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Tolerance and Belonging

A study about tolerance, its socio-political dynamics as visible in media discourse, and its impact on Reformed Christians' identification with 'the' national identity of the Netherlands.

Master Thesis

Religion, Conflict & Globalization

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Foreword

Before you lies the thesis 'Tolerance and Belonging'. I have written this thesis to fulfil the graduation requirements of the Religion, Conflict and Globalization program at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RUG).

During the master's programme, the books and articles I read sparked my interest in the socio-political dynamics of tolerance and the nature of the concept. While studying the portrayal of Reformed schools' policy concerning LGB individuals in the media, it struck me how much the debate on religious tolerance and rights has changed over the last few decades in The Netherlands, in line with its increasingly secular national identity. During the COVID-19 crisis, this group once again became the object of tolerance in the public debate concerning vaccination and church attendance issues. Differences seemed to become perceived as increasingly fundamental, and the now secular majority increasingly questioned the traditional rights and privileges of these conservative Christian groups. When looking at public discourses in which religion is concerned, it is challenging to neglect that the Dutch public, and the media as an extension of it, has been especially preoccupied with it. The question of what role 'religion' plays or should be allowed to play in the public sphere comes up consistently (de Groot & Sengers, 2016). The research was challenging, as the original research question was answered by new studies that came out while I was setting up my research design. However, by identifying new interesting angles, I have been able to add to the scientific debate on tolerance and belonging.

I would like to thank my supervisor for her excellent guidance and feedback. I also wish to thank all of the respondents, without whose cooperation I would not have been able to conduct this analysis. Finally, I'd like to express my gratitude to my friends and family for keeping me motivated and supporting me.

I hope you enjoy your reading.

Rachel Koehoorn

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Abstract

Over the last years, especially in the context of COVID-19, the involvement of Reformed Christians in the socio-political dynamics of tolerance has become increasingly visible. However, whereas tolerance has gained increasing attention in research, little is known about how tolerance influences this specific minority's identification with the Netherlands.

This study aims to determine the relationship between tolerance and feelings of belonging. Specifically, it investigates the nature and socio-political dynamics of tolerance and its influence on a tolerated minority's sense of belonging to the mainstream national identity of the Netherlands. In this context, tolerance is approached as a minimalistic, weak principle, referring to a voluntary attitude of self-limitation towards practices that one has the possibility not to tolerate.

To explore this, I have conducted an integrative review to define the nature of tolerance. After that, I have performed a discourse analysis to identify the socio-political dynamics of tolerance present in the public view of Reformed Christians in the context of crisis. Finally, I held in-depth interviews to analyse the lived experiences of belonging to a tolerated minority. The results showed that the nature of tolerance contains unequal, hierarchical, conditional, devaluing and excluding aspects, which are reflected in its socio-political dynamics. Furthermore, the interviews showed that feelings of belonging to the mainstream identity of the Netherlands are positively as well as negatively influenced by tolerance. This finding reflects the inherent complexity of the concept.

Keywords:

National identity, tolerance, belonging, minority, religion, secularity

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Introduction

Over the past decades, society in The Netherlands has become increasingly culturally diverse. This diversification has happened through various processes, such as immigration and secularisation. People with differing norms and values have found themselves in a situation where they need to live together to shape society. These differences are related to processes of self-identification and tolerance. It is widely known that being open to diverging ways of thinking and doing is not easy when these ways are fundamentally different from your own beliefs and convictions. Over the past years, this has become concrete in the context of COVID-19. The public debate placed renewed attention on diverging practices of minorities, such as in the case of church attendance in Reformed Cristian communities.

Tolerance has been commonly understood to facilitate the acceptance of a right to diverge from the norm without having to sacrifice one's own identity and convictions. In this context, tolerance is approached as a minimalistic, weak principle, referring to a voluntary attitude of self-limitation towards practices that one has the possibility not to tolerate. Scholars in this field have increasingly started studying the effects and socio-political dynamics of tolerance. However, most research on public discourse in this area has focussed on non-western minorities, leading to Islam, ethnicity and nativism being the main aspects of analysis. Nonetheless, discourses in which the ethnic or nativist elements are relatively absent as diverging factors or in which the religion is different, such as is the case for the minority of Reformed Christians, have not been researched as widely. Yet, there is plenty of material 'out there' in which Christianity is the centre focus, and secular actors play the discursive role.

In this study, I aimed to determine the relationship between tolerance and feelings of belonging. Specifically, I aim to answer the following research question:

How does the nature of tolerance and its socio-political dynamics influence a tolerated minority's sense of belonging to the mainstream national identity of the Netherlands?

To answer the research question, I first define the research context through an exploration of national identity. After that, I proceed with three analytical chapters in which I first discuss the nature of tolerance through an integrative review, integrating its critiques. Here, I find that tolerance carries the potential for minorities to live out their divergent identities while also posing a simmering

threat to those same practices as the nature of tolerance contains elements of inequality, hierarchy, conditionality, devaluation, and exclusion. These characteristics allow it to be invoked to serve the majority in a myriad of ways, facilitating hierarchies of power and morality. After discerning the nature of tolerance, I make the concept of tolerance less abstract by performing a discourse analysis that determines which socio-political dynamics of tolerance are at play in the mainstream media's reporting on Reformed Christians, focusing on the debate around church exemptions in COVID-19. Here I found that tolerance is reflected in the socio-political dynamics visible in the reporting on Reformed Christians. Moreover, I identified all elements of its nature in the discourse, albeit to different degrees. After that, I analyse in-depth interviews with Reformed Christians through which I explore the lived experience of being tolerated and its influence on processes of identification. In doing so, I find that the relationship between tolerance and this minority's identification with the mainstream national identity of the Netherlands is characterised as negative, as well as positive, albeit in an insecure and declining manner. These findings reflect the nature of tolerance and the socio-political dynamics associated with its practice.

In this research, I contribute to existing studies about nationalism, minorities, religion, secularity, identity and tolerance by studying the socio-political dynamics of tolerance and its effects. In addition, this thesis contributes to the field of religious studies by concentrating on a different subject and the development of critical languages for speaking of diverging religious practices. Moreover, because of the chosen context, which is placed in a period of crisis, I also contribute to the understanding of how crises influence socio-political dynamics of tolerance.

Qualitative research of this type illustrates the complexity of toleration and the processes and dynamics whereby tolerance is internalised and may shape behaviour. Such an understanding may assist policymakers in identifying and remediating the impact of practices of tolerance. In addition, increased awareness amongst journalists may also aid in the formation of renewed reporting guidelines in times of crisis.

Literature review

Understanding tolerance and belonging from the perspective of national identity.

In this literature review, I contextualise the issues of tolerance and belonging. The concepts of tolerance and belonging will be defined and developed further in the theoretical framework and analytical chapters. To gain a more thorough understanding of how tolerance is integrated into feelings of belonging, I will first explore the concepts from the perspective of national identity formation in the context of the Netherlands. After that, I will investigate the dynamics of belonging to the Dutch national identity from a historical perspective. Moreover, the facets of ethnicity and religion will be studied as they are fundamental to the public debate around identification and belonging to national identity (Slootman & Duyvandak, 2017). The focus of the study of these aspects is geared to understanding the dynamics surrounding the minority of Reformed Christians, as they form the case group of this study. Finally, I will state the study's relevance and highlight the areas and issues that could present a challenge.

National identity

Throughout this study, the notion of national identity is important as it forms the context within which people identify themselves with the society of the Netherlands and feel whether they and others belong to it, determining in- and outgroups. Moreover, the conceptualization of national identity that is pushed forward is considered to reflect the normative stances and hierarchical relations of the groups that are able to do so.

Even though the concept of national identity is incredibly complex, this study defines a few useful aspects for this research (Canovan, 1998; Smith, 1991). First off, the notion of territoriality is important, as it describes a way in which inhabitants can feel they belong to each other. The notion of territoriality includes generational and traditional facets. Secondly, national identity contains an ethnic facet that emphasises the 'original' culture and community, separately from territory, as national identity is considered inalienable and separate from the state. Moreover, the concept of 'shared norms, values and traditions' is crucial as it defines who 'we' are and what 'we' stand for. When this approach is primary, it is often difficult for minority groups to feel included in the national identity. The fourth aspect is the state approach refers to the cultural, formal and constitutional aspects of national identity. Moreover, the aspect of modernism is of interest, which understands nations to be intrinsic to the modern world (Smith, 1991?). This aspect prioritises the importance of a shared economy and emphasises nation-building for its benefit (Smith, 1991). Finally, the sixth

approach to national identity is geared toward the emotional and sees national identity as connected to feelings and images and symbols of people and their constructed identities. The base of this approach is the idea of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 2020), in which the nation is depicted as a socially constructed community imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of a group.

These approaches demonstrate that one can not reduce national identity to one dimension but rather that it is inherently complex, dynamic, and layered. These approaches form the theoretical basis upon which this study identifies inclusionary and exclusionary processes that influence the dynamics of tolerance and feelings of belonging to the national identity.

National identity formation

As tolerance and belonging, as concepts and dynamics, are fundamentally embedded into national identity (Verkuyten, 2019), understanding the processes of national identity formation can reveal some of the socio-political dynamics associated with tolerance and its implications for belonging.

Tolerance is embedded in national identity as national identity formation essentially revolves around including and excluding on the basis of an 'us' and 'them' (WRR, 2007). Through the exclusionary and inclusionary practices of national identity formation, it is defined who belongs to the Dutch identity, but also who does not belong. In essence, the way in which Dutch national identity is approached and defined marks the borders between which people can construct their identities. One-dimensional approaches to national identity and who belongs to its definition cause processes of 'othering', resulting in conflicting stances toward diverging identities (Beaman, 2017). The manner in which national identity is approached and defined influences the process of identification of minority and majority groups, in which feelings of belonging play an important role (Duyvendak, 2011). Moreover, the national identity that is formed defines how these groups relate to each other and whether there is space for 'the other' (WRR, 2007). This occurs through the articulation of certain concepts and dynamics that become seen as part of Dutch national identity, such as tolerance, which has become an integral part of the discursive national identity of the Netherlands (Mepschen, 2009).

A historical perspective

Understanding the importance that 'tolerance' has carried in Dutch national identity through the years can reveal how the concept has undergone shifts and how it has become fundamentally integrated into processes of identification and targeting of different groups (cf. Penninx, 2006; Duyvendak, 2004). The Netherlands is a fascinating case study regarding the discursive trends around national identity and its relation to tolerance as the national identity of the Netherlands has long

been coloured by (self-proclaimed) tolerance towards a vast array of minorities. However, the focus on tolerance has become increasingly questioned and contested in the political and public debate. To gain a fonder understanding of the role of tolerance and its effects in Dutch society, it is crucial to analyse how the structures and dynamics of belonging have developed into the current form.

An essentialist view of culture generally defines the public and political debate on national identity in the Netherlands. This view has come into existence through the specific cultural-historical phases of the Netherlands. Historically, the dynamics of belonging to the Dutch identity started with a view of assimilation, then pillarisation, and ended in 'new realism' through multiculturalism. Assimilationist views are based on the belief that minority groups should adapt to the everyday practices of the dominant culture. It is a process of fusion in which persons acquire the sentiments and attitudes of other persons and groups (Gordon, 2015). Full assimilation occurs when members of a society become indistinguishable from those of the dominant group. Pillarization describes how a separation into a number of 'pillars' characterised Dutch society from the 1900s until the late 1960s. These pillars constituted networks of organisations belonging to religious and ideological subcultures, covering a broad range of societal domains. The 'pillarised' society of the Netherlands was composed of a Catholic, a Reformed, a socialist, and a liberal pillar. It is considered the purest example of a pillarised society (Maussen, 2015).

