by the PvdA[6]. If anything, this result shows the complexity of voting behaviour especially in places that have been rapidly transforming (Tzaninis, 2016). That is not to say of course that the xenophobic vote has left Almere. Our argument here is rather that not only is voting behaviour a truncated approach to understand perspectives on diversity and immigration, it is even quite difficult to interpret its social relevance isolated from a wider context and rhetoric.
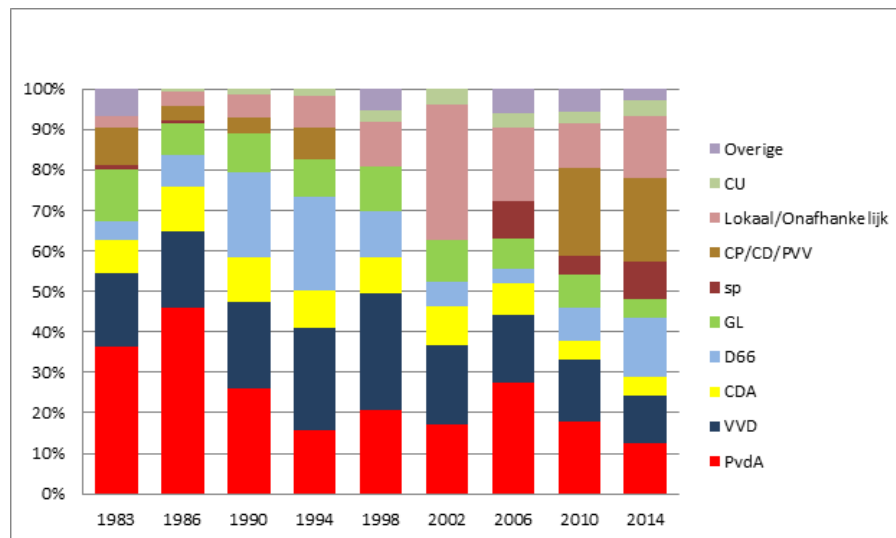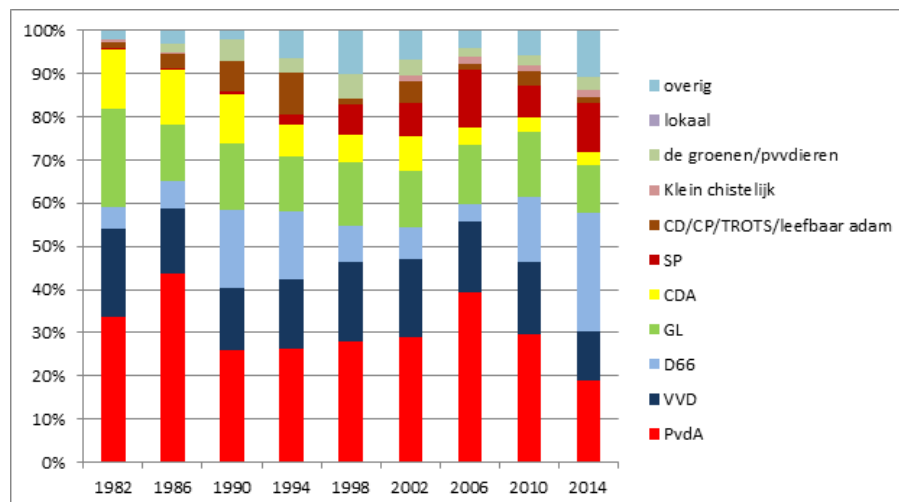
Figure 1. Municipal elections Almere

Figure 2. Municipal elections Amsterdam

Amsterdam was a Labour Party stronghold since the first general municipal elections in 1922 until 2010. While the city maintained a fairly strong preference for left-wing parties, including the labour party, eventually in Amsterdam support for socialist parties crumbled and voters have been shifting towards more (neo)liberal parties, notably D66. Yet, electoral changes have largely evolved according to class-based urban change. Nowadays Amsterdam's gentrified inner city is dominated by higher income classes who are increasingly voting for VVD and D66 (Van Gent and Boterman, 2018). Especially the transition from PvdA towards the D66 has been remarkable, unless of course one accounts for the demographic transitions, as we have been arguing. Looking at both Almere and Amsterdam we can see that voting patterns are highly correlated with population change and do not point in the direction of the effect of spatial context. Voters tend to have relatively

consistent voting habits that are not affected by their living environment which so happens to be sometimes the gentrified areas in Amsterdam and sometimes the suburban areas of Almere. People do, however, sort themselves in space according to various preferences, which also tend to be associated with political attitudes.

