CHAPTER 1

Figures of Femonationalism

In this chapter I begin to lay out a critical genealogy of the mobilization of women's rights in anti-Islam and anti-immigration campaigns in the Netherlands, France, and Italy from the early 2000s until 2013. In particular, the next sections will provide a detailed account of the ways in which three right-wing nationalist parties—the PVV in the Netherlands, the FN in France, and the LN in Italy—have increasingly resorted to a gender equality lexicon to advance their xenophobic political agendas.[1] This chapter also traces the participation of several feminist intellectuals and women's organizations, female politicians (including some of Muslim descent), and women's equality agencies (or femocrats) in the campaign against Islam's "patriarchy" and Muslim women's alleged special exposure to misogyny and gender violence.[2] However, before I begin to describe the contours of these *femonationalist figures*, in what follows I will provide a brief historical framing of the ways in which the stereotypes of the non-western migrant man as misogynist and of the non-western migrant woman as victim to be rescued have gained currency in the western European imagery. It is important to highlight that the current stigmatization of Muslim men as enemies of gender equality and the foregrounding of Muslim women as oppressed victims both build on gendered prejudices that had been applied to non-western, colonized subjects more generally in all three countries. As I mentioned in the introduction, the current positioning of Muslim men and women, with the latter playing the role of the passive object of non-western male congenital violence who require protection, can in fact be regarded as a contemporary face of a well-known western topos, namely, that of the "white men [claiming to be] saving brown women from brown men," to use Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's apposite formulation.[3] I thus contend that, in the present context, Muslim women play the role of a *synecdoche* for the western European stereotype of the female Other.

That is, Muslim women currently personify in the western European imagery the homogenizing figure of the non-western woman as the victim par excellence of non-western male violence. In this sense, the Muslim woman nowadays powerfully embodies the features of what Chandra Mohanty already in the 1980s famously called the Third World woman: that is, the representation of women from non-western societies as constituting a homogeneous "powerless" group defined by their status of victimhood.[4]

Muslim Women as Synecdoche

The mobilization of issues of gender equality to stigmatize non-western migrant men in general has indeed a specific history and trajectory in the western European context. After World War II, when western Europe began to recover from the devastations brought about by the horrific conflict, millions of migrants, mostly male, migrated to and through the continent to fill the demand for labor power in the reconstruction industry.[5] A whole business grew up around these new migrants, with bilateral agreements signed between states and offices across northern European countries that were specifically designed to attract young males to be employed in manufacture and construction. Whether coming from the ex-European colonies (or from countries that were still under colonial rule), or from the Mediterranean region (e.g., southern Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and part of the Maghreb), these male migrants soon became the victims of widespread xenophobia and racism.[6] Despite their crucial role in the reconstruction of western European economies, they were portrayed by the mainstream media and right-wing parties, and perceived by many (northern) Europeans, in negative terms: lazy, uncivilized, aggressive, backward, unambitious, and so forth.[7] It was only from the mid-1970s onward—that is, after the 1973 oil crisis and the policies stopping further immigration flows to the majority of northern European countries—that migrant women entered onto the stage of migration on an unprecedented scale (on which more in chapter 5). Fearing that they would not be able to come back to the "hosting" countries once they left, a number of these male migrants decided to settle in northern Europe and bring in their family members: spouses, mothers, or daughters. From the 1970s onward the geography of migrations also changed, whereby countries of emigration became countries of immigration—as in the case of southern Europe—and

were admitted to the western European family. The presence of migrant women from the ex-colonies and the Global South in western Europe thus, at least in its initial stage, was largely the unexpected and paradoxical outcome of policies that aimed to reduce, rather than to increase, the number of migrants present in the continent.[8] And it was not long before these women too became the object of political scrutiny and stereotyping. Typical orientalist gendered dichotomies began to be applied to them: if migrant males were usually depicted as brutes and uncivilized, women were portrayed as passive and submissive. In the Netherlands, Conny Roggeband and Mieke Verloo remind us that it was only at the beginning of the 2000s that Muslim women started to attract increasing political and media attention and to be used as the chief example of the non-western woman as victim of gendered oppression.[9] Before then, women from minority groups in general were referred to as "allochthonous" and discussed in denigratory terms as retrograde—without distinctions of nationality or religion—when compared to the "autochthonous" Dutch women.[10] Until the late 1990s, therefore, women from former Dutch colonies (Surinam, the Antilles, and Indonesia), from eastern Europe as well as from Turkey and Morocco (the biggest migrant communities in the country), were all represented as backward and victims.[11] For instance, discussing the status of Russians in the Netherlands, Gudrun Willett points out that "the Dutch in particular use [sex] trafficking and mafia images in order to define them [the Russians] as 'other' in matters of migration, work, and crime."[12] Russian women, and eastern European women in general, have thus usually been thought of as being "trafficking victims." From the end of the 1990s onward, however, the hierarchy of backwardness became more layered, with Turkish and Moroccan women gradually being placed at the bottom of the emancipation scale, with Surinamese and Antillean women being presented as less backward in comparison.[13] The relegation of Muslim women to the lower echelons of the emancipation league table became more pronounced in the early 2000s under the center-right Balkenende I (2002) and Balkenende II (2003–2006) cabinets. In 2002 the appearance on the political scene of the party named Pim Fortuyn List (on which more below), and its subsequent electoral success involving fierce anti-immigration and anti-Islam propaganda in the name of women's rights, redesigned the Dutch political landscape as well as the ways in which non-western migrant women, above all Muslim women, would be framed in subsequent years.[14] As Minister

for Integration and Immigration in the Balkenende cabinets, the right-wing nationalist Rita Verdonk has been another key figure in the public contemporary construction of Muslim women as the principal victims of backward and misogynist cultures. Verdonk's interventions strongly contributed to spreading the idea that Islam amounts to unequal gender relations and violence (with an emphasis on honor killings, domestic violence, and forced marriages).[15] Thus, it was particularly in the 2000s that "emancipation policies bec[a]me 'ethnicized'" and addressed above all to Muslim women.[16]

Unlike in the Netherlands, in France Muslim women have played the role of the synecdoche for the western European stereotype of the female Other from the outset, that is, from the beginning of mass immigration to the country in the 1950s and 1960s. Despite the fact that in the early 1980s—that is, when the presence of women in migratory movements tripled due to family reunification—migrants from Portugal were as numerous as those from Algeria, research and political discourses tended to focus on migrants from the latter country.[17] Masima Moujoud notes how, from the very outset in the 1970s, sociological studies on gender and migration in France focused on the "effects" of migration on women, particularly women from the Maghreb.[18] The common denominator among these studies was the assumption that migration was positive for these women since the transition from "traditional" to "modern" contexts would have an emancipatory impact on them.[19] The evolutionary paradigm that informed studies on gender and migration also shaped the widespread conviction that rejecting the values of the society of origin was essential for women's integration into France.[20] Capucine Larzillière and Lisbeth Sal, for instance, remind us that already in 1983—long before the explosion of the controversy over the wearing of the Muslim headscarf in public schools, culminating in their banning in 2004—the journal *Les cahiers du féminisme* echoed this idea by referring to the example of a young woman born in France to Moroccan parents.[21] The journal portrays the young woman as struggling in order to continue her studies as an "escape" from the type of "traditional" life that her family had planned for her. "School thus is established as a place of liberation in which she does not experience either discrimination or racism."[22] Furthermore, there is a long history in France of applying a double standard in the representation of Muslim men and women. Whereas the former are represented as violent and sexist, an image encapsulated in

the concept of the Arab boy (*garçon arabe*), Muslim young veiled women (*filles voiles*) stand for the submissive victims of traditional families and patriarchal cultures; those who do not conform to this model, instead, are called *beurettes emancipées* (emancipated girls of Maghreb origin) and regarded as the model that Muslim girls should follow.[23] In this sense, then, in France there is a fundamental continuity between past and present, where Muslim women have consistently been identified as the quintessential embodiment of the non-western woman as backward and traditional. This notwithstanding, we should note that women from postsocialist countries in France too have been consistently identified as victims, as in the case of discussions on sex trafficking. In 2009 for instance, *Le Nouvelle Observateur* devoted its November issue to the "explosion of sex traffic" with several articles focusing upon women from eastern Europe as the most numerous group in the sex industry (*filière*).[24]