The cultural-historical phase characterised by 'pillarisation' has advanced a categorical way of thinking (Ghorashi, 2010). The combination of pillarisation and assimilationist views has formed the basis through which 'thinking in boxes', a typically Dutch way of acknowledging categorical thinking about people, has become the standard. This categorical thinking has advanced a closed and static conception of culture, which many self-identifying 'natives' embrace. As a result, diverging cultures are regarded as essentially different and irreconcilable from 'Dutch culture' (Slootman, Duyvendak, 2015). Culture, in this perspective, is portrayed as "a closed, timeless, and conflict-free whole, carried by citizens who all basically share beliefs, norms and traditions" (Slootman & Duyvendak, 2015). The dominant discourse about multiculturalism in which views around tolerance and accommodation of 'newcomers' and diverse minority groups were promoted was most prominent until the 2000s. Multiculturalism is a political and societal view with a range of meanings within sociology and political philosophy contexts. It is related to ideas about how societies are either believed to, or should, respond to diversity. Traditionally this relates to differences stemming from culture or religion. Supporters of multiculturalism see it as a system that allows people to truly express who they are within society, which is of a tolerant and adaptive nature. The ideal of a well-functioning multicultural Dutch society, for which the concepts were instrumentalized, lapsed after it stopped

being actively advanced (Slegers, 2007). As the promotion of multiculturalism was not based on a conviction of equality but rather on a power hierarchy (Beaman, 2017), increasingly more stringent policies on immigration and integration were made possible with slight changes in discourse. The increasing sentiment that the government was not tolerant and accommodating but lax caused these changes in discourse in society (Slegers, 2007).

Nationalist, populist and right-wing politicians were able to translate this sentiment into the political sphere. New realism came into existence as a reaction to multiculturalism, which became depicted as retarded, antiquated and politically incorrect. With the increasing critique of the multicultural perspective, the dominance and discourse around tolerance have started to shift. In response to perceived threats to social cohesion stemming from the increasing diversification of Dutch society through migration, national identity is advanced as a binder for social cohesion (WRR, 2007: 196). New realism states that everyone should adhere to the same 'basic Dutch standards' (Prins, 2010), which are based on 'norms and values'. In this view, national identity is instrumentalized to attain social cohesion by presenting it as homogenous. It is partially based on a romanticised view of the past and is redefined and used as a measurement tool and target for 'others'. In the assimilationist, 'new realism' view of national identity, a nostalgic ahistorical notion of culture is consistently reified to identify diverging minorities as a threat to social cohesion and national identity (Slootman, Duyvendak, 2015). The particular invocation of this past almost always functions as an argument against diversity (Duyvendak, 2020). It has led to an approach in which diversity and difference are problematized and work against notions of national identity that refuse to take difference as a starting point (Beaman, 2017).

All approaches to diversity and difference described above engage, to varying degrees, with tolerance, are rooted in nationalism, and have been both controversial and racialized (Hage, 1998). Multiculturalism, cultural diversity, pillarisation, assimilation, tolerance and integration all overlap ideologically (Butcher and Thomas 2006). I have chosen to focus on tolerance because this concept is able to capture the complexity of expectations and pressures that minority groups experience in relation to their negotiation of a sense of belonging to the Dutch national identity.

National identity rigidity

As becomes visible through the historical perspective on national identity formation in the Netherlands, the dominance and discourse around tolerance have shifted. The discourses on diverging minorities showed increasing tendencies of one-sided perspectives on the role of religion and culture in problematic difference, particularly on nonwestern cultures and Islam. These changes

became intrinsic to the practice of tolerance (Ghorashi, 2006). This has formed the basis for an us/them divide, which has been strengthened through more recent developments (Ghorashi, 2006), such as instances of religiously inspired violence and discrimination (de Nies, 2020; Mepschen et al., 2010, 963), influxes of groups of immigrants and a pandemic.

These developments have increased national identity rigidity (Balkenhol et al., 2016). National identity has increasingly become perceived as something fixed and in need of being promoted and specified, to be able to let other people adhere to it. Narratives increasingly portrayed Dutch national identity as a set of 'norms and values' to which all 'true Dutch people' can relate. The discourse around it has taken a central role in public and political debate. Unfortunately, it has also resulted in discourses working against notions of contaminated diversity (Beaman, 2017), creating policy that is blind to inherent diversity within groups of immigrants and neglects its own culturally contaminated national identity.

The currently dominant discourse demands diverging minority groups to adhere to certain promoted 'norms and values' and be loyal to them. The demands made by dominant groups are often disguised as proclaimed notions of 'normalcy', in which they contrast diverse ideas and behaviours with 'normal' behaviour and call minorities to adhere to it. Dominant groups demand normalcy from immigrants, minority groups that have resided in the Netherlands for multiple generations, and diverging minorities typically considered to be 'native'. The new dominant discourse around national identity in relation to minority groups inherently advocates for assimilation to a created national identity (Entzinger, 2006). The primary concern involved is the nation's cultural identity which is portrayed as secular, based on 'cultural Christianity' (Van den Hemel, 2017; Kešić, 2020), defined from nativist perspectives (Duyvendak, 2021) and disconnected from lived religion (Meyer, 2019). The nation is defined in terms of 'Cultural Christianity', which functions not as a religious but as a cultural marker of the secular nation (Kešić, 2020).

Liberal secular identity and religion

Although facets such as religion and secularity play a fundamental role in discourse relating to tolerance, they should be understood as components of the underlying, primary concern: national identity (Kešić, 2020). The current national identity of the Netherlands is placed in a context of liberal secularism. This context is an important fact, given that tolerance is widely considered a central value of liberalism, forming the foundation for a free 'marketplace' of ideas (Levinovitz, 2017). In this context, toleration is challenged by the paradox of epistemological toleration, which states that it is

morally good to tolerate falsehoods believed by others but also morally good to pursue the truth. These two goals are often contradictory in a society composed of a multitude of truths.

Over the past decades, religious diversity has increased tremendously in the Netherlands due to migration (Sleegers, 2007). In addition, the non-migrant population in the Netherlands has also undergone tremendous religious changes. The most apparent change has been the increasing secularisation of Dutch society and, subsequently, the secularisation of the mainstream national identity (Meyer, 2019). There is a societal balance on the paradox of epistemological destruction, which entails that "the pursuit of truth as morally good is incompatible with tolerating belief in falsehoods, no matter how important those falsehoods are to someone's identity" (Levinovitz, 2017). This paradox has become increasingly relevant in an increasingly secular society, as secularity makes a neutrality claim regarding beliefs and practices, thereby removing itself from the deadlock of different 'truths'.

In the context of a secular society, dominant groups increasingly depict orthodox religious groups as fundamentally intolerant to some of the core values of secularity. The increasing discussions centred around LGB discrimination through 'gay therapy', alleged forced coming outs, and 'special' education rights reflect this depiction and tension. A major challenge to toleration that has sprung because of this is defined by the paradox of self-destruction (Levinovitz, 2017). This paradox states that when toleration is extended to the supposed enemies of toleration, it eventually leads to self-destruction. Consequently, it seems to be increasingly difficult for secular society and thinkers to extend tolerance to these religious groups as they can only survive by defending clear community boundaries, thereby being posed as antithetical to the tolerance of others. This belief leads to the increasing tendency in public and private debate to advocate for 'pushing religion back to private life' (de Groot & Sengers, 2016) or calls for its abandonment.

Conclusion

In this literature review, I have defined the context of tolerance and belonging, which is defined by national identity processes. I have shown the importance of the notion of national identity in its function as the context within which people identify themselves with the society of the Netherlands and feel whether they and others belong to it, thereby determining in- and outgroups. Moreover, I have come to consider the conceptualization of national identity that is pushed forward by the dominant groups in society to reflect their normative stances and hierarchical positions. Thus, the processes and aspects influencing national identity form the context in which tolerance and belonging shift. In the following section, the theoretical framework, I will clarify the main concepts of

this research. In doing so, I will give specific and detailed attention to the concept of tolerance. Moreover, I will set out the relevant theories for this research. By 'framing' my research within a clearly defined field, I will be laying the foundations that support my analysis.

Theoretical framework

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework regarding the scientific discussion of the conceptualisation of the terms that are important to understanding the socio-political dynamics of tolerance and toleration. In doing so, I identify and clarify the key concepts and establish and justify the definitions that best fit my research. Furthermore, this theoretical framework explores research and insights to contextualise the debate concerning notions of tolerance within a scientific framework. In doing so, it touches upon the vast scientific discussion around themes related to tolerance and toleration, such as the position of minorities in Dutch society and liberal secularism. The importance the described concepts carry in the different analytical chapters structures their discussion. However, this does not entail that the importance is limited to those chapters. Moreover, I will evaluate and explain the relevant theories related to the key concepts on which I base my research. Finally, I will show how this research is situated within the wider scientific framework and debate throughout this framework.

Chapter 1

The approach to the key concept of 'tolerance'

Chapter 1 is titled 'Understanding Tolerance'. It is an integrative review of the concept of tolerance in which I discern its inherent nature and the social dynamics and structures associated with it in the context of majority and minority groups in a pandemic. So naturally, the concept of tolerance is fundamental to this study. Therefore, I will elaborate on the concept extensively in Chapter 1. Nonetheless, it is crucial to establish the basic approach toward this concept that this study builds upon.

This study approaches tolerance and toleration as multi-interpretable concepts. Doing so allows for the inclusion of the many forms in which the concepts have manifested themselves over the years and the fundamentally differing conceptions. These differences stem from the fact that they contain a multitude of aspects and can be approached and criticised from multiple conflicting, normative and cognitive perspectives (Bader, 2007). Therefore, my aim in Chapter 1 is not to reach a conceptual consensus but rather to explore the notions on which these differing conceptions are stalled. This study includes multiple dimensions of the concept as it can refer to an articulated normative principle, a disposition or a virtue, as well as to practices of institutional regimes. When I refer to articulated normative principles, I refer to 'tolerance'. In contrast, I use 'toleration' when referring to dispositions/virtues, practices and regimes. It is important to note that this distinction is somewhat

arbitrary as linguistically, the Dutch language does not make such a distinction (Bader, 2007). However, for the purpose of clarity in English writing, the distinction has been made.

Furthermore, in studying the socio-political dynamics of tolerance, I follow the minimalistic approach. This entails that I understand toleration to be a minimalistic, weak principle, referring to a voluntary attitude of self-limitation towards practices that one has the possibility not to tolerate. Toleration then entails that people refrain from acting on negative attitudes towards these differences, even when they have, or believe they have, the power to act upon these negative attitudes. Crucial to the concept of tolerance is that people or groups refrain from acting not because of negative influences, such as fear and prohibitions, but out of other beliefs, such as a belief in fundamental rights (Cohen, 2004). The nature of tolerance is thus based on an attitude of non-interference. This conception of tolerance distinguishes it from discrimination, as the negative attitudes concerned with discrimination are turned into action, whereas tolerance functions as a barrier.

Moreover, I follow a minimalistic approach to tolerance as I do not find the maximalist approaches to fall within the same terminological definition. I view more maximalist approaches to go 'beyond tolerance', relating more closely to 'respect' (Burg 1998:240) or 'pluralism'. These understandings are based on more demanding attitudes, such as respect toleration (Forst, 2007) and 'pluralistic' toleration/tolerance (Connely, 2005). The more 'modern' descriptions of tolerance state the perceived equality of diverging beliefs and practices, going further than the fundamentals of the concept that state that the core of tolerance is formed by not countering dissenting opinions and behaviours with sanctions. Substantially, when these approaches are taken, the targets of tolerance are no longer tolerated as their divergence is no longer objected to. The diverging practices and beliefs may be theoretically and legally considered equal and of the same value; however, when it is also perceived as such, a social dynamic is argued to have moved past tolerance as its function as a barrier to sanctions no longer exists. Tolerance, as understood in this study, requires the presence of disapproved beliefs and practices that are not met with feelings of acceptance or indifference (Forst, 2013; Cohen, 2004, p. 71).