Segregation

Despite its consistent presence of a xenophobic vote, Almere is one of the cities with the lowest residential and school segregation in the Netherlands. While physical presence of different social groups does not necessarily entail actual contact, particularly in school choice exposure to other social groups is one of the most pertinent themes (Butler and Hamnett, 2007; Boterman, 2013; Andreotti et al, 2013). Avoidance of the classed or ethnic Other are particularly visible in school selection and therefore also in levels and patterns of school segregation. The level to which children of various backgrounds are integrated in schools and neighbourhoods may therefore be a suitable indicator for social distances and possibilities for meeting the Other. When comparing the segregation levels of residential segregation of young children (figure 3) along different dimensions it becomes evident that Almere has much lower levels of residential segregation than Amsterdam. In fact, while Amsterdam's levels of segregation for young children are fairly high, also from an international perspective (cf. Tammaru et al, 2016), Almere has very low levels. A dissimilarity index of 14 for ethnic segregation is remarkably low even compared to other Dutch cities.
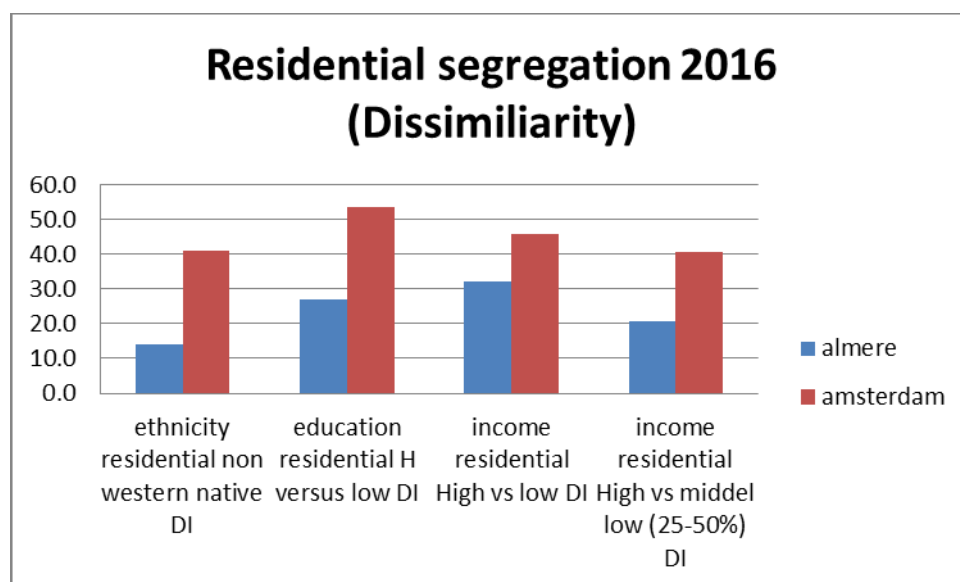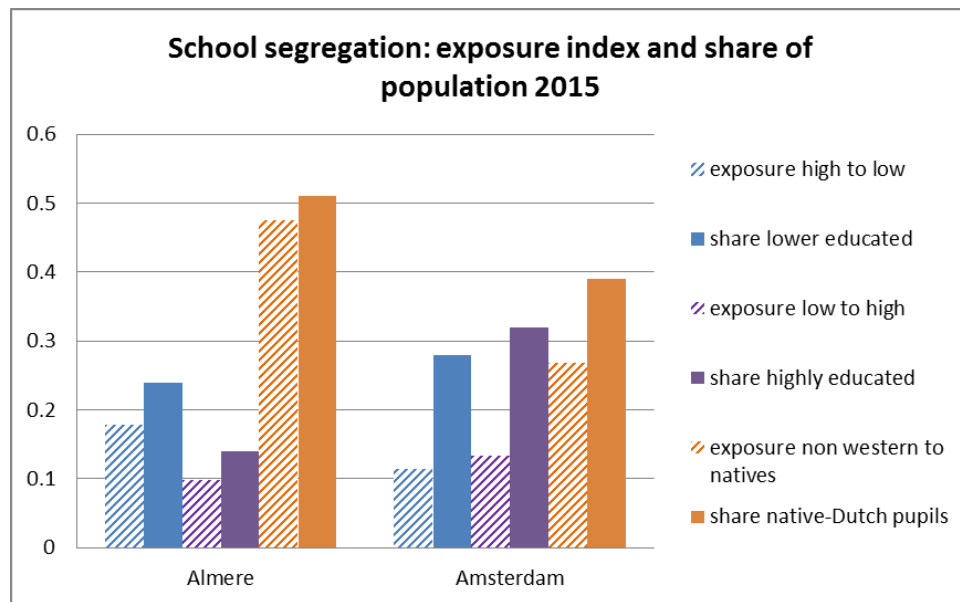