Finally, non-western migrant women in Italy started to become visible—particularly in academic work—at the beginning of the 1980s. Unlike in the Netherlands and France, which have a longer history of being immigrants' final destinations, and in which initially men had predominantly been the bridgeheads of the migratory chain, in Italy single women constituted a significant number of migrants from the outset. These women mostly came from countries with majoritarian Catholic populations (such as the Philippines, El Salvador, and Cape Verde) and tended to be employed as domestic workers (*colf*) and/or carers (*badanti*; sing. *badante*) in private households. During the 1970s and 1980s, scholarly work that focused on migrant women was dominated by the "tradition-modernity" dichotomy.[25] At the time, non-western migrant women, no matter what their country of origin, were systematically considered backward when compared to Italian women, and immigration was cast in these scholarly texts as an opportunity for them to enter a modern country and to acquire a more emancipated model of womanhood. From the beginning of the 1990s up until the present, however, the composition of migrants moving to Italy began to change dramatically. Entry restrictions put in place in other western European countries, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the geographical location of the peninsula, which makes it easily reachable from different areas particularly for temporary migration, were all factors that made Italy increasingly attractive for immigrants from eastern Europe as well as from African and Asian countries. Representations of, and policies targeting, non-western

migrant women in the 1990s tended to concentrate on eastern European and Nigerian women, as victims of trafficking in the sex industry. In 1998, for instance, with the approval of the first law regulating immigration (Testo Unico Immigrazione), an article was introduced (article 18) allowing migrant women who were forced into prostitution to obtain a special visa if they denounced their exploiter. In the 1980s and especially the 1990s, therefore, two main figures dominated the public imagery regarding non-western female foreigners: the badante, which referred to both care and domestic workers, and the trafficking victim. In the 2000s the stereotype of victimhood associated with women of non-western descent was "enriched" by a new figure: that of the Muslim woman qua victim of genital mutilations, honor killings, forced veiling, and arranged marriages. The case of Sanaa Dafani, the young woman of Moroccan origin murdered by her father in 2009, as well as similar cases of gendered violence involving Muslim men as perpetrators, monopolized media attention in the 2000s and began to establish an equation between women's oppression and Islam. Yet in those same years the number of Italian women killed and assaulted by Italian men (partners, fathers, relatives, etc.) reached such heights that some commentators began to speak of a femicide emergency.[26]

All in all, while migrant women from the postsocialist countries have been foregrounded as sex-trafficking victims, those coming from North and Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East have gained the reputation of being victims of specific forms of gendered violence (genital mutilations and honor killings in particular).[27] In short, the representation of the non-western migrant universe as one made of (male) masters and (female) slaves has been somewhat of a cliché from early on in all three western European countries. This notwithstanding, it is important to note that in the 1980s and most of the 1990s it was still a representation that belonged to the rubric of stereotypes surrounding migrant communities from the Global South and postsocialist countries, alongside other prejudices, such as the idea that non-western migrant males were on average more prone to criminal activities than nonmigrant ones and were parasitic on the welfare system or responsible for the low wages of nonmigrant workers. In other words, until relatively recently the ostensible lesser status of women within migrant enclaves was not perceived, and used, as a special reason for disliking non-western migrants. In this sense, the contemporary emphasis upon gender inequalities and the obsessive invocation

of the violation of women's rights within migrant (especially Muslim) communities particularly by the nationalist right, but also by several feminists, women's organizations, and neoliberal policy makers—or what I call the femonationalist convergence—might well constitute a novelty of the new millennium. Since 9/11 and the subsequent bombing of Afghanistan in particular, which was justified—among other things—by the claim that the West was liberating Muslim women from the oppressive conditions to which Islamic fundamentalists were subjecting them, the issue of women's rights as a central tool for Othering and stigmatizing non-western populations has gained unprecedented currency.[28]

The New Centrality of Gender for Right-Wing Nationalism

One of the novelties of the present neoliberal conjuncture is the centrality that gender issues seem to have acquired within right-wing nationalist parties' agendas. Since the mid-2000s these parties have begun adopting the language of women's rights and gender equality in anti-immigration and anti-Islam campaigns *on an unprecedented scale*. Seeking to cash in on the general shift of the political spectrum to the right that characterized the beginning of the millennium and to normalize their public image as "modernized" and trustworthy political forces, numerous right-wing parties in western Europe have begun to show concern for the status of women's rights, especially within Muslim and non-western migrant communities.[29] Nationalist right-wing parties' newly found feminist "vocation" is in fact in sharp contradiction with their traditional antifeminist politics and ideology. While advocating women's emancipation as a central value of the European (Christian) social fabric, which Muslims and non-western migrants allegedly lack, these parties also promote policies that encourage the maintenance of traditional roles for women. Despite their strong contradictions on the theme of gender issues, their exploitation of women's rights has paid off. As I will show in the next pages, the stigmatization of Muslim and non-western migrant males as misogynists and backward has helped these parties not only become more acceptable in the mainstream but also obtain unprecedented success in recent elections. The following three sections draw mainly on an analysis of the PVV's, FN's, and LN's positions that were found on their official websites and in national newspapers and magazines and electoral materials between (roughly) 2005 and 2013.

Documents analyzed also included political posters, relevant parliamentary discussions, and interviews with party leaders that appeared in the national press.[30]

Geert Wilders and the PVV

The sociologist Sarah Bracke identifies three phases of what she calls the "civilizational era" of Dutch politics, that is, the historical conjuncture in which the clash of civilizations between supposedly progressive, liberal western Europe and the backward Islamic world has become a major topic of the political and economic agenda. Within such a civilizational era, the theme of gender equality has assumed a new centrality.[31] The first phase was inaugurated by the Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD; People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) with the center-right politician Frits Bolkestein's speech on the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.[32] This is the phase during which multiculturalism began to be declared unviable as a project or ideal for Dutch society. The growing number of immigrants, particularly of Islamic faith, who decided to reside in the Netherlands on a stable basis, thereby changing the demographics of the country, was declared to be a danger for liberal western values. The second phase between 2002 and 2004 was dominated by figures such as the right-wing politicians Pim Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Rita Verdonk and the film director Theo van Gogh. During this phase, gender and gay equality were asserted as mainstays of Dutch culture and its social contract, something that Muslims' alleged misogyny and homophobia were seen to threaten. The third phase lasted from 2004 to 2012; it was inaugurated by the murder of Theo van Gogh in 2004 and the subsequent and dramatic shift of the political axis toward the nationalist right, with the emergence of the right-wing nationalist and Islamophobic politician Geert Wilders. Given its centrality to the consolidation of the femonationalist ideology in the Netherlands, in what follows I thus concentrate on delineating Wilders's politics and on his mobilization of gay and gender equality in anti-Islam/anti-immigration campaigns in this third phase.

Upon leaving the VVD in 2004 in protest against the party's considering admitting Turkey to the EU, Wilders in 2006 founded his own political platform: the right-wing nationalist PVV.[33] Profoundly inspired and influenced by Pim Fortuyn's xenophobic politics, Wilders has made the mainstay of his politics a campaign against non-western immigrants and Muslims in

the name of western values of freedom and gay and gender equality.[34] Its ideological manifesto—"Een Nieuw-Realistische Visie" (A new realistic vision)—presents the main tenets of his nationalist, xenophobic, and (neo) liberal recipe. Drawing on Hegel and Tocqueville, Hobbes, Fukuyama, and Leo Strauss, Wilders's manifesto proposes a conservative and nationalist corrective that he conceives to be a cure to the excesses of liberal freedom, that is, to multiculturalism. His goal is to establish secure cultural and moral foundations for the new neoliberal credo.[35] In this document, Islam was already identified as one of the main threats to the liberal western lineage of democracy and values. It was especially in subsequent years, however, with Wilders increasingly moving toward what Vossen calls "national populism," that he obsessively presented Islam as a dangerous ideology and way of life that threatens, above all, gay and gender equality.[36] This theme had been present in Wilders's agenda for a long time; in many ways, it drew on and was reinforced by his political collaboration with the Islamophobic, self-proclaimed feminist politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, with whom he authored a 2003 document calling for a "liberal jihad" against Islam.[37] But it was after 2006, upon the foundation of his own party, that Wilders's mobilization of gay and gender equality according to an anti-Islam script clearly became central to his political strategy. In an attempt to capitalize on the clamor that followed the release of the movie *Submission I*, and the subsequent murder of its director, Theo van Gogh, by a Muslim fundamentalist in 2004 (on which more shortly), in 2008 Wilders produced a short movie, *Fitna.* Like van Gogh's film, *Fitna* also focuses on the theme of gender inequality and violence as inherent, central features of Islam. Throughout the movie, *suras* of the Koran suggesting that Islam is about the annihilation of the enemy (i.e., the infidel and the non-Muslim) are accompanied by images showing the 9/11 terrorist attacks, rallies of Muslim fundamentalists celebrating Nazism and the killing of Jews, and the murder of van Gogh. All of its scenes convey the message that Islam, as a political ideology rather than simply a religious credo, wants to rule the world. Under the title "The Netherlands under the Spell of Islam," the second part of the movie portrays how the "Islamization of Europe" is affecting the Dutch nation. Here, images of veiled women walking through the streets of Dutch cities serve as the backdrop to Muslim fundamentalists' declarations regarding the justness of punishing women's adultery with death. The movie closes with projections of chilly scenarios if Islam

were to take over: gay people killed, women stoned to death, and children turned into terrorists. The release of *Fitna* on the video website LiveLeak in March 2008 sparked enormous controversies, including death threats against Wilders and a boycott of Dutch products organized by Muslim organizations in several countries. At the 2010 Dutch general elections it became clear that Wilders's extreme political style had served to establish him not only as the most discussed and controversial Dutch politician but also as the leader of a political movement able to touch the sensitive, Islamophobic nerves of Dutch society. Not surprisingly, the PVV's party program for the June 9, 2010, elections was wholly directed against immigration, dual nationality, multiculturalism, and, of course, Islam and its homophobia and misogyny. An example is this excerpt from his electoral program:

> Anyone who thinks that Islam is just one issue cannot count. Mass immigration has huge implications for all facets of our society. It is economically a disaster, it affects the quality of our education, it increases insecurity in the streets, leading to an exodus from our cities, it expels Jews and gays and flushes decades of women's rights down the toilet.[38]

In the 2010 elections, the PVV turned out to be the third party of the Netherlands, with 15.4 percent of votes, almost 10 percent more than in the previous 2006 elections, thereby becoming a key force in the constitution of the new government. After two years of external backing for the conservative Rutte I government (formed by the VVD and Christen-Democratisch Appèl, CDA), in 2012 the PVV withdrew its support, which effectively led to a new election. The PVV's political campaign for the 2012 general elections again used the by-then-familiar anti-Islam watchwords, but it now included a stronger anti-EU and anti-immigration propaganda in which European integration was depicted as the source of the economic and cultural decline that had affected the Netherlands since the beginning of the economic crisis in 2007 and immigrants from Eastern Europe were declared unwelcome. For instance, in 2012 the PVV established a website in which Dutch citizens could send their complaints against immigrants from the new eastern member countries of the EU; Wilders depicted such immigrants as "criminals" and "rapists."[39] During the 2012 electoral campaign the usual anti-Islam motifs in the name of gay and gender equality were also maintained, while the party ridiculed the EU directive for quotas of

women in the upper echelons of companies, a clear lapse that showed the PVV's actual ambiguities on gender issues.[40] As Sarah De Lange and Liza Mügge argue, the PVV is virtually silent on more traditional gender equality issues (like the gender pay gap or women's participation in the public sphere).[41] Its main interventions on the theme of women's equality, indeed, surface when the PVV discusses immigration and Muslims. For instance, in its 2012 program the PVV proposed to limit child benefits to families who have no more than two children—thereby attempting to exclude from welfare benefits immigrant families who are on average larger than Dutch ones—and to tax Muslim women wearing the headscarf.[42] At the general elections in September 2012, the PVV was again confirmed as the country's third party, although it did not garner the support from two years earlier, losing almost five percentage points and nine seats.

The instrumentalization of a pro-gay and especially pro-women agenda in his anti-Muslim crusade intensified on the occasion of International Women's Day in 2013. On March 8 Wilders marked the party's celebrations with the release of a document entirely devoted to violence against women under Islam (*Geweld tegen Vrouwen binnen de Islam*).[43] Beside the usual references to the suras of the Koran concerning the injunction that women submit to men, one section of the document was entirely devoted to the occurrence of gendered violence among Muslims in the Netherlands. Statistical data on honor killings in Turkish and Moroccan communities were accompanied by considerations on their difference from domestic violence in Dutch households: while domestic violence taking place among Dutch people was described as most often "unpremeditated" (thereby making it less reprehensible though socially unacceptable), the type of violence that occurs among Muslims was defined as inextricable from their culture.

All in all, albeit not initiating the stigmatization of Muslims in the name of women's rights, as the rest of this chapter will discuss in more detail, the PVV has been key in the consolidation and further intensification of the femonationalist ideological space in the Netherlands since the mid-2000s. Its harsh Islamophobic lexicon was indeed instrumental to the declaration of the end of multiculturalism—a political and economic project that worked through the provision of social services and policies for minorities' integration—but also to the framing of migrants' integration in

general, and Muslims' in particular, as a matter of individual willingness and "cultural affinity," in line with neoliberal conceptions of citizenship and the state. As chapter 3 will discuss at length. Wilders's PVV thus largely contributed not only to the exploitation of feminist themes for racist and chauvinistic purposes but also to the ratification of the neoliberal agenda that was to become the new dogma of Dutch economy and politics on matters of immigration.

Marine Le Pen and the FN

In France the 2002 victory of the FN over the Socialist Party, and its subsequent appearance in the run-off elections against the recently founded center-right party Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP), headed by Jacques Chirac, marked a shift to the right and a dramatic growth of anti-immigration and Islamophobic politics. As in the Netherlands, throughout the 2000s the question of women's rights became central to anti-Islam and anti-immigration politics in France as well. Gender equality was recast as a cornerstone of the French Republic, and the Muslim veil was subsumed under the rubric of backward, oppressive misogynistic practices. Unlike in the Netherlands, however, where new nationalist-populist formations such as Wilders's PVV appeared on the political scene and built their identity precisely on the issue of women's and gays' rights vis-à-vis Islam, in France this role was played by an older nationalist formation, such as the FN. Toward the end of the 2000s in fact, the FN began to seize on the hot-button issue of women's rights within the context of its xenophobic political campaigns. The FN was founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen, who remained its leader until the end of 2010. Given its links to fascist organizations and its anti-Semitic stance on the Holocaust, the party has monopolized, and been confined within, the far-right space of the French political topography since its inception.[44] With the stated goal of liberating the party from its political confinement and making it acceptable within the mainstream, from 2002 onward, Marine Le Pen—the daughter of the party's founder—began what is now called the "de-demonization" (*dediabolisation*) of the Front National, first in her role as coordinator of the FN's electoral campaign and, since January 2011, as its new president. Le Pen's operation of de-demonization has followed two paths: first, the adoption of republican themes such as secularism and the Declaration of the Rights

of Man and Citizen of 1789, once anathema to the party; second, the mobilization of women's rights and (less prominently) gay rights in the cause of opposing Islam and non-western migrants.[45]

Concerning the first path, although secularism (*laïcité*) had not previously been part of the FN's agenda—since the party has always been tied to the most conservative fringes of the Catholic Church—it was one of the themes most used by Marine Le Pen during the 2012 presidential campaign. On January 15, 2012, in Grand-Quevilly, in the Rouen *banlieue* (Seine-Maritime), Marine Le Pen proposed the creation of a ministry of immigration and secularism. According to Le Pen, secularism is currently under attack by immigrants, particularly by Muslims, who introduce communitarianism into French society and thus threaten not only a pillar of the republic, but also the unity of the nation. It is "mass immigration" that is responsible for such threats and indeed, according to Le Pen, "it will be easier to apply secularism once we stop immigration."[46] In Le Pen's analysis, mass immigration itself is the result of globalization, which denies "national identities" and "transforms every area, every nation, every people into an empty globalized magma without identity, where trade reigns."[47] In order to avoid mass immigration, Le Pen proposes drastically reducing the number of immigrants allowed to enter the country to ten thousand each year, the majority of whom should be students and asylum seekers.[48]

Concerning the second path, already in 2007 when Marine Le Pen coordinated the presidential campaign for her father, the mobilization of women's rights as a means for opposing Islam and immigration more generally began entering the FN's agenda. Under the motto "They have broken everything" (*Ils ont tout cassé*) to refer to the French political class, in 2007 the FN began disseminating a number of posters, including one that depicted a young woman clearly of North African origin, dressed in modern French attire, showing her belly and flowing hair.[49] The image of the beurette emancipée supporting the FN's electoral motto clearly aimed both to reaffirm the republican position on the "right" attire for young women of Muslim background and, arguably, to reach a new female electorate that had not been a target of FN campaigns before. However, it is only really since her notorious 2010 statement that "in some areas, it is not good to be a woman or gay or Jewish, or even French or white" that Marine Le Pen has figured prominently in the right-wing nationalist family that claims to

defend women's rights.[50] The "appearance" of an opening of the FN to the theme of women's rights in particular has been further emphasized not only by the fact that its new president is a woman, but also by the growth of the female vote for the FN in the May 2012 presidential elections. On this occasion, the FN obtained 17.9 percent of the vote, positioning the FN as the third force in French politics. Marine Le Pen managed to obtain this result within little more than a year of becoming the new president of the party.[51]