In addition, the minimalistic approach to tolerance/toleration is most appropriate for the context of the Netherlands, which is defined by liberal-democratic fundamental rights and secularity (Bader, 2007). Liberal democracies primarily employ minimalistic conceptions of individual and collective tolerance as rights. These rights are always contained by other fundamental rights and may not be

considered absolute. Therefore, the employment of a minimalistic conception of tolerance is most useful.

The approach to the key concept of 'minority'

I have selected the studied individuals based on membership to an identified minority that is targeted for toleration, namely, Reformed Christians. In doing so, I assume that minority identity is part of the broader socio-cultural context of the Netherlands. There is a certain definitional uncertainty to the concept of 'minority', which becomes especially clear when looking at categories of contested identity claims. As there is no widely accepted, generally applicable, authoritative definition of minority (Qianbo, 2014), this research will not strictly define it. Rather, I will use the concept when referring to groups identified as 'the other' in the discourse around identity. It refers to the people within the Netherlands that have non-dominant and disadvantaged identity positions or numerical inferiority and are therefore identified as 'different' to the dominant majority and distinguished from elites. Moreover, due to their subordinate position, minorities are often vulnerable to experiencing toleration, discrimination and other socio-political dynamics steered by groups that are considered more powerful.

Chapter 2

The concepts and theories of 'religion' and 'secularity'

As I already explored in the literature review, notions of religiosity and secularity play a fundamental role in discourse relating to tolerance. In Chapter 2, I study the discourse surrounding a target of toleration, namely the religious minority of Reformed Christians. Due to the identity of this minority and the basis upon which dominant groups see them as being in need of toleration, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the conceptualisation and theories of religion and secularity. Therefore, in this section, I delve into the conceptualisation and theories surrounding the religious-secular divide in the Netherlands by looking at different understandings of secularism and religion.

According to anthropologist Talal Asad, liberal secularism makes claims of individual freedom and tolerance towards dissenters while also defaulting to the right of the majority (Asad, 2020). The concept of 'secularism' can be described as a process in which differing societal actors, like the government and society, relate themselves to each other and religion. In line with Burchardt (2020) and Schuh (2021), who stress the importance of distinguishing different formations of secularity, this study supposes a separation between institutionalised secularism and 'every-day/lived reality' secularism. Tamimi Arab and Verkaaik also describe this separation in secularism by distinguishing constitutional and cultural secularism (2016). These conceptions of secularism are very applicable to

the political and public discourse around tolerance and will therefore return throughout this research.

Moreover, this study looks at the presence of 'secular progressivism' in the analysed discourse. By secular progressivism, Schuh et al. (2012) mean the idea that *"within an 'immanent frame' in which the secular ontologically embodies the 'real' and constitutes the ground for normative universalism, religion turns into a historical vestige whose protection must be subordinated to universalistic notions of civic liberties."* Secular progressivism is a contested development in the Netherlands, and this study aims to add to the scientific debate surrounding this development through the analysis of the case study.

The term 'religion' as used in this paper refers to the usage of the term 'religie' in Dutch public discourse. The conception of religion that I use in this research is critical of the individualistic, subjective and privatised understanding of religion as I find it to be based on an idealised secular version of Protestantism in the Netherlands (Spinner-Halev, 2005). I do not only view this version as discriminatory but also as fundamentally incompatible with the legal liberal-democratic context of the Netherlands, in which there are fundamental rights for religions that exceed the private sphere emphasised by secularism. The understanding of religion employed in this study is thus complex and accommodating to the fundamental tensions between individual and collective rights.

Chapter 3

The approach to the key concept of 'belonging'

In the third chapter, I take position between the concepts of identification with national identity and feelings of belonging in my exploration of the experienced impact of toleration. Belonging in this study is approached as dynamic, as people can feel they belong in multiple aspects and not in others, and because the extent of these feelings can diverge in time (Giddens, 1991; Baumann, 1996). Many researchers have attempted to conceptualise belonging. In their efforts to develop a transdisciplinary conceptualisation of social belonging, Mahar et al. (2013) have come up with the following definition: *"A subjective feeling of value and respect derived from a reciprocal relationship to an external referent that is built on a foundation of shared experiences, beliefs or personal characteristics. These feelings of external connectedness are grounded to the context or referent group, to whom one chooses, wants and feels permission to belong."*

This study will use this definition as I understand belonging to be a subjective, contextual and dynamic phenomenon influenced by personal and environmental factors. In understanding the

processes of feeling a sense of belonging, it is important to establish that an individual can feel belonging to more than one group, relationship, system or entity (Mahar, 2013) and that these feelings may also be conflicting. Therefore, when examining the lived reality of feelings of belonging, it is crucial to bear in mind that an individual may internalise the multiplicity and conflict in their sense of belonging through adaptation. This again emphasises the importance of defining belonging as a fluid concept.

The approach to the key concept of 'identity'

As became clear through the focus of the literature review, the concept of identity is central to this research as it is fundamental to the identification processes and dynamics of tolerance.

Over the last few decades, the concept of identity has been given much significance and critique in academia and wider public discourse (Gilroy 1997:301). In my study, I draw from theories that understand identity as being engaged in continual processes of becoming through social practices and being in a constant relationship with existing power structures (Hall, 1996).

Identities emerge within the play of specific modalities of power (Hall, 1996). Therefore, they result from the markings of difference and exclusion. In contrast, they are not merely a sign of an 'identical, naturally constituted unity' (Hall, 1996), as they are sometimes stated to be. However, this study's predominantly social constructivist approach does not entail that essentialistic aspects of identity are completely disregarded (Baumann, 1999). Therefore, in this study, identity is approached as a procedural, multiple and changeable concept with essentialistic aspects. Identity revolves around inclusion as well as exclusion, the distinctive and what people have in common. It is constantly subject to change and is dependent on the context by which it is reinterpreted and adjusted. However, that does not mean that there is no room for continuity and stability. On the contrary, continuity is given to the process of identity formation in the form of habitus or embodied history (Bourdieu, 1990:56; Ghorashi, 2021). In short, this study gives attention to the situational and the more permanent and characteristics of identity and belonging.

The theories

Following the suggestions done by research on tolerance (van Doorn, 2014), this study takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of tolerance and belonging in the case of Reformed Christians in the Netherlands. Drawing from several fields will help me approach tolerance from multiple perspectives, thereby reaching new understandings of its complex nature, dynamics, and effects.

Important to note is that even though theories of 'whiteness' are important in studying discourses of tolerance, belonging and identity, this study has chosen not to put the main focus on ethnicity. The reason for doing so is that religion plays a more fundamental role in the chosen case of Reformed Christians. Ethnicity is not the aspect that makes them divergent in the perception of dominant groups in society. Including theories of whiteness would therefore be useful when performing comparative analysis, as it may disclose the predominantly positive ways in which their whiteness benefits this minority. However, as this study solely focuses on this group, without comparing them to other minorities, theories of whiteness are not the leading framework.

Social identity theory

Social identity theory has been of fundamental importance for Chapter 3. In line with the social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979), several components have been crucial in the questioning and subsequent interpretation when interviewing individuals. The internal or subjective criteria for social identification are based on the importance the individual assigns to their social group and consist of the following components: The cognitive component, which describes the awareness of belonging to a social group. Moreover, the evaluative component explores whether belonging to a certain social group is considered to be positive or negative. And finally, the emotional component studies the identification and feelings of belonging to a social group.

According to social identity theory, minorities with negatively associated social identities might engage with various group strategies. These group strategies can concern individual strategies, such as inter-group comparison or changing social groups and group strategies. Social competition and social creativity are important group strategies. In social competition, people attempt to change the existing status hierarchies. With social creativity, people attempt to restructure the cognitions about their social group in an attempt to attain a favourable group comparison. Another example of this is changing the negative perception of a belief or practice into a positive perception. Finally, another manner to do so is by engaging in inter-group comparison with groups of a lower social status. I have attempted to discern whether these strategies are at play in the questioning.

In line with the interdisciplinary approach, I have also taken an intergroup perspective to gain a better understanding of the nature of tolerance. The framework of intergroup relations is especially well-suited for this research. It refers to how people who belong to social groups or categories perceive, think about, feel about, act towards and interact with people in other groups. In this context, 'the national identity' is taken as an abstract group to which people can relate themselves. In the third part of this research, I will examine the effects of toleration on feelings of belonging to

the national identity. A central aspect of toleration is the minority groups' identities involved in social identity processes (Verkuyten, 2016; Verkuyten, 2012; Verkuyten et al., 2019). Therefore, a social identity model is well suited to provide a theoretical understanding of the experiences of toleration.

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1999) supposes that people strive to belong to social groups. Consequently, individuals are assumed to estimate to which extent other people align with their 'norms and values'. This theory stipulates that individuals make distinctions based on whom they consider to be equal and whom they consider to be different, resulting in processes of othering and in- and exclusion. By identifying with a nation, groups involve themselves in intergroup comparisons, which often leads to the derogation of outgroups. The discourse analysis is performed in the context of the pandemic, in which there were strong calls and tendencies to unite in a joint national effort to 'fight' the virus, suggesting an increased identification with the nation. In line with social identity theory, the intergroup comparisons resulting from these identification processes can lead to the increased derogation of outgroups.

The processes whereby us/them thinking is expressed have been called social identification and social contra-identification (Eisinga en Scheepers, 1989). Social identification occurs within the group people feel they belong to and social contra-identification occurs in relation to the 'other group'. In line with this argumentation, it is to be expected that certain minorities are more often contra-identified than others. The minorities people do not identify themselves with but yet are able to tolerate are groups that are not situated farthest from the ingroup, in line with Simmel's research on social structures (Caetano, 2020). They are the minorities that express diverging practices and beliefs, in accordance with diverging norms and values, that are not too divergent, or who share other significant characteristics. A minority that this is the case for in the context of Covid-19 in the Netherlands are Reformed Christians. This is the case as a more negative attitude, and more significant social distance are to be expected in a context in which they can be framed as a threat, due to diverging practices and beliefs such as refusal to vaccinate and continuing attending religious services during several lockdowns. Characteristics such as ethnicity, constitutional privileges, the particular religion at play, and nationality are factors that lead to the expectancy that the social dynamics visible lean more towards tolerance than discrimination. This is the case as there is a basis upon which the 'ingroups' are able to identify themselves with Reformed Christians. According to the social identity theory, the social-economic and societal status similarities should lead to a basic identification and lessen negative attitudes. Therefore, following social identity theory, this minority seems suitable for studying tolerance.

According to the social identity theory, the following hypotheses can be made:

Hypothesis: As the minority of Reformed Christians expressed diverging norms, values and practices during the pandemic, the particular approach that is taken towards them can be characterised as social contra-identification. If this is the case, the discourse analysis of the reporting on this group in the media should show signs of this group being identified as 'the other' in the dynamic of tolerance.

Hypothesis: According to social identity theory, the discourse analysis of how the media portray the minority of Reformed Christians should show signs of stating similarity, equality or difference, othering and in- and exclusion.

Hypothesis: Following social identity theory, it can be assumed that the discourse about the minority of Reformed Christians influences the relative positioning this group perceives themselves to be in as people strive to belong to social groups. This should become clear through the in depth-interviews.