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

The same image emerges when we compare the levels of school segregation (figure 4). In Almere the exposure to other groups approximates the actual representation of those groups in schools, implying low levels of segregation. In Amsterdam segregation is much higher: for instance while the share of children of low-educated parents is higher in Amsterdam than in Almere, the average share of pupils of low-educated parents with whom those of highly-educated parents go to school is higher in Almere than in Amsterdam.[7] Both in schools and neighbourhoods children of different backgrounds appear to be highly integrated in Almere. This is quite remarkable considering the public debate about problems of integration and the rise of xenophobic voting in Almere (and correspondingly of tolerant, diversity-seeking behaviour in Amsterdam). This is simple evidence that voting is one thing, and everyday practice and interaction are another. In other words while many (white) residents of Almere may tend to favour right-wing populism, many white middle-class Amsterdammers are quite prompt to be selective for their kids' school. In all fairness when looking at the ideal scenario of potential segregation levels if every child went to a primary school only according to place of residence, the one factor that seems to clearly influence choice in Almere is ethnic background. In other words there are still many parents in Almere who avoid certain schools due to expectations related to the ethnic background of other students. Nonetheless school segregation in terms of ethnic background is still among the lowest in the country, which supports our argument that xenophobia may manifest across the board, regardless of place or space.

These findings suggest that there may be more interaction between ethnic categories in Almere compared to Amsterdam, due to lower levels of residential and school segregation. Without

implying that simply being in school or living in the same neighbourhood with the Other means openness, we are only suggesting that the diversified suburban Almere has a gone a step further towards ethnic interaction than Amsterdam's gentrified centre, segregated (white) schools and a priori lack of contact between ethnic categories in primary school.

Populist discourse and xenophobia in the Netherlands

Right-wing populism has emerged as a major force in the political landscape in Europe especially in West and North European countries (Betz, 1993; Ivarsflaten, 2008). As Bonikowski (2017: 183) argues populism and nationalism are obviously not phenomena in public opinion or political discourse in the West but rather long-standing political repertoires that have gained renewed resonance because of a unique confluence of political, economic, cultural and demographic changes. Those changes have threatened the perceived collective status of national ethnocultural majorities and have activated pre-existing nationalist cleavages. Populist parties that have been on the rise already from the 1980s have been nurturing or inducing such perceptions among native citizens infiltrating the discourse on migration in Western politics. What seems to be new, however, is the current mainstreaming of nativist discourses. Prolonged stays by migrants, especially those of low class standing, are seen and explicitly presented as a threat to the social cohesion and cultural homogeneity of the nation, and the acceptance of newcomers is provisional upon their compliance with a set of norms and behaviours dispelling impressions of their perceived dangerous character (Pratsinakis, 2017).

The explanations for the success of populist parties are complex (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Akkerman and Haggelund, 2007), but when looking particularly at the links between immigration and the popularity of right-wing populist parties, De Koster et al. (2013) show that a 'welfare populist' party rhetoric in the Netherlands has been indeed effective. It is intriguing in fact that in one of the richest and most equal welfare systems in the world, the presence of radical populism is so pervasive. The Netherlands is also an interesting case for that the rise of populist parties was coupled by a radical harshness of the policy debate vis-à-vis migrants and an explicit turn towards assimilationism which is widely embraced by most political parties across the political spectrum (Duyvendak and Scholten, 2011; Kešić and Duyvendak, 2016).