Yet Le Pen's positions on women's rights are ambivalent and rather contradictory. When we look at the FN program and Le Pen's statements directly addressing women's issues, it becomes clear that she considers women primarily as mothers. Initially she claimed to be in favor of the right to abortion but against abuses of this right, or what she calls "abortion of convenience." "From the beginning of my campaign, I clearly said, against some elements of my party, I was not going to challenge the law [on abortion]. But there are excesses and abuses. Women use abortion as a means of contraception."[52] The FN presidential program for 2012 states that "the free choice for women must be also that of choosing not to abort: better prevention and information are essential, parents' responsibility is necessary, the possibility of prenatal adoption must be proposed, improved family benefits for large families must be established."[53] In a long interview given to *Elle* in 2012 Le Pen expressed her opposition to the idea of a special ministry for women's rights, explaining that women are not an "endangered species."[54] This position is also reflected in Le Pen's attack against "positive discrimination" in favor of meritocracy. Furthermore, Le Pen supports pro-natality policies, to be achieved by encouraging "French" women to have more than two children. These policies are of two types. First, the FN family policy calls for a parental income "intended to guarantee that . . . mothers or fathers can choose freely between the exercise of a profession and the education of their children: income payments equivalent to 80% of the minimum wage for three years from the second child for an additional term of four years for the third child."[55] This also includes "family allowances, reserved for families *with at least one French parent*, [to] be adjusted and indexed to the cost of living."[56] As sociologist Francesca Scrinzi notes, Marine Le Pen's statements on women's rights are highly paradoxical, "alternating between defending women's liberation and defending the traditional family, with the latter viewed as the basis of the nation. Asked if she identifies herself as a feminist, Le Pen said that she could consider

herself as such to the extent that she defends women's rights, which are threatened by Islam."[57] According to Le Pen, indeed, France would not be a sexist country if it were not for the migrants' enclaves. In the *Elle* interview, she in fact declared that sexism is a problem only among non-French communities. As she put it,

> There is, that's for sure, in a certain number of schools, a cultural work that needs to be done to teach that [i.e., gender equality] to the children who were raised in a cultural environment where women are firmly inferior to men and who are presented as such. . . . (Public starts booing her). Well what are you booing at now? Yes you are booing the fact that you really know that. . . . Excuse me, but you refuse to see the reality! Well in that case we will never resolve the problem! We know that the girls in the banlieues. . . . Honestly there are places where sexism exists, I agree. The girls in the banlieues cannot wear short skirts. There. The girls in the banlieues are treated like objects. Therefore, yes, the best way to solve our problems is first to detect them, to be able to apply a diagnostic on the problems in order to solve them where they need solving. I don't mind if you resolve problems that do not exist [such as sexism in French schools among French pupils], but that's not helpful.[58]

In the end, as Scrinzi notes,

> While the stigmatization of racialized men is still central in FN propaganda, today racialized women have acquired a new visibility, being exposed—by a female leader—as symbols of feminine oppression in the debates about the burqa, the Muslim headscarf, and sexual violence. . . . The figure of the female Other thus seems to epitomize the paradoxes of Marine Le Pen's propaganda. On the one hand, migrant women are represented as victims of patriarchal practices, which are condemned by the party. On the other, Marine Le Pen's discourse and policy proposals on women and the family echo findings on radical right organizations from across the world, where female activists may favor some rights for the women of their "community" (variously defined on the basis of nationality, culture, religion, class . . .) while countering the same rights for the female Others.[59]

As for the issue of gay rights, the FN has more recently attenuated its traditional homophobic agenda. Presumably following the Wilders model,

since becoming president of the party Marine Le Pen has made not more than a few rhetorical openings to gay equality. Her general strategy, however, seems to be to keep a tactical silence on the issue in order to both keep happy its most conservative internal areas and constituencies and to gain some consensus from gay voters.[60]

Ultimately, by means of explicitly equating sexual/gender violence and non-western migrant cultures, Le Pen has thus followed the strategy of other right-wing nationalist parties for whom the mobilization of gender equality is arguably instrumental to vilifying non-western migrant men, Muslim in particular.

The Lega Nord

The dawn of the new millennium saw a dramatic shift to the right in Italy as well. In 2001 Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing coalition Casa delle Libertà (House of Freedoms), won the general elections and inaugurated almost a decade of uninterrupted rule—with the exception of a brief center-left cabinet between 2006 and 2008 (i.e., the Prodi II government). Relying on neofascist and right-wing nationalist and anti-immigration parties like Alleanza Nazionale (AN; National Alliance) and the Lega Nord (LN; Northern League), Berlusconi's governments marked a turning point with regard to immigration and Islamophobic policies. In July 2002, it passed Law No. 177, the so-called Bossi-Fini law, by decree introducing extremely severe sanctions on immigrants and refugees. Under the new law, illegal immigration became a criminal offense; all foreigners applying for a residence permit were required to be fingerprinted; residency permits became strictly linked to a work contract (in a country in which black-market labor imposed by employers is very widespread, particularly among migrant workers); and the time limit for seclusion in detention centers while waiting for extradition was extended from thirty to sixty days, with asylum seekers placed in detention while waiting for their asylum review, in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights. The law took its name from its two initial proponents, Gianfranco Fini, the leader of AN (a neofascist party founded in 1994 and dissolved in 2009), and Umberto Bossi (the then leader of the LN). The LN in particular has played a key role within Italian politics not only in promoting harsh xenophobic policies but also in fomenting anti-immigration sentiments through the exploitation of the issue of women's rights. The analysis that follows will thus concentrate on this party.

Upon its foundation in 1991 LN presented itself as the party of a new era in Italian politics, denouncing the corrupt political elite and the theft of the northern regions' resources and autonomy by the central government. In the 1990s, the LN was still bound to an ethnoregionalist ideology demanding the independence of Padania (roughly corresponding to the Italian regions north of the Po River), based on the idea of it being a homogeneous nation with a common history and ethnic identity. In the 1990s, the LN's regional nationalism led it to position southern Italians as the inimical Other. At the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s, particularly after its participation in the Berlusconi government, and therefore its co-optation into national rather than regionalist politics, the LN moved from demanding secession to encouraging fiscal federalism, and the Other was increasingly identified as non-Italian, non-western migrants. From its entrance into the government in 2001 onward, the LN distinguished itself with its harsh anti-immigration and increasingly anti-Islam propaganda, as well as for resorting to a strongly nationalist and masculinist rhetoric opposed to the integration of migrants into the Italian labor market and the welfare system. Non-western migrants in general were depicted as a threat to national security, and Muslims in particular were regarded as a danger not only to Christian Italian culture but also to women. Muslim and non-western migrant males were constantly identified as violent and criminal and as rapists under the Berlusconi governments, with the support of the LN.[61] The mobilization of the issue of gender equality against Muslim migrants in particular began—at least explicitly and vocally—with the LN's 2005 campaign against negotiations for a possible entry of Turkey into the EU. On that occasion the LN produced a poster, which was plastered on walls throughout the peninsula for many months. The poster portrays three women: the one on the left is veiled and appears behind prison bars. She is surrounded by darkness, but her state of suffering is clearly discernible. On the righthand side are two women with short hair and western clothes, both sitting at an office desk and seemingly discussing work issues in a well-lit environment. The caption on the left says "Them . . ."; the one on the right, "Us . . .". Beneath the image is an almost rhetorical question: "Are you willing to take the risk? No to Turkey in Europe."[62] The message is, of course, very clear: admitting Turkey to the European Union would mean allowing a country with an Islamic majoritarian culture into a tradition-

ally Christian area and would therefore run the risk of exposing European women to a religion with political ambitions that subjugate the female sex.