Hypothesis: From an intergroup perspective, it is expected that if Reformed Christians are identified as an out group in the public discourse, their identification with 'the nation' should be negatively affected. This should become clear through the in-depth interviews.

Realistic conflict theory

Another prominent theory that is useful in studying the dynamics of tolerance and feelings of belonging is the 'realistic conflict theory' (Jackson, 1993) which posits that rivalry and conflict between groups can emerge when groups have conflicting interests or access to resources (Duckitt, 1994, Jackson, 1993, Sidanius, 1999). In the context of reformed Christians, the conflict at play is most closely characterised by 'dominance of the outgroup by the ingroup' (Duckitt, 1994), as the social status is not equal. However, they are an interesting case as reformed Christians yield constitutional privileges that complicate the assertion of dominance by the ingroup. This is a dynamic that could be quite complex for this particular group.

According to the realistic conflict theory the following hypothesis can be made:

Hypothesis: Vaccination and exemptions can be regarded as threatened resources on which the ingroup focussed themselves during the pandemic and which Reformed Christians threatened. The presence of this rivalry or conflict should become clear in the discourse analysis.

Realistic conflict theory describes two types of reactions by the outgroup. The reactions of the outgroup are typically described as 'stable suppression', whereby the beliefs and practices of the dominant group are accepted to evade conflict. The second type is 'unstable suppression', whereby the suppressed minority comes to see the dominant majority as the suppressor. The dominant group can view this challenge as just or unjust and act in corresponding manners, allowing movements for change (Sherif, 1966) or reacting in a hostile manner. This has led to the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis: Both groups will react differently during different pandemic phases as the suppression also differs in intensity. This should become visible in both the discourse analysis and the in-depth interviews.

Conclusion

In the sections above, I have defined, identified and clarified the fundamental concepts of this study. Moreover, I have set out the relevant theories and developed hypotheses for my research. In the following chapters, I aim to do multiple things. Firstly, I will use the theories and conceptualisations which I have elaborated on as a basis for interpreting the results of the analytical chapters. In doing so, I combine perspectives and theories in new ways. Furthermore, I will test whether social identity theory and realistic conflict theory hold in the specific context of the case of Reformed Christians in times of a pandemic.

Methodology

Introduction

In this study, I aim to gain a better understanding of tolerance, the socio-political dynamics involved in toleration, and its relation to a minority's sense of belonging to the national identity of the Netherlands. The case study I selected to research is the minority of Reformed Christians in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

First off, I gathered academic literature to perform an integrative study into the concept of tolerance to be able to discern the socio-political dynamics of tolerance associated with the studied group. After that, I looked at how these dynamics play out in practice by performing a discourse analysis of the public debate in the news media around the exemption rule for religious gatherings. Finally, I have explored the feelings of belonging to the national identity of the minority in question through interviews. Therefore, the approach of this study is characterised as qualitative and is based on both primary and secondary data. In this methodology, I will explain and justify my approach.

Validity, reliability and ethics

The methodology of this study is less controlled and more interpretive in nature, therefore needing me to take a reflexive approach. I have employed reflexivity to increase the validity of my research, as is often done in social constructivist research (Fairclough, 1995). Employing reflexivity entailed making my personal biases transparent to facilitate the challenging of my research outcomes. The analytical framework of this study has been set up in such a way that it becomes easier for me, the researcher, to recognise and acknowledge my biases. Furthermore, it helps me reflect on the problematic linguistics that I may use (Fairclough, 1995) and brings things to my attention that would otherwise remain distant because of my particular sociocultural background. Therefore, the theory that has been outlined does not only serve as a framework for the conduction of the study but also counters the subjective position that I hold as a researcher.

To mitigate the possible limitations present in the process of the discourse analysis and the interviews, I have adopted principles of care (Boellstorff, 2017), entailing that ethical reflection and awareness are strived for. The aim of this is to avoid wrongdoing by adhering to principles of research ethics. I need to handle the humans behind the visual and textual excerpts with close ethical consideration. In performing discourse analysis, this entails analysing documents and their corresponding view of social reality with care. I have constantly aimed for the correct interpretation

and contextualisation of meanings and motives, making it a precarious exercise. This practice of care is important as discourse analysis is highly interpretative and consists of reading 'between the lines'. One attempts to discern meaning that is not directly discernible. To limit ethical concerns for the process of the interviews, I have installed guidelines that aim to avoid other forms of harm and help ensure anonymity and confidentiality.¹

Methods of data collection

Chapter 1 - An integrative review

In Chapter 1, I attempt to gain a fonder understanding of the concept and socio-political dynamics of tolerance. In order to do so, I have integrated critiques of tolerance as stated by a myriad of researchers from a range of fields, such as sociology, philosophy and social psychology. The purpose of this chapter was not to cover all articles ever published on the topic of tolerance but rather to combine perspectives and insights from different fields to create a new theoretical perspective. Therefore, the integrative review method was selected as it is especially appropriate for gaining an overview of the knowledge base and for expanding on the theoretical foundation of the topic of tolerance (Torraco, 2005).

In studying tolerance, I rely on academic literature and studies on the social structures in societies that influence tolerance and toleration or in which it has a role. Even though I aim to study tolerance in Dutch society, not all sources are selected based on country of origin. Non-Dutch theories about tolerance and 'tolerant societies', for the most part, also apply to the Dutch case. To collect the material needed to perform the integrative review, I first searched for the literature and collected the data. Thereafter, I performed a critical analysis of the studies included, discussed the results and presented them in the integrative review. The primary method was a bibliographic search on terms related to tolerance and the specific minority, such as 'tolerance', 'religious-tolerance', 'nature of tolerance', and 'dynamics of tolerance'. The material analysed consisted of research articles and books from different academic fields. An essential criterion in selecting the included material was whether the article directly and explicitly addressed tolerance.

Chapter 2 - A Discourse Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the nature and socio-political dynamics of tolerance as visible in the Dutch media's reporting on Reformed Christians. To do so, I have collected and analysed

¹ These guidelines can be found in appendix I

80 news articles from the eight most popular news media. The included news outlets consist of; NU.nl, NOS, AD, Telegraaf, NRC, Volkskrant, RTLnieuws and Trouw. The time scope of the material ranged from March-2020 to February-2022 as this concerned the time during which COVID-19 felt most relevant for most Dutch citizens. I have made this selection based on popularity, language, accessibility, and relevance criteria.

I have chosen to analyse news media as it is commonly identified in research that news media have a central role in discursive practices, in addition to an agenda-setting role. Public opinion is heavily influenced and shaped through mass media, which has consequences on the social and political dimensions (McCombs, 2002). Moreover, the material has been selected from news media with a significant audience, falling under the description of mass media (Potter, 2013). I have selected these outlets as they have a significant role in affirming attitudes and opinions that are already established. In addition, mass media have the ability to affirm latent attitudes around tolerance and 'activate' them, prompting people to take action (Davison, 1998). Mass media are both a reflection of public and political opinion as they provide political leaders with platforms. I have also selected mass media as their nature results in public opinion encompassing large numbers of individuals and geographic areas, as long as they are significantly present, as is the case in the Netherlands. Subsequently, this data should reflect, to a great extent, what perspectives are provided in the formation of 'popular knowledge' about who is to be tolerated.

The data for the discourse analysis has been selected from Dutch resources as the study concerns itself with toleration and national identity in the context of the Netherlands and aims to study the Dutch public debate. For the material that is present in an offline and online form, predominantly the case for news media, I have selected the analysed material based on online accessibility as most political and public material is consumed online (GfK, 2020). Online news consumption was especially prevalent during COVID-19, as the accessibility of online news became preferred and increased significantly (NDP, 2020). Moreover, I have selected the data based on relevance. It needed to refer to, or directly address, Reformed Christians, churches, tolerance, religion, the Bible Belt (and other places associated with Reformed Christians), or the exemption rule.

Chapter 3 - Interviews

For Chapter 3, in which I analyse lived experiences of tolerance, I have collected primary data through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviewees were selected on the basis of four criteria. Firstly, the interviewees needed to identify as Reformed Christian (albeit to different extents) and reside in the Netherlands. Non-Dutch respondents were irrelevant to the analysis as the

study concerns itself with toleration and national identity in the context of the Netherlands. In addition, they needed to be of adult age and willing to consent to the conditions of the interview².

I found the participants through two approaches. First off, I contacted people who might know other people who fit the criteria. After that, I contacted associations, such as student associations which profited themselves as Reformatory Christian. After providing my contact information and information about the study, seven people stated they were willing to participate. The participants range in age from 19 to 63 and come from different parts of the Netherlands, including some particularly notorious areas in the analysed discourse.

There is variability in qualitative research regarding the minimum of interviews needed (Dworkin, 2012). When looking at the conclusions from a vast amount of articles, book chapters and books, a minimum of 5 interviewees is often suggested. To discern the number of interviews needed, it is important to take the nature of the topic into account and the qualitative method and study design (Morse, 2000, p. 1). Doing so, I concluded that seven interviewees suffices given the explorative nature of the relevant chapter. The aim of the interviews was not to attain data saturation and redundancy. Taking the topic of this study into account, the expectancy that this number would be adequate as it allows for the chance of negative cases was confirmed. In addition, this number also allowed for the examination of the characteristics that address the research questions and for the distinction of conceptual categories of interest (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 1994, 1995).

I conducted five interviews online, one by phone and one in person in a cafe. On average, the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews have been performed on a semi-structured basis. This method entails that the interviews consisted of several key questions that helped me define the areas I wanted to explore while allowing divergence in order to go into more detail (Britten, 1999). I recorded the interviews on a secure device, with consent, and transcribed them into detail soon afterwards. I have anonymised the interviews. In doing so, I have replaced names with other names that retained the 'feeling' of the original names. Moreover, I have added age ranges and anonymised places. Contrastingly, I have chosen not to anonymise the gender with which the interviewees identify themselves as some experiences may be influenced by gender and as this aligns with the emphasis that this particular minority places on gender and their expressed beliefs on these matters.

² The informed consent form can be found in Appendix II

Methods of analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis

I have analysed the questions in this thesis primarily within a framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is based on viewing language as a social practice carrying social meanings. It follows the belief that the identification of discourse can help disclose current social structures and promote awareness of the social hierarchies involved in systems of tolerance (Qianbo, 2016). I have chosen this framework as it is especially well suited to studying language as a form of social practice, not merely as a random linguistic process (Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; McKenna, 2004).

Moreover, in designing the research questions, I have been led by the notion of this theory that social practices stand in relation to historical contexts (McKenna, 2004), through which existing social relations can be strengthened, reproduced, or contested. Thus, discourse is taken as being shaped by society while simultaneously shaping it. Following this theory entails that context is taken into account when analysing discourse around tolerance through, among other things, looking at perceived urgency and surrounding legalities and policies.

Critical discourse analysis distincts itself from discourse analysis in that it considers power or inequality as manifested and reproduced through discourse. This entails that in the analysis of the interviews and the news material, it has been attempted to determine whether the language used sought to maintain, reinforce or change their position of power or place in the hierarchy of tolerance. Fundamentally, the usage of CDA entails that the motivations of the interviewees and media reporters are explored, which would not be standard in Discourse Analysis (Woofitt, 2005).

CDA in Chapter 1

Critical discourse theory is well suited to the study of socio-political dynamics of tolerance as it is fundamentally concerned with analysing structural relationships of dominance, inequality, social power and control as manifested in language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, Van Dijk, 2001). I translate this concern by looking at how these relationships are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by texts and talk in a social and political context (Van Dijk, 2001). Moreover, CDA allows the analysed discourses to be considered expressions of ideologies while also being considered constitutive of them. Critical discourse theory is therefore very suitable in this study's attempt to demystify the ideological and asymmetrical power structures that inhibit the concept and practises of tolerance.