Many Dutch scholars (Shinkel and Van Houdt, 2010; Tonkens and Duyvendak, 2016; Duyvendak et al., 2010) use the concept of *culturalization* of citizenship to describe a process by which an essentialist notion of Dutch culture has come to play a central role in the debate on what it means to be a citizen. This process, which started in the 1990s and critically intensified over the past years,

may seem at odds with widespread perceptions in the Netherlands claiming 'the Dutch' as distinctly modern, prone to equality and anti-nationalist. To adhere to this view politicians in the Netherlands represent migrant cultures as potentially intrinsically problematic, and as incompatible with the Dutch culture which is regarded as enlightened, secular and tolerant (Schinkel, 2013; Reekum, 2012). Such ideas, rather constant since the Dutch colonial past, are rife with the racialization of minorities and the naïve absolution of racism from being Dutch (Essed and Hoving, 2014; Wekker, 2016). In a recent article Jones (2016) frames the Dutch post-colonial character by linking contemporary right-wing populism with the longer imperial Dutch history of hierarchies. When writing on the success of populists in the Netherlands, Jones (2016: 614) writes:

> 'The binary between 'autochthones' and 'allochthones', the more recent Dutch incarnation of conditional versus unconditional citizens, have provided fertile ground for populist parties. Populist politicians, evoking the image of a Dutch (ethno)nation under siege by the 'EU, refugees and terrorists', use this binary and take it to new extremes. Particularly 'Muslims' identified as 'allochthones' are targeted by the PVV.'

Even though other political parties are less explicit in singling out certain ethnic or religious categories, they converge with the PVV in presenting migration as potentially threatening and the migrants in need of integration. A good illustration for this is the fact that the party that won the 2017 Dutch general election (VVD) did so with a rather populist, anti-immigration agenda and the chilling slogan 'Doe Normaal' ('act normally', followed by the implied 'or go away'). This message was addressed to those that may be considered as *others* by mainstream Dutch nationalism discourse, namely ethnic minorities. What the slogan implies is that if someone does not act in a 'normal' way, then they should leave the country.[9] VVD's victory came during times of the imminent rise of the xenophobic PVV, the party of Geert Wilders, and was in fact celebrated by happy 'moderates' that the 'centre holds' ('The Centre Holds', 2017; Robinson, 2017). It is of course surprising however that the win of 'doe normaal' is considered a moderate voting behavior, while the Netherlands is still praised for its liberal and tolerant values. Or perhaps it is not surprising at all to realize how certain so-called mainstream parties, like the VVD, have coopted by now the anti-immigration rhetoric that was traditionally an extreme right-wing stance. It is most indicative how the xenophobic rhetoric of the Centrumpartij, seen as extremely politically incorrect in the 1980s, is now fairly routine parlance in parliament and the media.

Some recent surveys have shown indications that tolerance, at least among young people, is globally on the rise but there are crucial nuances that we should consider. For instance Janmaat and Keating (2017) find that British youth are more open to homosexuality and racial diversity than their past peers. Yet, when it comes to immigrants and foreign workers they are less open

than their past peers despite being even more educated than them (17). Sobolewska et al. (2017) similarly show that although (Islamic) religiosity in the Netherlands (and the UK) seems increasingly unimportant for integration according to the general public, certain backgrounds are favoured to be seen as more 'integrated' than others simply due to skin colour or country of origin. In order to address such nuances regarding political discourse, in the remainder of the paper we shift our attention to the everyday. We do so in an attempt to show how such populist ideas resonate or not among Dutch people, tracing possible differences between residents of Almere and Amsterdam.[10] It should be noted that residents of Almere and Amsterdam are not taken as prototypical urbanites or suburbanites since some live in Amsterdam and have lived in Almere, or vice versa. Also some of them live in Almere and work in Amsterdam. There is even a respondent who was born in Almere, moved to Amsterdam and then moved back to Almere with her family. The point here is that with the following we are not making claims about spatiality as a determining factor regarding immigration discourse. Rather, we demonstrate that no matter the circumstances in terms of living in the city or the periphery, migration skepticism remains constant.