Such a move was startling because of the decidedly scant attention the party had paid to women's rights until then. The LN, as I mentioned above, utilizes a strongly masculinist political rhetoric and is bound to a traditional model of the family. As Scrinzi notes, "Padanian masculinity is associated with sexual prowess and heterosexual normality. . . . The political conflict tends to be described in military terms as the Padanian masculinity is associated with strength, resistance and toughness in politics. Finally, . . . the gendered construction of Padania is associated with rationality, a modern work ethic, industriousness, honesty and individualism. . . . Padania is constructed as a masculine nation."[63] From 2006 onward in particular, the LN has continued to position gender equality in opposition to migration from the Global South in general and Islam in particular in instrumental and xenophobic ways. In February 2006 the then city counselor for the LN in Milan, Matteo Salvini (now leader of the party) proposed a "Decalogo delle libertà" (Decalogue of freedoms) to be presented to immigrants applying for Italian citizenship. Five out of ten questions focus on women's issues and are motivated by the clear idea that non-western migrants—presumably Muslims in particular—do not respect women's rights. The questions include the following:

1. Would you forbid your wife or daughter to dress like Italian women?
2. What do you think of the statement according to which a woman must obey her husband, and that he can beat her in the case she does not obey him?
3. Do you think it is acceptable that a man locks his wife or daughter at home to avoid that she dishonors the family in public?
4. What would you do if your daughter or son wanted to marry a person from another religion?
5. Would you allow a male doctor to examine you (if you are a woman) or a female doctor to visit you (if you are a man)?[64]

In October 2009 the LN presented a bill to ban the burqa in public spaces. The proposal was meant to modify a previous measure from 1975 allowing certain categories of people to keep their faces covered if there is

a "justified motive." Officially presented as being motivated by security reasons, the antiburqa law was largely broadcasted in the mainstream media as a proposal that would enable Muslim women—who, it was assumed, were coerced into wearing the integral veil—to free themselves from this imposition.[65] The campaign against the burqa in public spaces at the end of the 2000s represented the main way in which the issue of gender inequality and violence as the exclusive domain of the (Muslim) Other has dominated the LN's Islamophobic propaganda. However, it is important to highlight that it is not only Muslim men who are singled out as women's main enemies and it is not only Muslim women who are foregrounded as victims. In the xenophobic campaign in which the issues of sexism and gender violence are strongly racialized, and where racism itself takes the form of a distinction between non-western migrant men as "bad" and non-western migrant women as "victims," the LN openly identifies all men from eastern Europe and the Global South more generally as misogynists and especially as potentially rapists and all women from these regions as passive victims. For instance, in April 2013 the current president of the LN, Matteo Salvini, promoted on Twitter a new website called "Tutti i crimini degli immigrati" (All the immigrants' crimes). The site exclusively hosts journal articles reporting cases of violence in which an immigrant is the perpetrator, with cases of rape emerging as the most common crime among non-Italian, non-western citizens. Non-western migrant men in general are thus identified by the LN as a social threat that endangers the female sex.[66] In spite of its rather disputable reputation and antifeminist policies concerning gender equality, the LN, just like the PVV in the Netherlands and the FN in France, has thus successfully instrumentalized women's rights as a powerful weapon in the campaign against Muslim and non-western migrants.

The Constitution of a Heterogeneous, Anti-Islam, Feminist Front?

Right-wing nationalist parties such as the PVV, FN, and LN have not been the only ones invoking women's rights against Muslim males in particular. Since the beginning of the 2000s in all three countries several well-known feminist intellectuals and some prominent feminist politicians (some with a Muslim background) from both right and left, as well as women in gen-

der equality agencies and organizations (within and outside state bureaucracies), have denounced Muslim religious practices as infringements of women's freedom. Whereas I analyzed right-wing nationalism's endorsement of a gender equality lexicon by focusing upon one single nationalist party in each country, I chose not to pinpoint any specific feminist current/figures endorsing anti-Islam positions in the name of women's rights. My reasons were the following. First, the interest of looking at different feminists', femocrats', and women's organizations' arguments concerning their embrace of anti-Islam campaigns lies in the possibility of providing an overview of the field that has so far been missing. Second, what is noteworthy in the embrace of anti-Islam arguments by this array of women is precisely the similarities among them in spite of their divergent positions, and divisions, on other issues. It is also worth noting that the multifarious ways in which feminism as an emancipatory project dedicated to women's liberation (whether liberal, radical, or leftist) has increasingly "converged" with nonemancipatory/Islamophobic and neoliberal political and economic agendas makes the femonationalist ideological formation all the more disconcerting. Third, the endorsement of anti-Islam stances by some feminists, femocrats, and women's organizations across the political spectrum is arguably what has contributed to consolidating the idea that Muslim communities in particular do not respect women's rights and to creating what I call the femonationalist ideological formation. However, as I will begin to show in the following sections and to explore more in chapters 3 and 4, the temporal coincidence between nationalists and some feminists voicing anti-Islam slogans under the banner of gender equality is a case in point of a convergence rather than of a conscious political alliance, or of the constitution of a homogeneous anti-Islam, feminist front.

North American liberal political theorist Susan Moller Okin's famous essay "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?," published in 1997, arguably provided some of the main arguments that have been used by this rather politically heterogeneous feminist front in its convergence with anti-Islam campaigns. It is thus important to briefly turn to it. In a nutshell, in this text Okin argued that certain minorities within western societies do not respect gender equality principles. As examples she listed the wearing of headscarves by Muslim girls in schools, genital mutilations among African immigrants, and coerced marriages and honor killings among Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants in both Europe and the United States. While

she acknowledged that "virtually all of the world's cultures have distinctly patriarchal pasts," she also maintained that "some mostly, though by no means exclusively, western liberal cultures have departed far further from them than others [i.e., Asian, Middle Eastern, and African cultures]."[67] She thus proposed that female members with a non-western background "might be much better off if the culture into which they were born were either to become extinct (so that its members would become integrated into the less sexist surrounding culture) or, preferably, to be encouraged to alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women at least to the degree to which this value is upheld in the majority culture."[68] Okin's position at the beginning of the 2000s became widespread among sectors of second-wave, liberal, and left-wing western European feminism.[69] As the next sections show, a rather heterogeneous feminist front in all three countries resorted to some of Okin's arguments in order to frame Islamic traditions as especially inimical for women. Four main actors can be identified in each country as constituting this front: (1) feminist intellectuals and (2) feminist associations that champion secularism, (3) prominent feminist politicians (in some cases of Muslim descent), and (4) representatives of gender equality state-funded agencies, or femocrats.

The Netherlands: Gender Equality Is a Migrant Women's Issue

As I mentioned earlier, in 2002 the right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn forcefully initiated the mobilization of gender equality against the perceived violent patriarchy of Islam.[70] In a February 9, 2002, interview with the Dutch national newspaper *De Volkskrant*, he declared the following:

> I want a very strong emancipation policy for Islamic women in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In particular the highly-educated Turkish and Moroccan girls get a sound thrashing from me. They leave their sisters in the lurch. Take an example from our feminists in the seventies. My mother, who came from a posh milieu, became emancipated because of those women. I expect the same from those Muslim girls, instead of putting on a headscarf as some kind of protest. Take it off and make sure your sisters do not have only one right of existence: the kitchen.[71]

Fortuyn's framing of emancipation as an urgent problem in the case of Muslim women of Turkish and Moroccan descent was taken on by some prominent feminists. In the May 2002 issue of the Dutch feminist maga-

zine *Opzji*, the journal's chief editor, Cisca Dresselhuys, devoted an editorial to Fortuyn's new attention to women's issues. Dresselhuys had already sparked controversy a year earlier with the statement that she would not hire a woman wearing a veil for her journal.[72] Albeit noticing the rather inconsistent record of Fortuyn in matters of women's emancipation, Dresselhuys nonetheless called Fortuyn an "ally" of the feminist cause in the Netherlands.[73] Fortuyn, according to Dresselhuys, had underscored the importance of promoting the emancipation of Muslim women, whose struggle, she maintained, should initiate the "third wave" of Dutch feminism.[74] Dresselhuys is a well-known Dutch women's rights public intellectual, who advocates a white, middle-class, and liberal feminism as well as a rejection of multiculturalism in line with Okin's position.[75] Dresselhuys's declaration of a necessary, albeit counterintuitive, "alliance" with Fortuyn on the issue of Muslim women's emancipation was soon echoed by another (self-declared) feminist: the Dutch-Somali politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Beginning in 2003 and after being elected as an MP for the center-right party VVD, Hirsi Ali regularly denounced Islam as a backward religion, the main danger of which lay in its promotion of violence against women, including female genital mutilations, forced marriage, and honor killing. The fact that Hirsi Ali is herself an "allochthonous" woman—according to the Dutch definition, coming from a Muslim family—has made her anti-Islam utterances in the name of gender equality all the more "credible." As an "insider," she could claim "authentic knowledge" and her "enunciation [was] protected from critique."[76] After joining VVD in 2003, Hirsi Ali was assigned the portfolio for emancipation issues. In 2004 she wrote the script for a short movie directed by Theo van Gogh, *Submission I*, in which we are told the story of four Muslim women who have been abused by men in various ways. The women recite their monologues in see-through chadors; their naked bodies are covered with verses from the Koran that are deeply misogynist passages. The release of *Submission I* on the Dutch Public Broadcasting Network on August 29, 2004, sparked enormous controversy, with major protests from Muslim communities. Two months after the release of the movie, van Gogh was murdered by a young Dutch-Moroccan member of an Islamic fundamentalist network. Hirsi Ali received death threats and went into hiding.