CDA in Chapter 2

Chapter 2 is based on the theory of Critical Discourse Analysis as it concentrates on social issues and shows special interest in the role of media in their bias towards, and reproduction of, the ideological favour of dominant groups (Qianbo, 2016; Van Dijk, 1998). In the process of CDA, the focus lies on linguistic elements and structures, which may show 'hidden determinants' in the system of social relationships and the effects they may have on that system. For Chapter 2, I distinguished and identified elements within the text, whereafter I analysed their relation to other elements in the text to see how the elements generate meaning together.

The theoretical framework of this study draws on Foucault's notion of 'discursive formations', focusing on the processes whereby a dominant ideology/discourse becomes 'common sense' and embedded in institutions – a central concern in the socio-political dynamics of tolerance. Discursive formations appear when discourses allow for ways of communicating about issues in similar ways, employing similar clusters of keywords, mobilising metaphors, ideas, and forms of knowledge (Barker, 2000). Foucault's notion of 'discursive formations' focuses on the processes whereby a dominant discourse becomes seen as 'common sense', and eventually becomes embedded in institutions while excluding other discourses. One of the organising principles of Foucault's notion of discourse is that meanings are temporarily stabilised into a discourse (Barker 2000:78). In this research, the shifting meanings of different discursive formations in the analysed news material reflect the struggles between the dominant group, represented by the media, and the group considered to be in need of toleration, Reformed Christians.

Moreover, considering the multimodal nature of the analysed material, I have also given attention to visual elements. I considered the inclusion of imagery in the analysed material to be essential because of the assumption of relative objectivity surrounding it, through which it depicts reality with a certain authority (Sontag, 2003). However, imagery only shows what it does not exclude. Imagery is not neutral and can promote or sustain discourse while exuding objectivity. Moreover, there are fundamentally political processes of decision making involved in the selection of imagery. This indicates the value that photographs have for political analysis and the necessity for critical engagement. Analysing the imagery can reveal something about what is considered representative of a situation or newsworthy. The choices concerned in the imagery selection influence the perception of the public, especially of people who are perceived as 'different' by the media. These images are thus a fundamental aspect of our comprehension of social phenomena and people and how we perceive their reality.

Finally, in line with the proper utilisation of CDA, I analysed which elements have been excluded from the text. To achieve this, I formulated my questions in such a way that it left room for 'what is missing'. Fairclough has formulated specific questions on which I have based the questions leading this research. In addition, I have added questions suitable for visual analysis³.

CDA in Chapter 3

In Chapter 3, I interviewed individuals about their sense of belonging to the national identity in relation to socio-political dynamics of tolerance. In line with phenomenological methodology, an inductive method of CDA has been followed (Byrne, 2001). CDA is a wide-ranging tool that can be applied to a range of forms of data, including written text, imagery and spoken word (Bryman, 2008). Moreover, it distinguishes itself from other discourse theories in its multidisciplinary approach to subjects (Wodak & Meyer, 2009) by studying them in an intertextual and interdiscursive manner (McKenna, 2004). Therefore, in my approach towards these individuals and subjects, I have aimed to be balanced and complete, in line with this theory.

My essential aim was to gain an understanding of the essential "truths" (i.e., essences) of the lived experience of the interviewees (Byrne, 2001). Lived experience refers to the unique lived experience of a particular group of people. In qualitative phenomenological research, lived experience refers to a representation of the experiences and choices of a given person and the knowledge that they gain from these experiences and choices. This lived reality is described by multiple experiences, which can coexist and are first-hand accounts. It is experienced in how an individual perceives, describes, feels, judges, remembers, makes sense of, and talks about the experience (Patton, 2002).

I have attempted to explore the lived reality of Reformed Christians by collecting and analysing narrative materials. In doing so, I have used the original transcripts in conducting the CDA for the interviews. The formal processes of the execution of this research are not easily described and identified, which is partly due to the reflexive and intuitive nature of the skills involved in analysis following CDA. However, the following steps of analysis for the interviews have been identified:

1. I have read the transcripts.
2. I identified themes.
3. I identified the language that constructs those themes and the commonalities in the use of language in relation to each theme.
4. I have drawn conclusions regarding the phenomena based on these themes.

³ All questions can be found in Appendix III.

In line with other qualitative analyses, interpretation is involved. That entails that I acknowledge the possibility of alternative interpretations.

Evaluation and justification

In this thesis, I have attempted to contribute to new knowledge and understanding about tolerance, its socio-political dynamics, and its influence on feelings of belonging. I have chosen to take a broad approach, including multiple scientific domains, theories and a myriad of concepts. While this broadness can be considered a strength, it is also a possible weakness of the study, possibly causing unclarity of the argument and lack of depth and academic rigour. Nonetheless, I have chosen this approach as new interdisciplinary perspectives have been able to emerge because of it.

Furthermore, the results produced by the semi-structured interviews bear the possibility of not being generalisable beyond the sample group. However, I have chosen this method as it does provide a more in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions, emotions and motivations, in line with the aim of the study.

Chapter 1 - Understanding tolerance

A study into the dimensions, limits, function, nature and practice of tolerance.

Introduction

As becomes clear in the exploration of national identity in the context of the Netherlands, tolerance plays a fundamental and complex part in the discursive formations in which it is involved. In the following chapters, I will explore discourses on tolerance and associated feelings of belonging to the mainstream national identity of the Netherlands in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is fundamental to grasp the concept of tolerance to recognise and understand its presence in the analysed discourse and people's personal accounts. Therefore, in this chapter, I perform an integrative review of the concept of tolerance to discern its inherent nature and the social dynamics and structures associated with it in the context of majority and minority groups (Forst, 2013). Moreover, I will pay specific attention to how a context of crisis may influence the social-political dynamics of toleration as COVID-19 forms the context of the analysis in the following chapters.

As stated in the theoretical framework, I approach tolerance and toleration as multi-interpretable concepts. Doing so allows for the inclusion of the many forms in which the concepts have manifested themselves over the years and their fundamentally differing conceptions. This chapter explores the notions on which these conceptions are stalled. To do so, I look at the meanings and purviews of tolerance to reveal the nature of the concept. I do this by first gaining an understanding of the dimensions of tolerance, whereafter I define its limits and consider its function. This leads to an exploration of the nature of tolerance, which I do by integrating critiques of tolerance as stated by a myriad of researchers from a range of fields, such as sociology, philosophy and social psychology. Finally, I look at how tolerance plays out in practice. By critically assessing the concept, I can gain a more detailed understanding of the socio-political practices that underlie the meanings attached to the concept of tolerance.

Even though this chapter integrates critiques of tolerance, the point of this chapter is not to devalue or counter-argue the fundamental importance of tolerance for the diverse society of the Netherlands. It has real historical and current value, and it has played a crucial role in the ability of persons belonging to minorities to express and maintain their diverging beliefs and practices (Verkuyten et al., 2019a). Rather, in this chapter, I intend to better understand the concept by discerning the structural and inherent systems upon which the concept is built and its subsequent practice. I find that although tolerance has a positive function in diverse societies, it is limited in

multiple ways. These limitations arise out of its nature, which can be characterised as containing elements of inequality, hierarchy, conditionality, devaluation and exclusion. In the context of crisis, I find that periods of heightened tension can reveal power hierarchies, lead to negative shifts in attitudes towards social groups and undermine a sense of shared identity among social groups. These attitudes exacerbate the negative aspects present in socio-political dynamics related to tolerance. Therefore, I conclude that if tolerating can be argued to be a virtue, it at least should be considered a flawed virtue. This is the case as tolerance results in fundamentally hierarchical notions that go beyond the sphere of power by including notions of morality, which lead to a false sense of moral superiority in the tolerating group and moral inferiority in the tolerated group. Minorities are not only subordinated in a political and social sense but also in a fundamentally ethical manner.

The dimensions of tolerance

I begin this discussion with the exposition of the multiple dimensions of tolerance. First off, tolerance/toleration often refers to an articulated normative principle. However, it can also refer to a disposition or virtue and to practices of institutional regimes. When I refer to articulated normative principles, I refer to 'tolerance'. Contrastingly, I use toleration when referring to dispositions/virtues, practices, and regimes⁴.

Individual and collective tolerance

Freedom of religion often forms the crux of the current debates around tolerance/toleration. In that context, individual and collective tolerance can also be recognised as 'internal' vs 'external' freedoms or autonomy (Bader, 2007). Tolerance is thus an element of multiple rights. In the case of individual tolerance/toleration, the tolerated individual is concerned with the right to liberty of conscience. This right falls within the sphere of 'private' practices. Conversely, in the case of collective toleration, it involves the right of diverging groups to practice disapproved collective practices.

The limits of tolerance

These different forms of tolerance are defined by limits that can be understood in correspondingly different and contradicting ways, in which the different rights of which tolerance is an element are often combined. The first manner is typically defined by matters of national safety, public health, protection of other individuals in society, and the health of the members belonging to the tolerated

⁴ It is important to note that this distinction is somewhat arbitrary as linguistically, the Dutch language does not make such a distinction (Bader, 2007). However, for the purposes of clarity in English writing, the distinction has been made.

group. It refers to the fact that freedom is limited by the context of society and is based on post-enlightenment concerns about when an individual's or minority's freedom poses a threat to the invoked collective identity, such as the nation (O'Toole, 2022). This notion of the limits of tolerance is therefore also reflected in law and politics. It is intertwined with the fundamental rights that are in a constant balancing act. However, there is a second way to approach the limits of tolerance, which has gained increasing traction in research. This approach looks at the inherent limits of tolerance, thereby questioning its value. Questions that arise from this second understanding revolve around, for example, the different notions and nature of tolerance and the legitimacy of its practice (e.g. Beaman, 2017; Mepchen, 2009; Brown, 2009, Insel, 2019 etc).

I find it essential to understand the ideas on the limits of tolerance as tolerance always flips over into intolerance once the inevitable boundaries are traced between what can and cannot be tolerated (Forst, 2013). This idea on the boundaries of tolerance is called the 'paradox of drawing the limits'. Understanding the different ways and bases upon which these boundaries are understood and articulated can therefore help in recognising socio-political dynamics of toleration.

Both versions of understanding the limits of tolerance are represented in this study as they both represent a part of tolerance. Nevertheless, in this first chapter, I focus on the second approach as this chapter is geared towards understanding the inherent nature and structures of tolerance. Conversely, the first approach becomes especially relevant in the second chapter on the discourse around tolerance as the balancing of different rights is prominent in the analysed discourse. When researching the lived experiences of toleration, both forms will be important to the analysis of an individual's experience.

The function of tolerance

Toleration is considered a key concept in political science and philosophy domains when the workings of societies are analysed (e.g. Forst, 2013; Cohen, 2004; Verkuyten et al., 2019). Traditionally, tolerance entails that aspects that are objected to by a majority are endured and permitted, making it a concept that is widely considered to be critical to a well-functioning, culturally diverse society (Vogt, 1997). It is considered so as people in a diverse society are inevitably confronted with beliefs, norms, values and practices that are fundamentally different from theirs and their identity-related foundations (Brandt et al., 2014; Haidt, 2012; Tetlock, 2003). Due to its function as a conflict-mitigating dynamic in diverse societies, a myriad of organisations, institutions, political views, and even religions have advanced tolerance as a concept (Brown, 2009; Verkuyten et al., 2019). Tolerance has real historical and current value, and it has played a crucial role in the ability of

persons belonging to minorities to express and maintain their diverging beliefs and practices (Verkuyten et al., 2019a).