And even if migration skepticism would be expected from voters of the populist far right here we choose to focus on people that oppose to PVV. Our interviewees may dissociate themselves from PVV which they represent as a collective shame for the Dutch nation but their discourse and viewpoints on migration do not differ that much from the party's rhetoric. In accordance to the dominant political discourse characterized by a strong anti-migration rhetoric across the political spectrum, xenophobia seems to permeate the everyday as well.

Marius (late 30s – manager) is a Dutch national who returned to the Netherlands from Dublin directly to Almere with his Italian partner; he was born in Maasdam (3,300), 100km south of Almere, and grew up in Leeuwarden (110,000), 120km north of Almere. He is very much against the PVV, feeling 'scared' because of its popularity. His explanation is that the average IQ and job quality in Almere are lower than the national average. His discussion on immigration though is based on subtle hints of deservingness:

> 'Also if you are 2nd or 3rd generation with a job and paying your taxes, wouldn't you be mad to the newcomers who get welfare and don't pay taxes?... I understand you can't let everyone in. If you open borders to everyone, we can't do many things anymore, welfare level [goes down], unemployment level [goes up]. But *if people are trying to contribute* to this city then I don't have any [issues].'

Marius' views on immigration policy are a clear reminder of the sense of entitlement a white Dutch person may have. In other words there is no question for Marius himself having consequences for not contributing to the city, only for migrants. A similar perspective comes from Sonja, who was

born in Amersfoort (155,000, 35km south of Almere) in 1951 and lived for several years in Amsterdam before moving to Almere in 1980, currently working as an administrator in Amsterdam. Despite explicitly saying she is not 'right-wing', at another moment she says 'there will be an Islamic school [in Almere] and this shows integration doesn't go well'. One wonders of course if she would consider a catholic school an equal sign of failing integration.

Another subtle indication of ethnic prejudice comes from Paula (graphic designer), who was born in Almere in 1980, then moved to Amsterdam in 1998 and then back to Almere with her own family in 2012. She appears liberal in every way, but her vocabulary is quite telling when she talks about the area in Almere they were moving to:

> 'There are many Hindustani in the area we're going to live now, it is with people who are building a house by themselves and all [are] people who have bought the house so no social rental, the whole area. So it is a good neighborhood *but* still a lot of foreign people live there, allochtonen, but those are the people who made a career so it is funny to see that.'

Paula expects her suburban way of life to be a positive experience since her neighbours appear to have similar aspirations like building their own house and having a career, and yet simply the fact that they are 'foreign' appears to her as a contradiction. This kind of subtle linking of ethnic background with normative ideas about behaviour comes from Ewald as well (early 40s – IT specialist), born and raised in Hoogeveen (55,000), a small town in Eastern Netherlands. He moved to Almere in 2003 from Den Helder (56,000, 100km north of Almere), a small town in North Holland. He is an interesting case considering that he converted to Islam in order to be able to marry his Persian spouse, despite being a skeptic regarding religion. When asked about the PVV he simply says 'I hate them, they are dangerous', while he thinks that the PVV is popular 'because we are multicultural, we have problems, and a lot of low-educated, low-income people.' Yet, when he discusses the development of Almere's center he makes a subtle comment on what 'improvement' means:

> 'Things have improved too. When I was walking around the center there were loads of Antillean people. Hanging out. Some thought it was scary, I didn't mind, I even had fun with them. They don't hang out there anymore.'

Regarding social and ethnic mixing, a hot issue in urban policy for decades (Uitermark, 2003), respondents appear rather vocal on their preferences. Jan (1958 - IT professional) was born and raised in Amsterdam, and moved to Almere in 1983, still living there in 2014. He is against the PVV and thinks that its popularity is not really because people are agreeing with its program but rather due to being dissatisfied with the loss of local community and due to the 'centralization of

things'; as he says, 'we are not part of decisions [made] in Brussels'. His views on mixing and diversity however are not that positive:

> 'Mixing all kinds of people, not race but social level, doesn't work. They have different way of what living means. I have Iraqi friends. Not race but attitude, what you expect from living. We have an old Dutch saying: eén rotte appel in de mand, maakt al het gave fruit te schand ('one rotten apple in the basket makes all the fruit go bad'), and the whole neighbourhood goes too. And we can avoid that. If there are e.g. Surinamers who like to party and they live together, nobody minds, but if you have two families like that in a quiet area then there is a problem. *People can have their own culture without bothering.*'