Hirsi Ali's interventions against Islam in the name of Muslim women's emancipation deeply divided Dutch feminists. Whereas her positions were

welcome by some sections of liberal/secular Dutch feminism (as in the case of the feminist sociologist Jolande Withuis) and even Muslim feminism (as in the case of the Dutch-Egyptian writer and self-proclaimed Muslim feminist Nahed Selim), they were not well received by feminists active in antiracist politics as well as by many of the Muslim women in the name of whom they claimed to speak.[77] Anja Meulenbelt, an icon of second-wave feminism and a politician in the Socialist Party, and Muslim women's organizations like ZAMI or Al Nisa, as well as renowned feminist academics like Gloria Wekker, Rosi Braidotti, Baukje Prins, Sawitri Saharso, and Haleh Ghorashi, only to mention some prominent examples, strongly dissented from Hirsi Ali's as well as Dresselhuys's depictions of Islam and from their version of feminism.[78]

Yet Hirsi Ali's positions—and also those of Dresselhuys—became those most echoed in the Dutch mainstream media. Both women benefited from, and significantly contributed to forming, the general climate of consensus with respect to Islamophobia in the name of gender equality throughout the 2000s. The support they enjoyed in the mainstream media also coincided with, and benefited from a shift occurring within, the Dutch "state feminist" apparatus in the first half of the 2000s whereby public attention and funds were diverted from women's rights in general to ethnic minority women's rights in particular. As Joyce Outshoorn and Jantine Oldersma report, between 2004 and 2006 there was a general call for the abolition of the main Dutch state feminist agency (i.e., the women's policy network) "as supposedly women's equality policy [was] now well-integrated into mainstream policy." As these authors continue, such a proposal to stop funds for this state feminism agency occurred "in a context of the drastic shift to the right in Dutch politics. . . . Toughness [was] advocated on all fronts, gender discrimination and inequality [were] no longer issues which motivate politicians. In this discourse, only migrant and minority women, especially when they [were] from Muslim countries, are oppressed and need to be aided, suggesting gender inequality among ethnically white Dutch has been eliminated."[79]

Indeed, since the rightward turn in Dutch politics, most policies dealing with gender equality have been ethnicized.[80] For instance, in those same years, the minister in charge of gender equality issues, Aart Jan De Geus (CDA), together with Rita Verdonk, the Minister for Integration and Immigration (VVD), established a commission for the participation of

ethnic minority women, Participatie van Vrouwen uit Etnische Minderheidsgroepen (PAVEM; Participation of Ethnic Minority Women), in order to address issues related to migrant women's cultural integration and participation in the labor market. Between 2003 until 2005, PAVEM worked to establish the main coordinates of what later in 2005 became the gender aspects of the integration package in the Netherlands, while subsidies for Dutch women's organizations stopped. In 2005 PAVEM published a plan, "Emancipatie: Vanzelfsprekend, maar het gaat niet vanzelf!" (Emancipation: Of course, but it does not happen by itself!), according to which migrant women have to catch up with Dutch women, particularly in the area of work and social participation. Consequently, state-sponsored commissions for women's equality in the Netherlands were no longer the institutional and governmental apparatuses promoting equality between the sexes. Rather, as I will discuss more at length in chapters 3 and 4, they have been increasingly transformed into agencies for the education and assimilation of minority and non-western migrant women into what are deemed to represent proper Dutch models of womanhood.

France: Feminism and the Republic without Veils

The mobilization of gender equality in opposing Islam in France coincides with the controversies on the veil and burqa that began at the end of the 1980s.[81] On October 3, 1989, three Muslim girls were expelled from their school in Creil, after they refused to remove their veils. This event generated huge media coverage, triggered by the fact that Islam was already under the spotlight on account of the Salman Rushdie affair, but also due to the fact that it was a way to remind the republic of one of its pillars, that is, laïcité, during the year of celebrations of the bicentennial of the French Revolution. The issue was taken to the Council of State (the highest administrative court in France), which rejected the demand that the veil should be banned from public schools. However, following the strong success of the right in the European elections in 1994, the issue resurfaced and a bill was presented by the right-wing MP Eugene Chenier proposing to ban "ostentatious" religious symbols from public schools.[82] Again, Chenier's proposal enjoyed huge media coverage, but it too was rejected by several courts across the country as well as by the Council of State. Although in these earlier headscarf controversies the question of laïcité had been connected with equality between the sexes, it was still the supposed

infringements of secularism that was in question. It was indeed not until the beginning of the 2000s that gender equality took center stage in the discussion. In July 2003 President Jacques Chirac appointed a commission chaired by Bernard Stasi—a former government minister and deputy—in order to explore the possibility of introducing a law to ensure secularism in public schools. A law was eventually approved in March 2004, applying the ban of ostentatious religious symbols to all of the country's public schools.[83] Finally, in 2009 the conservative Fillon government appointed a special commission chaired by André Gérin to investigate the practice of "full veiling" (*voile integral*). In September 2010 a law was finally passed banning the use of face-covering garments in public spaces.[84] As Joan Scott notes, the chronology of the legislative measures against the Islamic veil—an instance of a more general Muslim question taking place in France, as I have argued elsewhere—coincides very closely with that of the FN's successes.[85] But the same chronology in recent French history also coincides with another timeline: that of French feminists' public interventions and increasing internal divisions. On November 2, 1989, following the case of the veiled students expelled from school in Creil, *Le Nouvel Observateur* published a letter by five philosophers, including the well-known feminist philosopher Élisabeth Badinter, which was addressed to the then Minister of Education Lionel Jospin. As they put it,

> To tolerate the headscarf is not to host a free agent (in this case a girl), it is to open the door to those who have decided once and for all, without discussion, that she must cover up. Instead of giving this girl an area of freedom, it signifies that there is no difference between the school and the home of her father. If you allow the Islamic headscarf as a symbol of female submission, you give *carte blanche* to fathers and brothers, that is to say the hardest in the world of patriarchy. Ultimately, it is no longer respect for gender equality and free will that is law in France. In one sentence, you have disarmed the thousands of young Muslim women who are everywhere fighting for their dignity and freedom.[86]

In December 2003, during the works of the Stasi commission that had to provide a report on feasible measures for implementing secularism in public schools, the magazine *Elle* published an appeal to President Chirac signed by sixty-eight public figures, again including Badinter, but also the former socialist minister for the rights of women, Yvette Roudy, and the

president of the organization Ni Putes Ni Soumises (NPNS; Neither Whores, nor Submissive), Fadela Amara. The appeal was to demand a law banning the veil, "this visible symbol of female submission," from public schools, "a place in which the state should be the guarantor of a strict equality between the sexes."[87] Finally, on the occasion of the appointment of the Gérin commission to propose a law banning the burqa from public places, Badinter and Amara were heard as "experts" and well-informed members of civil society, and some of their arguments were subsequently used in the 2010 law officially banning the burqa from public spaces. Whereas Amara insisted on the patriarchal nature of this practice and the lack of freedom experienced by Muslim women who are subjected to full veiling, Badinter invoked the notion of pathology and perversion. According to Badinter, the practice of full veiling is contrary not only to western civilization and its valorization of the "face," but also to the principles of the republic—freedom, equality, and fraternity—since it denies reciprocity in the relationship between the unveiled person who allows his/her face to be seen, and the veiled one who denies the other this option.[88] She concluded: "In this possibility of being looked at without being seen, and to look at the other without him/her being able to see you, I see the satisfaction of a triple perverse enjoyment: the enjoyment of one's supremacy over the other, the enjoyment of the exhibitionist, and the enjoyment of the voyeur. . . . I think we are dealing with very sick women and I do not think we have to be determined according to their pathology."[89] The relegation of fully covered women to insane and perverted individuals reinforced the idea that the state had to intervene not only to discipline Muslim women but also to "liberate" them from the false consciousness of their distorted psyche. From 2004 onward, therefore, the feminist antiveil and anti-Islam front in France has become very vocal and also very composite. Not only well-known feminist secular intellectuals like Badinter, Jeannette Bougrab, Caroline Fourest, and Fiammetta Venner—the latter two founders of the feminist magazine *ProChoix*, which accused the opponents of the veil ban of "cultural relativism"—but also feminists within some left organizations, such as Lutte Ouvrière, (some members of the) Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste, and, more recently, the Front de Gauche, have endorsed antiveil arguments.[90]

It is important, however, to note that feminist opposition to the antiveil law, as well as alternative feminist stances concerning the mobilization of gender equality against Muslim citizens in France, has not been absent.