On an individual level, the ultimate function of tolerance is often considered to be the realisation of specific ideals such as human dignity, autonomy, diversity and recognition of the Other (Levinovitz, 2016). The aspect of the recognition of the 'Other' is important here as sociologists have stipulated that the function of tolerance is similar to the concept of 'othering'. This approach describes how the function of othering and tolerating certain groups or individuals in society is similar in its strengthening of the unity of the other groups (Durkheim, 1965). These dynamics are reflected in recent debates revolving around national identity, such as in discussions around symbols and traditions in Dutch festivities.

The nature of tolerance

Due to the perceived necessity of tolerance for a well-functioning diverse society and the supposed positive impact of tolerance on majority and minority groups, perspectives criticising tolerance have long remained sparse. However, increasingly more researchers have contributed to the argument that there is a necessity to go beyond 'mere' tolerance (e.g. Laegaard, 2013; Macedo, 2000; Beaman, 2017). When looking at the critiques, the nature of tolerance is described as containing unequal, conditional, devaluing and exclusionary aspects. It is crucial to understand these aspects to recognise the socio-political dynamics of tolerance and the basis for why being tolerated might have implications for one's sense of belonging to 'the' national identity.

The unequal/hierarchical aspect

When looking at tolerance from a theoretical standpoint, it is interesting that it has traditionally been regarded as a positive approach towards minorities. The positive interpretation is remarkable as the nature of tolerance has been found to function as a mechanism that subtly enables unequal and dominant dynamics (Insel, 2019; Marcuse, 1965; Wemyss, 2006).

The aspect of inequality in tolerance rises from the fact that its dynamics legitimise and reinforce the dominant position of the tolerating groups. This also entails that the relatively powerless position of the tolerated groups is strengthened. Therefore, it is not a system of inclusion and equality for all groups. The system and socio-political dynamics of tolerance create a situation in which the powerful define the conditions of toleration. For example, when taking the practice of not shaking hands as an example related to a minority group in the Netherlands, it is visible that the practice is restricted to the private domain, whereas the norms and values of the majority group apply to the public sphere.

When dominant groups translate the practice of tolerance into policy, this often results in the privatisation of practices and beliefs of minority groups. As the book 'Deep equality in an era of religious difference' shows, the concept of tolerance is rooted in hierarchy, which makes the practice of tolerance inherently vulnerable (Beaman, 2017). The 'tolerated' citizen is positioned between the 'good' and the 'bad', with an impossibility of moving into the 'good' but an all too real possibility of moving into the 'bad' (Choudhury, 2007).

The conditional aspect

The power inherent to toleration is quite arbitrary as it is fully dependent on whether the tolerating group decides to voluntarily keep the barrier to action in place. The reservation towards interference can change in a multitude of ways and at any time. This fact makes the position of the tolerated insecure and makes them dependent on the willingness of the tolerating. Due to this position, there is a basic understanding amongst the tolerated that any action might risk the delicate balance of permission. This knowledge can be anxiety-inducing and might socially function as a form of oppression (Honohan, 2013; Lovett, 2010).

Tolerance is therefore not sufficient as a basis of human rights because, in addition to conditional acceptance, active respect for people and their practices is also required to maintain long-term feelings of certitude that one is allowed to diverge. Furthermore, when looking at empirical evidence from the psychological field, it is evident that the perceived or actual threats to one's identity lead to negative psychological consequences (Major et al., 2013; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Meyer, 2003).

The devaluing aspect

The inequality tolerance bears and its conditional nature described above have led researchers to the identification of a patronising element. The reasoning is that the dynamics described above lead to condescending attitudes, thereby devaluing the practices and beliefs of diverging minorities. Therefore, tolerance also distinguishes itself from appreciative and respectful approaches toward minorities in this regard, as these approaches do not yield devaluation (Brown, 2009; Modood, 2007). The devaluation stems from the fact that when dominant groups consider a practice or belief to be in need of tolerance, it inherently implies that these aspects of an individual's identity fall outside the 'normal' sphere, thereby affirming the majority's objection to it. It might be considered undesirable, deviant, marginal or distasteful (Brown, 2009). By tolerating a group, you do not engage in discussion with 'the other', and you do not take them seriously, devaluing their practices and beliefs.

Researchers have found identity devaluation to have the same effect as threats to one's identity. Both instigate negative psychological consequences (Major et al., 2013; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Meyer, 2003). However, researchers have not yet widely studied this phenomenon concerning tolerance. That is remarkable, as the concepts of tolerance and toleration contain inherent notions of devaluation.

The exclusionary aspect

In discussions about 'others', people often speak of "our values". This implies that there are national values that are fundamental to 'the' national identity and that all people belonging to it should subscribe to. So-called "national values" are, in the Western European context that applies to the Netherlands, often liberal values such as individual freedom, tolerance and democracy. These values are portrayed as universally valid and can therefore be seen as conflicting with nationalism. However, political philosopher Sune Lægaard (2013) argues that the nationalisation of liberal values is a form of nationalism.

According to Lægaard (2013), the basis of liberal values is the idea that each individual is autonomous and equal. With this definition in mind, it is unusual to consider liberal values as national values, especially if these values are the means of differentiating between members and outsiders of the national community. Nevertheless, it is possible to adopt liberal values in a nationalist manner. This happens when these values become symbols for 'in groups' and when the outsiders - at least in the eyes of the 'in groups' - do not propagate these values. Consequently, there originates a "we" versus a "they" based on who serves the liberal values, leading to these values serving as a social exclusion mechanism. It is irrelevant to what extent the 'ingroup' is actually propagating liberal values. The point is that the 'we' group can impose this idea on the outsiders, thereby excluding them from the mainstream national identity.

The ambiguous aspect

In her research, Wendy Brown indicates ambiguity in the meaning and purview of tolerance. This ambiguity is an important aspect for understanding the other aspects of tolerance as it allows tolerance to be invoked in a myriad of ways, thereby facilitating the other aspects. Moreover, the ambiguity allows for tolerance to be invoked to equate or conflate non-commensurable subjects and practices, such as religion and culture, and make them interchangeable and conflated (Brown, 2009).

The practice of tolerance

Tolerance in practice is neither easy nor pleasant. As Seligman (2008) states, 'it presents us with a double burden'. Tolerance demands an acceptance of the presence of that which we find objectionable, and in accepting it, it demands that we suffer our discomfort.

A morally virtuous practice

The difficulty involved in practising tolerance might be why traditionally, practising tolerance and being considered tolerant have been well-regarded. On an individual level, it is often considered a sign of virtue and moral character (Horton, 1996). On a national and international level, countries have prided themselves in their self-identification as tolerant nations. When dominant groups refrain from hindering beliefs and practices to which they object on the basis of beliefs of perceived 'higher moral values', such as allowing religious freedom, a moral hierarchy is established. As a result, when a majority group tolerates the beliefs and practices of another group, an inherent moral distinction is created that leads to a feeling of moral superiority. The aspects of the majority group that distinguish them from other groups become seen as aspects that confer tolerance, rather than merely not being in need of it (Brown, 2009). This dynamic relates to the articulated 'paradox of moral toleration' (Levinovitz, 2016), which describes how the practice of toleration results in moral rightness when tolerating what is considered morally wrong. Consequently, the tolerated groups find themselves in a relative position of moral inferiority (Insel, 2019). In addition, as a consequence of this relative positioning and the moral high ground that dominant groups take, they might experience that they should be highly appreciative of the generosity of the tolerating group for being allowed to live out their identities.

Practising tolerance in times of crisis

The tolerating group is thus provided with a sense of moral virtuosity through practising tolerance. However, in a time with much uncertainty and societal change caused by a multitude of processes, the incentive to avoid the double burden of tolerance is great. This is especially the case in times of crisis as there are certain socio-political dynamics identified with pandemics by social and behavioural science (Bavel, 2020). In periods of crisis, individual and collective interests become especially important, leading to forms of moral and value-based decision making that can reveal the perceptions and power of certain groups. Moreover, it has been stated that threat perceptions instigated by the crisis can lead to shifts in attitudes towards social groups. Greater fear and perceived threat are associated with greater intolerance and punitive attitudes toward outgroups, such as prejudice and discrimination (Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Jackson et al., 2019; Marcus et al., 1995). A shared identity can emerge by addressing the public in collective terms and urging 'us' to act

for the common good (Carter et al., 2015). Conversely, when certain groups are perceived as threats to this common good or as competitors, the sense of shared identity can be undermined. All these factors make this particular period interesting when wanting to discern social dynamics around tolerated groups.

Furthermore, another topic that becomes especially relevant during a pandemic is the social context of groups, including social inequality (Bavel, 2020). Group boundaries are highlighted in the context of pandemics, which can undermine the tolerance threshold with those who are socially distant through the undermining of empathy and the increasing possibility to punish social groups (Cikara et al., 2011; Han, 2018; Han, 2020). Although pandemics do not have to lead to violence, it almost definitely adds to the stigmatisation and scapegoating of certain social groups (Bavel, 2020). There have certainly been instances of discrimination and open prejudice, such as in the case of Asian-looking people. In short, there have probably been changes in which social groups are considered to be in need of toleration and the intensity of the perceived need to tolerate them.

Conclusion

As becomes apparent through the integration of the critiques on the nature of tolerance, its dimensions, limits and functions, tolerance can be considered a complex concept and practice. It carries the potential for minorities to live out their divergent identities while also posing a simmering threat to those same practices. It is an ambiguous concept, the nature of which allows it to be invoked to serve the majority in a myriad of ways, facilitating hierarchies of power and morality. This study has found that this occurs through elements of inequality, hierarchy, conditionality, devaluation and exclusion present in its nature. Therefore, this study concludes that if tolerating can be argued to be a virtue, it at least should be considered a flawed virtue. Tolerance is a flawed virtue as it results in fundamentally hierarchical notions that go beyond the sphere of power by including notions of morality that lead to a false sense of moral superiority in the tolerating group and moral inferiority for the tolerated group. Minorities are not only subordinated in a political and social sense but also in a fundamentally ethical manner.

The critiques of tolerance described above remain highly abstract. However, having integrated these critiques will facilitate the exploration of their presence in the specific case study that I will study in the following chapters. In order to create a theoretical basis on which I will be able to elaborate in the following chapters, I have considered the effects of a context of crisis on the practice of tolerance. I find that these periods are associated with specific socio-political dynamics in social and behavioural science (Bavel, 2020). Pandemics can reveal power hierarchies, lead to negative shifts in

attitudes towards social groups and undermine a sense of shared identity among social groups. In periods of crisis, individual and collective interests become especially important, leading to forms of moral and value-based decision making that can reveal the perceptions and power of certain groups.

In the following chapters, I will explore whether these dynamics are present in the discourse about a tolerated minority and their lived experiences.

Chapter 2 - A Target of Tolerance

The nature and socio-political dynamics of tolerance as visible in the Dutch Media's reporting on Reformed Christians

Introduction

As became clear in the previous chapter, tolerance and toleration are associated with certain socio-political dynamics of minority and majority groups. In order to make the concept less abstract, the case of Reformed Christians in the COVID-19 pandemic has been selected to reveal how the dimensions, limits, function and aspects of tolerance reveal themselves in the context of a crisis.

The term 'religion' has often come up in questions around the responsive attitude of religious institutions and communities in the COVID-19 pandemic. Many countries have restricted religious services, while the Netherlands seems to have struggled more with balancing these rights. Fundamentally, the COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the limits of tolerance for religiously motivated practices and beliefs in Dutch society. It has instigated debates that challenge the previously set boundaries for religiously motivated practices. Many of these debates explicitly include or revolve around Reformed Christian churches, people, or geographic areas associated with this minority. In this chapter, I further explore this observation, concentrating on the news media's fragmented but firm debates concerning religious gatherings' exemptions. I have chosen this as the primary analysis of the selected material revealed that this is one of the main issues around which dynamics of tolerance situated themselves in the context of COVID-19 and religion. I do not intend to legitimise the practices and beliefs of the tolerated group, nor do I attempt to legitimise the critical responses and attitudes. However, I do want to reveal the dynamics at play and the way in which the media reflect popular discourse and the structures of society.