Although Jan claims that mixing does not work because of different 'social level' and culture and not because of race, he quickly distinguishes Surinamese families as potential perpetrators of bothering their neighbours. Carla (late 50s – administrator) was born in Friesland, the Northwestern province of the Netherlands. She moved to Almere in 1982 from Lochem, a small town in Eastern Netherlands, and lived there until 2002 when she moved to De Pijp, a highly gentrified area in Amsterdam. She was actually one of the founding members of the Almere branch of a major liberal party in the country (D66). She is clearly disapproving of the PVV's rise which she attributes to 'angst, fear for what is happening, they eat my bread, they take my jobs'. She is against 'social mixing' however, which she finds something that only young, overly idealistic people believe in. It is interesting to note that both Carla and Jan makes a plea for the separation of cultures and ethnicities against the mainstream and politicized view which holds that migrants choose to live separate lives and should thus be brought closer to (Dutch) society. The views of Carla and Jan are in accordance to Reekum (2012) who has showed that in the everyday the native Dutch are less open and willing to socialize with immigrants who are ironically accused as enclosed in their own social milieus. Thus reaching out to the mainstream society, which is expected by the natives from the migrants, is purely symbolic as a means to show their loyalty to the Dutch nation to which they posit as candidate members to be approved by dominant society.

Chris, a native Dutch man in his 50s from Breda (180,000) studied Theology in Nijmegen (170,000) and eventually got a job for a major bank in Amsterdam. He moved to Almere in 2000 in order to work in Amsterdam, and was living in Almere in 2013. Chris is explicitly critical towards the PVV, the popularity of which he attributes to the fact that Almere's residents are 'unsatisfied with who their neighbours are'. When asked about his own experiences with his neighbours he articulates his disapproval of a neighbour's actions:

> 'I remember the first time when somebody on the other side of the street started installing a disk antenna (satellite dish), I thought: 'There goes the neighbourhood'. At first I really had the urge to ask this man to put the antenna on the other side of his house. I do not

want to get involved into what he watches on TV but placing his antenna at the street side of the house would cause the houses to drop in value.'

Chris looks at the satellite dish, linking a household with a possible homeland, and while not being affected in any direct way, he sees a sign that the neighbourhood is becoming alienating, endangering its 'value'. Even more importantly Chris expects that the antenna may deter others like him to move into the neighbourhood, creating the possibility of himself becoming isolated and surrounded by Otherness. At another moment Chris racializes Almere's population and stresses the unfamiliarity of being the 'only non-black on the train from Amsterdam to Almere after 8 in the evening', a phenomenon that he claims 'says something about the kind of population that is drawn to this town':

> 'I don't know if this is the result of an active government policy, I'm not sure. But you do see it happen. You also see it happen in the facilities (voorzieningen) that the city is making now, they are providing music opportunities for black kids. You see drum classes, you see Brazilian dancing classes, but you don't see recorder classes, to make an extreme [example] of the other side. So if you are into hip-hop, there will be a place to go, but if you're into musical there is nothing.'

His critique is aimed at government policy, assumed to provide support to 'specific' categories like people with 'ethnic backgrounds' or 'black kids'. In both cases the argument is that the authorities provide preferential treatment to the needs of 'others' instead of natives/whites, implying that the real residents of Almere are Dutch whites.

Rosa, a 63-year old therapist (born in Breda – 183,000, Southern Netherlands), moved to Almere in 1987 from Noordwijkerhout (16,000 – 67km west of Almere) where she used to work in occupational therapy. She feels strongly against the PVV. She eventually moved to Amsterdam in 2005 and she strongly wishes she never moved to Almere. Her attempt however to stay away from what caused her to move from Almere in the first place was not a success as her experiences repeat themselves in an similar way in IJburg, a recently built area 8km east of Amsterdam's center:

> '[There is] witte vlucht (white flight) from here [IJburg] to the [inner] city. I see a lot of foreigners here too. Just look at the names at the bells, and more since I came. I was very naïve. I thought in IJburg there are a lot of white people, who have money, who can buy [property], that there are just a few social houses… but I saw only divorced mothers with children, and we have a mosque at the corner. On Friday all the Muslims go… a small building which was a Suriname restaurant. So many people! How is it possible!? There is a cellar and the women are downstairs. All the dresses [hijab], it's really difficult for me. I don't like to see women like this. Also the men don't look at me, next to me only. One told me "don't come near me whore". We have low-earning people in this neighbourhood, [allowed to move in] only when they earn 27,000 a year. And they have to have 3 children. The whole block… they are really poor.'