On the contrary, it has been perhaps the most vigorous in Europe. For instance, the feminist sociologist Christine Delphy—one of the founders, together with Simone de Beauvoir, of the *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* and of so-called French materialist feminism—denounced the dilemma between antisexism and antiracism put forward by the pro-law feminists as false and misleading.[91] In 2005, following the approval of the law against headscarves in public schools and the huge media coverage and controversies it provoked, the feminist philosopher Elsa Dorlin authored a manifesto against the appropriation of feminism by Islamophobes, racists, and secular feminists: "Not in our name!" (*Pas en notre nom!*).[92] Houria Bouteldja, the founder of the Mouvement des Indigènes de la République (Movement of the Indigenous of the Republic) called the ban of the veil in public schools the "colonial and neo-colonial instrumentalization of women's rights," accusing organizations such as NPNS of being part of the "state apparatus," a position soon echoed by the feminist sociologist Sylvie Tissot and by feminist and antiracist activists and authors like Félix Boggio Éwanjé-Épée, Stella Magliani-Belkacem, Capucine Larzillière, Lisbeth Sal, and others.[93]

And yet, like in the Netherlands, Badinter's and Amara's positions gained currency in the mainstream. The consensus for their anti-Islam stance was in fact reinforced in large part by the support they received from the French state, both ideologically, but also financially.[94] The NPNS, for instance, has been funded with public monies since its foundation in 2002; its president, Fadela Amara, was made a junior minister for urban policy in François Fillon's first conservative government under the Sarkozy presidency in 2007, and inspector general for social affairs in January 2011. The presence within NPNS of women of North African descent, such as Amara herself and also Loubna Méliane, Chaddortt Djavann, and Jeannette Bougrab, also helped to create the impression that they were speaking for Muslim women. Arguably, the public prominence accorded to women of migratory background who joined the feminist secular front in denouncing Islam's alleged "exceptional" misogyny and the practice of veiling has contributed to push into the shade the many women and Muslim organizations who protested the antiveil laws—for instance, Mamans Toutes Égales, the collective of mothers, which includes many Muslim women; the group Le Collectif des Féministes pour l'Égalité; and Femmes dans la Mosquée, a collective of Muslim women.[95] In this context it is important to notice also

the position taken by the most important representatives of French state feminism—that is, the official agencies/departments in charge of women's rights at state level—on the legislative measures against the Muslim veils in particular. During the discussions about banning the veil from public schools in 2003, Nicole Ameline—then a delegate for the Ministry for Parity and Professional Equality between men and women—declared the veil to be the "expression of sexist discrimination . . . and a confiscation of individual freedom."[96] In spite of Sarkozy's numerous criticisms of Muslim and immigrants' communities in France as disrespectful of women's rights and of his campaign against face veils in public spaces—eventually leading to the 2010 law mentioned earlier—under his presidency the place of the delegate ministry in charge of gender equality issues remained vacant. A Ministry for the Rights of Women with full rights was finally reestablished in 2012 under the center-left presidency of François Hollande. The designated minister between 2012 and 2014—the socialist Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, of Moroccan and Algerian origins and herself born in Morocco—sparked controversy after she intimated in 2013 that teachers at *crèche* (nursery) levels might also be banned from wearing religious veils at work.[97] The most prominent representatives of state feminism at the governmental level thus—regardless of their political colors—have consistently denounced Muslim religious practices as against women's rights and have supported legislative measures that forbid Muslim women from wearing the veil in public schools or the full veil in public spaces.

As Larzillière and Sal aptly note, although the stated goal of the French feminist secular intelligentsia from right to left was the promotion of a "universalist" feminism, guaranteeing equal rights for men and women, their positions on Muslim women's religious practices in France have been marked by what Christelle Hamel calls the "racialization of sexism."[98] This is a discourse according to which "the enunciation by the majoritarian group [French white people] of favorable discourses in the case of the daughters of migrants, but unfavorable ones in the case of their sons, is often the sign of a form of racism that makes the denunciation of sexism a tool of its domination and sexuality one of its forms of expression."[99]

Italy: From Left to Right, United against Islam

Like in the Netherlands and France, in Italy too some feminist intellectuals and organizations, feminist politicians of immigrant and Muslim backgrounds, as well as femocrats in charge of gender equality at state level

have endorsed anti-Islam positions in the name of women's rights. On the intellectual front, several well-known feminist journalists have embarked upon the journey of denouncing Islam's oppression of women by invoking secularism in particular as the best antidote against fundamentalists' antifeminism. The most well-known example outside Italy is certainly that of Oriana Fallaci. Though she did not call herself a feminist, Fallaci supported some important feminist battles (for abortion and divorce) in the 1970s and had been associated ever since with liberal feminism. Particularly in her two books *The Rage and the Pride* (2002) and *The Force of Reason* (2006), Fallaci, though calling herself an atheist and secularist, depicted Islam as an inferior civilization as compared to western Christianity. She accused Muslims of turning Italian cities into "filthy kasbahs" and denounced the treatment of Muslim women by men as barbaric. Another feminist journalist who denounced Islam in the name of secularism and women's rights is Monica Lanfranco. A founder of the feminist magazine *Marea*, Lanfranco in 2005 coauthored *Senza velo: Donne nell'Islam contro l'integralismo* (Without the veil: Women in Islam against fundamentalism). Not unlike *ProChoix* in France, Lanfranco's critique of the condition of women in Islam particularly targets relativistic thought: "Cultural relativists go so far as to say that universal human rights are a western concept. But why, then, when he uses a telephone or a car does the Mullah not say that it is western stuff, incompatible with Islamic society?"[100] In more recent interventions, Lanfranco—approvingly quoting the work of the Iranian human rights activist Maryam Namazie—has directly invoked secularism as a "human need," which is especially urgent in Sharia-dominated countries where women are subjected to men.[101] Still in 2003, the influential left-liberal journalist and feminist Barbara Spinelli wrote, "The veil does not have the same meaning as the cross or the kippah. In much of the world it is a symbol of oppression and she who does not wear it is considered by people of the same religion as an apostate, against whom they decree the death penalty. . . . The veil means, most of the time, the order established at school by families and clans, against the freedom of the individual."[102] Another well-known journalist associated with the communist newspaper *Il Manifesto*, Giuliana Sgrena, published the book *Il prezzo del velo: La guerra dell'Islam contro le donne* (The price of the veil: Islam's war against women) in 2008, which is entirely devoted to a debate about the Muslim female garment. Repeating a familiar leitmotif con-

cerning the nature of the Muslim veil as a symbol of oppression, Sgrena's campaign against Islam and Muslim women's alleged lack of right to self-determination greatly contributed to spreading the idea among the left that Islam equals misogyny and gender violence. Indeed, the same repertoire was used by the Unione Donne in Italia (UDI; Union of Women in Italy), one of the most important organizations for women's rights founded after World War II and traditionally associated with the left and the Communist Party until the beginning of the 1980s. The UDI openly supported the bill to ban the burqa and niqab from public spaces, which was presented to Parliament by the right-wing politician Souad Sbai in 2009.[103] Originally from Morocco, with a past as a journalist for various Italian magazines, Sbai, who calls herself a feminist, was elected in 2008 as a member of Parliament for Il Popolo della Libertà (PDL; People of Freedom). As a right-wing deputy, Sbai was one of the sponsors of the 2009 bill proposing to ban the burqa and niqab from public spaces and has since emerged as one of the harshest critics of Islam and of gender inequality in Islamic countries and communities. In 2010 she published the book *L'inganno: Vittime del multiculturalismo* (The lie: Victims of multiculturalism), in which, clearly echoing Okin's famous essay, she accuses western multiculturalism of failing to defend migrant and Muslim women's rights. While considering these prominent right-wing self-appointed feminists and rescuers of Muslim women in Italy, it is impossible not to mention Daniela Santanchè. As an MP for the postfascist party AN under Berlusconi's government, Santanchè in 2006 proposed to ban the veil in public schools. In 2007, she embarked upon a harsh Islam-hatred campaign after the murder of Hina Saleem by Saleem's Pakistani father and other family members, a case that shook the country for months. As Ruba Salih puts it, "Hina was to become the emblem of a national campaign against what was represented in the media as genetically-based Islamic gendered violence. Particularly striking were the photographs circulating in the media. One in particular became the official picture, and portrayed Hina wearing blue-jeans and a very tight green undershirt showing her belly, like those very fashionable among European teenagers. Evidently the choice of that specific photograph was not accidental, but part and parcel of the fabrication of the super-empowered Muslim woman, the heroine who pays the highest price for her desire to challenge Islam and tradition and to be secularized, one of us."[104] Albeit instrumentalizing the cause of Muslim women for her personal political

battles inside her party, Santanchè's positions gave her enormous popularity, allowing her to run in the 2008 national elections for a postfascist coalition for the position of prime minister. Through an analysis of some of the main Italian women's magazines published between 2001 and 2008, Simona Stano showed how Italian feminists predominantly associate the Muslim veil with submission, violence, passivity, and suffering.[105]