In doing so, this chapter aims to answer the following sub-question;

What socio-political dynamics of tolerance are visible in the discourse about Reformed Christians in the Dutch media in the COVID-19 pandemic?

To answer this question, I first take a brief look at the role of the constitution in this debate, whereafter I delve into the approach of the news media. In doing so, I include the textual dimension as well as imagery. After that, I explore the tangible effects of the media's reporting, determining which aspects and socio-political dynamics of tolerance are visible in the discourse. Finally, I will analyse whether the hypotheses as set out in the theoretical framework have been met. This all leads

to the formation of a basis on which this study will be able to discern the lived experience of being targeted for tolerance in the following chapter. In order to ensure that the analysis is understood, I will sometimes provide context, which facilitates the proper understanding of the situations in which the dynamics of tolerance sprung and changed.

The constitution and religious freedom of assembly⁵

The exemption for religious gatherings that took on different forms during the pandemic stems from Article 6 of the Dutch constitution⁶⁷. Prime Minister Mark Rutte justified the exemption made for religious communities on the basis of Article 6. He argued that he 'had' to make this exemption, even in times of the pandemic, thereby taking an absolute interpretation of the article (van Eijdsden, 2020). In the spring of 2020, the interpretation of this article became heavily debated. The debate on religious exemptions was particularly reflected and promoted by reporting in mass media. The aim of this discourse analysis is not to state whether the debate and choices concerning the exemption rule are constitutional, nor is it to state whether the exemption rule itself is desirable. Instead, it is simply to observe the discourse involved to discern the socio-political dynamics of toleration.

In the article 'Six churchgoers in hospital' (2-4-2020, *Het AD*), the popular mayor of Rotterdam

⁵ Important to note is that the discourse analysed is not only fundamentally juridical, it also concerns wider notions of criticism of the role of religion in Dutch society and religious practices. The public figures, politicians and journalists that built and translated the discourse have different and sometimes complementary reasons for their criticism of the religious practices in question.

⁶ Article 6 of the Dutch constitution states that

1. *Everyone shall have the right to freely profess his religion or belief, either individually or in community with others, without prejudice to his responsibility under the law.*

2. *Rules concerning the exercise of this right other than in buildings and enclosed places may be laid down by Act of Parliament for the protection of health, in the interest of traffic and to combat or prevent disorders. (Nederlandse Grondwet)*

⁷ In analysing the discourse, it is important to bear in mind that fundamental religious rights are not fixed, but based on political and legal agreements in a context in which the separation of church and state developed itself (Galligan, 2013). This discussion is part of the ever-returning discussions about 'religious' fundamental rights, such as Article 6, and article 23 about 'special education rights', that arise out of the fact that the separation has never been fully realised.

criticises the exception "*It is not good, and it can not be defended. The argument of the cabinet that it is about a fundamental right... it is a sought argument*".

He relates this to the fact that the government has not hesitated to infringe on other fundamental rights. This statement reflects how the perception of the constitution becomes increasingly relative throughout this debate.

The approach of news media

Opinion driven

First off, a vast amount of the articles in the news media that talked about the exemption were opinion columns. A clear example of this is the 'Volkskrant', which talked about the exemption rule more often in the form of opinion columns than in the form of news articles (11 out of 18 articles). Moreover, the articles that were signified as 'news and background' exhibited similar features as the opinion articles, with excerpts such as "*Those numbers are perhaps even more surprising in the secular Netherlands than the fact that the faithful could gather in Staphorst without being punished.*" (5-10-20 Volkskrant). In almost all articles - both opinion and news related - the disbelief at the apparent discrepancy between the opening of churches and the closure of sports and cultural sites was consistently expressed by the reporter in direct and indirect ways.

Moreover, many articles hinted at the opinion of the news outlet, to the disadvantage of the perception of Reformed Christians. The following example best illustrates this. In April, 'Het AD' extensively reported that the religious services, coined 'COVID-church services', could count on 'strong societal criticism'. Examples of headlines include; '*Six churchgoers in hospital, but still Sunday service with thirty believers*' (02-04-2020, Het AD); '*Corona or not, people still come together in this church on Urk*' (02-04-2020, Het AD); and '*Strict Christian churches ignore advice and want to hold services after 5 p.m.*' (03-12-21, Het AD).

These headlines not only clarify the perceived issue, which is that people refuse to take responsibility and take unnecessary risks, the manner in which the articles are written also hints at the opinion of 'Het AD'. In the articles, the measures and the continuation of religious services are negatively associated in a significant manner even before the journalists and respondents have reported on the situation. Importantly, these headlines do not stem from quotes in the articles; the news media have separately formulated them. This negative association is anchored in the increasing discussion about Article 6. The articles explicitly revolve around '*congregations in the Bible Belt*', accompanied by imagery of Reformed churches. Similar patterns are visible in other news outlets. In an article by NU.nl, titled '*Why are churches the exception in corona policy again and again?*' (14-10-2020, NU.nl) the origins of the exemption in the constitution are explored. The exemption is called a '*problem*',

and there is significantly more attention given to the reasoning for why it should be changed, even though it is hard to do so, than to the origins and reasoning for this exemption. In addition, the article ends with a quote that reiterates the question, leaving it open-ended.

Throughout the pandemic, opinions geared towards tolerance were barely stated or addressed in the media discourse. However, once the Omicron variant became dominant, decreasing the perception of being in crisis for the general public, analyses that revolved around tolerance began to emerge. Some articles even claimed that the debate essentially revolved around tolerance, stating that you *'should tolerate individual freedoms for as long as possible. That is not even a matter of principle, but above all of patience.'* (e.g. 16-01-22, NRC). However, it was only starting to be actively viewed from this perspective once the media no longer perceived the issue as problematic and acute.

Exemption 'privileges' and the secular lense

In articles reporting on large gatherings in a Reformed church in Staphorst, the NOS quoted some parliament members that spoke out against the practices of this church. The politicians featured talked about how this situation was 'unexplainable' and 'irresponsible' (4-10-20, NOS) as there were restrictions for theatres and restaurants and as this would show a lack of solidarity with other citizens. Trouw published a reflection on this critical view; *"In the past week, there was a lack of understanding on social media for the exceptional position of the churches: why, for example, are only thirty people allowed to gather in theatres, even if the RIVM guidelines can be followed with larger groups of visitors, while churches do not have those restrictions?"* (4-10-20, Trouw)¹. Trouw, traditionally having a large Christian following, posed the societally perceived discrepancy as a question. This questioning stands in stark contrast to the way in which other news media approached the exemption of religious gatherings in headlines, visible in headlines such as *'Why the church in Urk can [emphasis on can with an accent] decide to let go of the corona measures'* (8-05-22, NU.nl)

In the comparisons of religious versus cultural and sports events, the incomprehension of reporters for exemptions stemming from constitutional interpretations of religious tolerance becomes apparent. This is expressed through statements such as *'As far as the importance for our mental well-being is concerned, art belongs in the row churches-schools-gyms'* (5-11-20, Volkskrant); and *'Theatre directors, transform your theatre into a place of worship for art and culture, and you will be able to open the doors again'* (4-10-20, Volkskrant). Not only is incomprehension expressed for why the religious services should be tolerated, the media also express surprise that these divergent practices are not punished. This is visible in statements such as; *'Those numbers [the number of people gathering in a Reformed church] are perhaps even more surprising in the secular Netherlands than*

the fact that in Staphorst the faithful could gather without being punished, while that same day football matches had to be played without an audience and the 'urgent advice' was in force in theatres to wear face masks.' (2-10-20, Volkskrant).

The secular lens was visible in the reporting on the perceivably irrational position of 'religious' practices. However, it was also visible for religious beliefs as a whole, as illustrated by the following title; *'How can you still sell such nonsense [referring to a Reformed church member stating that God influences the pandemic] in 2020?* (1-04-20, NRC). In the context of COVID-19, the media often addressed the public in collective terms and urged 'us' to act for the common good. Thereby, the media aided the emergence of a shared identity (Carter et al., 2015) based on characteristics and priorities that Reformed Christians did not necessarily endorse.

Appropriation of religious privileges

As can be read in the previous segments, religious tolerance as derived from interpretations of the constitution became increasingly scrutinised and seen as irrational. As it became clear that the exemption rule could not easily be entirely abolished, simultaneously with the cultural sector feeling increasingly suppressed, a move was visible. The discourse moved from denying churches the characteristics that would substantiate the exemption to appropriating these characteristics in an attempt to gain the same privileges. Articles began to be published in which primarily the cultural sector appropriated the perceived 'religious' characteristics through statements such as *'Both offer comfort and perspective. People need meaning in their life'* (20-01-22, NRC); *'But that nightlife is also a kind of religion, that is not getting through.'* (30-01-22, NRC). In an attempt to secure the same exemptions, the characteristics that would secure the privilege of religious gatherings became re-framed as logical, as long as other sectors were included in the exemptions, instead of irrational. The term 'religion' itself also became increasingly appropriated, broadening the boundaries of what it entails through new terms, such as 'culture church'. In doing so, the term was often approached from a perspective of everyday secularity, focusing on feelings such as 'consolation' and 'perspective' that are associated with religion from a secular point of view while leaving out others more commonly associated with lived religion.

Reporting on Reformed churches in contrast with other denominations

Reformed churches received the most attention in the reporting on churches and were set apart. This distinction happened through sentences such as *"Other churches, such as the big congregation DoorBrekers who normally gather with 2000 people, do choose a small group"* (11-10-2020, Telegraaf) after naming a few Reformed churches and their number of attendees. This example is

remarkable, as DoorBrekers was reported on by 'Trouw' because of their large gatherings (24-12-21, Trouw), which other news outlets did not report on while the attention for Reformed churches remained present. Interestingly, evangelical churches were barely mentioned in the context of attendance numbers and the exemption rule. This remained the case even when later reporting on the influence of conspiracy theories in this denomination demonstrated that some of these churches also held services with what was considered many people at that time.

There was some reporting on Catholic and PKN churches. In these reports, the media presented the taken choices by the churches as self-imposed, there was a focus on the churches that showed desirable behaviour, and the taken restrictions were directly stated in the reporting (e.g. NU.nl, 8-05-22; 31-05-20, NOS). In contrast, when Reformed churches made similar choices, the desired choices were posed as quotes instead of direct reporting (e.g. 17-10-20 Telegraaf). Moreover, the reporters often added that there were restrictions imposed '*according to*' the spokespersons (e.g. 5-10-20, NOS), a tone creating doubt towards this church, especially when contrasted with other cases.

Reporting on Reformed churches in contrast to mosques

In their reporting on religious minorities, the mass media have primarily written about Christian churches, with a clear focus on Reformed denominations. This focus on Christianity was reflected in sentences such as '*Churches and other religious buildings*' (RTLnieuws 23-4-2021)'.
Significantly fewer articles revolve around Mosques, which is remarkable considering the 'traditional' focus on diverging practices and beliefs of Islamic minorities.