Rosa explicitly articulates her alienation from the neighbourhood by the lack of 'white people' with 'money', contrasting them with poverty and social housing which she links to Muslim neighbours. She even implicitly links burglaries and crime in general to the existence of social housing in the area, anxious that IJburg might become the 'second Bijlmer', a stigmatized borough in south-eastern Amsterdam. Rosa elaborates on what being a 'naïve' white person means, on who is expected to live in a social house and who is poor, on how many Muslims are 'too many', on what 'black' schools are for; her discourse is very much in line with xenophobic and islamophobic public discourse in the Netherlands at large.

Finally, Anne, in her 60s, moved from North Brabant to Amsterdam, living in the Jordaan, a historically working-class area but now a completely gentrified and very expensive central borough of Amsterdam. She is a vehement critic of the extreme right and has voted for leftist parties like the GreenLeft and the Socialist Party. Yet, her vocabulary is reminiscent of xenophobic discourses: 'The foreigners hate it here, they don't want to live in the Netherlands. And there is enough people here already', or when talking in favour of the controversial Christmas blackface caricature 'zwarte piet': 'they are taking away our culture, our tradition, the colour of our life.'

Conclusion

In this paper we take a critical stance towards studies that investigate the 'populist voter' as a type, resembling an angry, young, white male, and we attempt to go beyond the search for villains in the story of populism. In so doing we challenge the common-sense idea that the highly-educated middle class does not harbour anti-immigration sentiments, while challenging the reified dichotomy of the urban middle class being pro-diversity versus suburban residents being anti-diversity. We develop our arguments in light of the rise of right-wing populism in the Netherlands, and specifically by demonstrating how the electoral histories of (urban) Amsterdam and (suburban) Almere do not allow for clear-cut conclusions regarding the rise and distribution of the right-wing populist vote. In fact voters in Almere have shown support for such parties already in the early 1980s, while in Amsterdam voting for (neo)liberal parties has remained geographically consistent historically with the presence of middle-high income residents. In other words, space does not seem to critically determine voting.

In addition, against expectations, Almere is a rather integrated, egalitarian place, despite its PVV electorate, with low school and residential segregation and quite equal income and education levels. On the contrary Amsterdam's children tend to live segregated lives and its income and education levels are unequal. Most importantly we show that besides voting, the discourse in the country at

large, and among urban and suburban residents alike, remains migration-skeptic. The urban middle-class may vote for the Greens or the Liberals but they are not exceptional in their discourse and practice. Their tolerance and celebration of diversity appear to be largely performative. Meanwhile right-wing populist parties may be favoured in the periphery but that does not make their voters exceptionally xenophobic. Be it an urban white resident of a posh inner-city neighbourhood full of white affluent residents, or a suburban white resident of an area where ethnic minorities reside, the vocabulary is similar: there are 'too many' immigrants. Thus, it is important in urban studies not to reproduce right-wing 'populism' as the catchphrase it has become, a vacuous term that can often obscure complex social behaviour and attitude. Moreover, instead of risking reproducing a self-fulfilling prophecy of an 'enlightened' highly-educated middle class, we should focus on repertoires and practices regarding diversity and coexistence between ethnic categories. In the end of the day what is important is to find ways to foster solidarity.

Acknowledgement:

Footnotes

[1]For this paper populism is defined as a political discourse referring to the people as a homogenous entity that should be represented by strong leaders.

[2]A social-liberal party.

[3]A green-liberal party.

[4]A liberal, increasingly populist party.

[5]A right-wing populist, anti-immigration party.

[6]The Social-Democratic Labour Party.

[7]Parents of small children in the Netherlands can choose two from a pool of several dozen primary schools in their district.

[8]A critique of the welfare state as an 'instrument catering to self-serving bureaucrats' (15).

[9]This was actually explicit in the end of a letter by former and current Prime Minister Mark Rutte addressing the voters in January 2017, where he wrote 'doe normaal of ga weg' (behave normally or go away).

[10]The names of the respondents have been altered in this paper.

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