Throughout the 2000s explicit anti-Islam positions were endorsed also by most ministers and representatives of the main state feminism agency in Italy, that is, the Ministry and the Department for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women. In 2007, under the brief center-left government led by Prodi, Minister Barbara Pollastrini—a member of the Democratic Party (PD) and former member of the Italian Communist Party—stated that "the face veil is an offence against the dignity of women [and] . . . there should not be any ambiguity [on the burqa question]. Only a straight no!"[106] Critical positions against Islam's alleged backwardness vis-à-vis women's rights had been expressed a year earlier by Livia Turco—then a minister for health and a historical representative of women's rights within the center left. Intervening on the debate on the veil as a symbol of male oppression, Turco proposed to create a "pink lobby" in order to defend the rights of autonomy for Muslim women. Her proposal was echoed by the young women within the PD who urged Muslim women to "adapt to the autonomy and freedom of western women."[107] In 2010, the Berlusconi government's Minister for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men, Mara Carfagna, a member of the right-wing party PDL, commented on the case of Sanaa Dafani—a young woman of Moroccan origin murdered by her father—with the following words: "The story of Sanaa is not a painful exception, but represents the widespread plight of women in Islamic countries: a condition of submission and segregation, which they are trying to introduce into our country. In this way, the rights of freedom are denied."[108] Again, the most prominent representative of state feminism in the country, from both right and left, upheld the equation between Islam and women's lack of rights by linking gender violence to ostensibly traditional Muslim practices.

All in all, the feminist anti-Islam front in Italy thus appears rather heterogeneous but nevertheless univocal. Most voices associated with the feminist movement have, indeed, adopted a clear stance against the veil and Islam as quintessentially patriarchal and opposed to western moder-

nity. Critical voices have not been entirely absent, however, although they have been marginalized in a mainstream dominated by these femonationalist convergences. For instance, young Muslim women of immigrant descent, such as those associated with the organization Giovani Musulmani d'Italia (Young Muslims of Italy), have promoted initiatives to show how Islam and women's rights are not incompatible.[109] In 2008 Sumaya Abdel Qader, who has Jordanian-Palestinian parents, published a book titled *Porto il velo, adoro i Queen* (I wear the veil, I adore Queen [the band]), which was widely received as a challenge against representations of Muslim women as backward and passive objects at the hand of their oppressive cultures.[110] Furthermore, a younger generation of feminists has strongly condemned the Eurocentric and Islamophobic character of the current framing of positions on Muslim women. Well-known antiracist feminists like Vincenza Perilli, Chiara Bonfiglioli, Lidia Cirillo, and Sonia Sabelli, as well as the scholar of Islam Anna Vanzan or Francesca Koch, the president of the Casa Internazionale delle Donne (International House of Women), have all attempted to break the hegemonic consensus around Islamophobic antisexism that dominates among numerous Italian feminists, women's organizations, and femocrats.[111] In a context of diffused gendered violence, where the murders of women perpetrated by Italian men are described in newspapers on a daily basis, the condemnation of Muslim men as the repository of all misogyny and sexism—these critical feminists maintain—amounts to nothing but plain racist instrumentalization.

Synchronicities of Femonationalism

To be sure, there are several differences between the three contexts under examination and the ways in which nationalist right-wing parties, feminists, and femocrats have articulated this femonationalist convergence. To begin with, when we look at the strategies adopted by right-wing nationalist parties, for instance, we see that whereas the PVV in the Netherlands has endorsed a pro-gay stance alongside a pro-women agenda in its stigmatization of non-western migrant and especially Muslim communities, the FN in France has very timidly and contradictorily begun to take distance from its traditional antigay lexicon, and the LN in Italy continues to stick to harshly homophobic language and politics. Furthermore, whereas both the FN and the LN have developed plans and policy proposals on gender issues,

albeit marginal ones with respect to their overall political agenda, and have mostly remained conservative in matters of reproductive rights and supportive of a traditional idea of the family and women's role, the PVV does not have a clear program on women's issues. For the PVV, the lack of gender equality concerns mainly ethnic minorities, a view that has gained increasing currency among Dutch right-wing and centrist politicians throughout the 2000s. Finally, whereas the FN and the LN have increasingly moved from a strong nationalist lexicon to western supremacist slogans, which are more acceptable in the mainstream media, the PVV's political rhetoric has shifted from strong westocentrism to a more explicit ethnic nationalism.[112] Yet in spite of these disparities, the similarities and astonishing synchrony among the three parties in their invocation of women's rights in anti-Muslim campaigns seem to prevail. Different interpretations have been offered to shed some light on this phenomenon. While some scholars consider the instrumentalization of gender equality as an electoral strategy to gain the female vote (usually low for these parties), others consider the mainstream focus on the "clash" between cultures as a terrain that facilitates attention to gender issues.[113] For others the centrality assigned to Muslim and non-western migrant women in discussions on migrants' integration into western European societies is the result of the general shift of the political spectrum to the right and the latter's strategic relocation between neoliberal laissez-faire programs on the economic side, and nationalist anti-immigration politics on the political side.[114] Other scholars maintain that the attention to women's issues in anti-immigration/anti-Islam campaigns demands that we update our understanding of these parties' new ideology as one dominated not by nationalism, or classical right-wing motives, but by populism. All these interpretations certainly provide important insights into the femonationalist turn. However, I believe they also tend to overlook the historical and ideological legacies and material interests underpinning these parties' framing of Muslim and non-western women as victims and redeemable subjects. As I will discuss extensively in the next chapters, an examination of the role Muslim and non-western migrant women increasingly play within contemporary western European societies as "potential" cultural and social reproducers of the nation enables us to shed light on the political-economic dimensions of femonationalism.

Concerning the feminist side, in all three countries as we have seen, the femonationalist field has been occupied by four main actors: some well-known feminist intellectuals and associations endorsing secularist arguments; female right-wing politicians, including self-proclaimed feminists of North African or Muslim background, some women's organizations and key figures within state women's equality agencies, or femocrats. From the right to the left, thus, women within the femonationalist field have become particularly vocal in reinforcing the notion of sexism and misogyny as problems that primarily affect Muslim communities. It should be noted, however, that women's voices in the 2000s have addressed their concerns about Muslim practices in particular, and not against migrants more generally—as in the case of the right-wing nationalist formations I analyzed. It is to Muslim women in fact that these feminists, right-wing politicians, and femocrats have offered help, thereby engaging in what Sarah Bracke aptly termed "rescue narratives."[115] In spite of the numerous differences among them, what seems to unite all these feminists in a common battle against Islam is the fundamental belief that western values of emancipation, individual rights, and secularism are best suited to guarantee gender equality. As the previous sections described, Dutch, French, or Italian feminists such as Badinter, Lanfranco, and Dresselhuys; right-wing feminist politicians of Muslim background like Bougrab in France, Sbai in Italy, and Ali in the Netherlands; or femocrats and equality agencies in all three countries thus share the idea of the supremacy of the western culture when it comes to women's rights. I further discuss this crucial point in chapter 4 when I analyze the concrete ways in which some figures within this anti-Islam feminist front have either implemented, or supported, policies aimed at the emancipation of Muslim and non-western migrant women.

In conclusion, as the intention to save Muslim women from their seeming barbaric culture seems to animate this heterogeneous anti-Islam feminist front, one should equally ask, "Do Muslim women need saving?," to put it in the anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod's words.[116] Did they demand this kind of representation from Dutch, French, and Italian feminists and femocrats? As I noted earlier, in all three countries, antiracist feminist activists and scholars as well as several Muslim women's organizations have begun to question the legitimacy of those representing Islam as a homogeneous misogynist entity as well as to challenge the widespread representation that

sees Muslim women only as passive objects and victims. In this sense, the fact that some feminists' "patronizing" stances in western Europe have now been unveiled and are being exposed to the trenchant critique of Muslim women speaks to us of important transformations taking place within European societies in general and the feminist movement in particular. The growing presence, visibility, and public engagement of second- and third-generation migrant (Muslim and non-Muslim alike) women within these societies begins, indeed, to shake the westocentric and falsely universalist foundations of some of the continent's most dearly felt convictions, challenging feminists to articulate their critique of gender inequalities with a critique of racial oppression and also class exploitation. In chapters 3 and 4, I further discuss how the participation of some feminists, women's organizations, and femocrats in the femonationalist ideological space can be regarded as the expression of that westocentric paternalism that black, antiracist, and non-western feminists have denounced since the rise of the feminist movement, especially in the Anglophone world. But I will also show the deep contradictions that traverse this heterogeneous anti-Islam feminist front when it practically engages in, or supports, rescuing initiatives addressed to Muslim as well as non-western migrant women.