The intensity and frequency of the reporting differ, but the tone does too. This discrepancy becomes apparent when comparing the reporting on outbreaks in Reformed churches and a mosque. For example, an outbreak in a mosque was reported on by various media with the following headlines; '*COVID outbreak in a mosque in The Hague*' (30-05-20, Telegraaf), '*Muslim community is shocked because of a COVID outbreak in the mosque*' (30-05-20, AD), '*COVID outbreak in mosques in The Hague: at least 25 infections*' (30-05-20, Volkskrant). An example of how the media reported outbreaks in Reformed churches is; '*Six churchgoers in hospital, but still Sunday service with thirty believers*' (02-04-2020, AD). Overall, the reporting on the mosques remained open to the 'human' facet and implications of infections and deaths. Contrastingly, the effects in Reformed churches were not met with empathetic reporting but with reporting underlining the responsibility of the churches. Media outlets have mainly discussed the infections and deaths related to Reformed churches in terms of closure options, constitutional, political, and societal options and feelings.

Similarly to the discrepancies visible in the reporting on different Christian denominations, with the reporting on the mosques, there is a clear focus on measures taken such as distancing. In addition, the reporting focuses on the mosques that did show desirable behaviour, e.g. *'Hundreds of mosques closed because of the coronavirus'* (12-03-20, Telegraaf). In addition, when a mosque opened, it was emphasised that the mosque was *'One of the few mosques that opened its doors in the Ramadan'* (30-05-20, AD), and the measures taken were accompanied by imagery of Muslims keeping distance in the mosque and posed in a positive manner through statements from the reporter such as *'The mosque-goers keep their distance while performing the prayer'* (30-05-20, AD).

Notably, the media acknowledges the agency of members of the mosque agency, which becomes visible in headlines such as *'Muslim community is shocked by corona outbreak in mosque: Administrators do not dare to address members'* (30-5-20, AD). In reporting on Reformed churches, church councils are often depicted as having full rule over the members of their churches. This perception of the media was taken to such an extent that criminal legal options were even discussed against them in the case of articles in the Volkskrant; *'Opinion: Criminal law is an unusable instrument against churches'* (9-04-21 De Volkskrant); and *'Opinion: Church boards that cram believers together can certainly be prosecuted'* (1-04-21, De Volkskrant).

The visual dimension

The imagery accompanying multiple articles features churches and individuals that can easily be recognised as Reformed due to their clothing or descriptions on buildings, even when the articles do not revolve around this particular group, talking about 'religion' and religious buildings in general. It becomes clear that the media considers Reformed Christians to be the primary target.



Example 1.1

'Cabinet takes advice: churches may also be closed in the event of a hotspot'
(23-04-21 NU.nl)



Example 1.2

'Why are churches still the exception in corona policy?'

(16-10-20, NU.nl)



Example 1.3

'The interior of the Sionkerk'

(A Reformed church in an article talking about legal options for closure of religious buildings)

(23-04-21, NOS)

Moreover, the same imagery was repeated across multiple media outlets and in different time periods. The images used were all recognisably from Reformed churches, even when the articles were not about these particular churches.



Example 2

'Cabinet takes advice: churches can also be closed in the event of a COVID hotspot' (23-04-21, Nu.nl)

'Churchgoers enter the Sion Church. The Urker Sionkerk has decided to lift the restrictive national corona measures to open the building to churchgoers again fully.'

(23-10-21, Volkskrant)



Example 3

'Why are churches still the exception in corona policy?'

(16-10-20, NU.nl)

'Why are churches the exception in corona policy again and again?'

(14-10-20, Nu.nl)

'The Dorpskerk in Staphorst'

(4-10-20, NOS)

Furthermore, the media did not proportionally reflect the diversity of attendees of Reformed churches in the imagery. Older women in traditional clothing were particularly often included in the articles. These images help establish a certain perception of Staphorst and its churches that does not reflect the congregation's compositions accurately. However, this portrayal does aid in the further enmeshment of culture and religion in the perception formed about Reformed churches.



Example 4.1

'Believers arrive at the Dorpskerk in Staphorst'

(4-10-20, NOS)



Example 4.2

'Church service in Staphorst well-attended, also in COVID-times'

(4-10-20, NOS)



Example 4.3

'Churchgoers arrive at the Restored Reformed Church in Staphorst'

(05-10-20, NOS)



Example 4.4

'In the Restored Reformed Church in Staphorst, three services with 600 people were held without a facemask obligation'

(05-10-20, NOS)



Example 4.5

'Many infections in the church? From now on, the municipality can close its doors.'

(RTLnieuws 23-4-2021)



Example 4.6

'Churchgoers arrive at the Restored Reformed Church in the deeply religious village of Staphorst.'
(10-10-20, De Telegraaf)

The tangible effects of reporting on political decision-making and the exemption rule

Whereas Rutte first argued that he 'had' to exempt churches, this changed after the 'media storm' around Reformed churches, in particular around Staphorst. Staphorst, Urk and 'The Bible Belt' as a whole were the focus of the debates and were featured most in the imagery accompanying the material analysed. Out of these three regions, Staphorst became the focus of a 'media storm' concerning the exemptions for religious groups to gather after three church services were attended by 600 people from reformed Christian denominations. There was no maximum of attendees at that time as long as the distance measures were attended to and people were registered, which was reportedly the case. On 5 October 2020, the government announced that the maximum number of attendees for religious services would be set at 30 and that people were no longer allowed to sing. There was a direct connection between the societal unrest around this case and the adjustment of policy. This link became explicit as the political leaders directly mentioned the commotion around the case of Staphorst as the cause of the changes (5-10-20, NOS).

This instance leads to the paradoxical conclusion that organisations can be deemed to be 'guilty' on societal as well as political levels without having breached the rules. There were no known cases of churches negating the rules set at that time, except for the disincentive around singing. Most churches chose one of the following two options; either they manoeuvred between the set limitations and exceptions dictated by the policy, or they chose not to adopt the exemption rule and placed themselves on equal footing with other types of organisations. The political decision taken illustrates that political and societal pressure instigated by the media can be leading in the negation of religious exemption rules. Whereas at first, the minister and the president were consistent in their statements that this rule could simply not be changed, this now happened on the basis of a case of a Reformed church which was heavily criticised in the media.

Discussion

The dimensions and limits of tolerance

When looking at the dimensions of tolerance set out in Chapter 1, it becomes clear that the type of toleration primarily concerned in this discourse is indeed collective toleration, involving the right of diverging groups to practise disapproved of collective practices. The primary limits to the tolerance of church attendance are defined by public health and the health of the members belonging to the tolerated group. This led to the debate in the media set out above, appealing to notions of law and politics. As stated in Chapter 1, this approach, which involves the balancing of rights, has been most visible in the discourse of the analysed debate. The tolerance for the accommodation of diverging practices decreased during the pandemic, and its anchoring in the constitution became increasingly controversial. By heavily infringing on the rights of assembly (article 8 of the constitution) while exempting religious assemblies, the government distorted the balance between fundamental rights and set them up against each other. Consequently, the government distorted the tolerance for the rights of religious groups, which became increasingly 'soft'.

However, it is also essential to look at the inherent limits of tolerance and how they play out in this discourse, as it can provide a deepening of the first understanding. The presence of the limiting aspects of tolerance helps indicate the presence of socio-political dynamics of tolerance functioning as a mechanism that subtly enables unequal and dominant dynamics (Insel, 2019; Marcuse, 1965; Wemyss, 2006). When considering the critiques on the nature of tolerance described in Chapter 1, all aspects are present, albeit in varying degrees.

Aspects of tolerance

The aspect of inequality of tolerance becomes visible as the discourse in the media makes many attempts at legitimising and reinforcing the stances of the tolerating groups. The majority makes many attempts at restricting the divergent practices to the private domain. These attempts are visible in the media's repeated calls essentially declaring the majority group's norms, values and practices to apply to the public sphere, indirectly calling for the privatisation of religious ones. However, this aspect is complex as the religious minority in question has legal privileges derived from constitutional religious rights, thereby not finding themselves in a legally completely powerless position. However, the discourse clearly shows their socially subordinate position and their subsequent inherent vulnerability in the right to practise divergency.

The relative powerlessness is affirmed by the conditionality the media present. At times of increased panic during the pandemic, the discourse increasingly focused on possibilities of interference and

different interpretations of the constitutional rights that could enable the prohibition of the disapproved practices. Toleration is dependent on whether the tolerating group decides to keep the barrier to action in place voluntarily. There were attitudes of intolerance visible as the reservation to interfere changed fundamentally, which was restricted by constitutional religious tolerance. At certain points in the debate, reactions of Reformed Christians showed a basic understanding that any action might risk the delicate balance of permission. The conditional nature is associated with a patronising element in the discourse. Due to the dynamics inherent to tolerance, condescending attitudes were able to emerge that devalued the practices and beliefs of diverging minorities, leading to signs of social contra-identification.

The discourse shows signs of exclusion on the basis of liberal values, serving as a social exclusion mechanism. In this case, the true extent to which the 'ingroup', being liberal media and the people they showcase, actually propagate liberal values in relation to the discourse around the exemption rule is questionable (e.g. when considering values such as individual freedom). However, the point is that the 'we' group is able to use that discourse to exclude deviant minorities from the national identity narrative.

Finally, the ambiguous nature of tolerance becomes visible in the repeated equating and conflating of non-commensurable subjects and practices, such as religion and culture, making them interchangeable and conflated (Brown, 2009). At some points in the discourse, culture is 'religionised', and in others, religion is 'secularised'. This commensuration fully depends on which approach the secular majority feels suits them best in maintaining or strengthening their place in the hierarchies of power.

Practising tolerance

Throughout the context of the pandemic, the incentive to avoid the double burden of tolerance increased significantly. The demand that tolerance made in this case, namely that the majority would suffer their own discomfort about the divergent practices of the religious minority, was increasingly unmet. Particular individual and collective interests gained importance, leading to moral and value-based decision-making forms. Threat perceptions instigated by the crisis led to significant shifts in already changing views towards this particular religious social group. The minority of Reformed Christians became perceived as threats to the common good of public health and as competitors for hospital beds and privileges that were seen as scarce, such as exemptions. The greater fear and perceived threat were directly associated with greater intolerance and punitive attitudes towards the

'out group', reflected in discourse about potential criminal legal action and scapegoating of, among others, religious Reformed leaders.

In the discourse, it is visible that boundaries were being traced between what can and cannot be tolerated (Forst, 2013). The depiction of exceptions from rules and regulations that are otherwise valid as 'crazy' or 'outrageous', or even illegal, showcase a decrease of tolerance for accommodation that 'involves shaping laws, rules, or codes in such a way that they carve out space for those with deep conscientious convictions, usually religious ones' (Seglow 2017, 177). This tracing of boundaries inevitably led to a situation in which tolerance sometimes flipped over into intolerance.

The morally virtuous aspect present in socio-political dynamics of tolerance was also visible as many articles engaged themselves in discussions essentially about what is morally right, allowing the religious rights, or prioritising health concerns. In this framing, the religious minority in question became positioned between the 'good' and the 'bad', with an impossibility of moving into the 'good' but an all too real possibility of moving into the 'bad' (Choudhury, 2007). Consequently, Reformed Christians became increasingly seen as making morally inferior choices. This observation falls within the framework of secular progressivism that I described in the theoretical framework. The secular ontologically embodies the 'real' and constitutes the ground for normative universalism, turning religion into a historical vestige whose protection must be subordinated to universalistic notions of civic liberties (Schuh et al., 2012).

Discrepancies in toleration attitudes

The apparent discrepancy between the reporting on Islamic minorities and Reformed Christian minorities is particularly interesting. Islamic minorities are often in the spotlight, receiving regular negative attention. However, in the context of COVID-19, the Reformed Christian minority was the negative focus in the reporting, while Islamic minorities were approached more positively in similar cases.

Reformed Christians might have become seen as the primary cause of the burden of toleration the majority experienced due to the possibly coincidental focus of reporting. On the other hand, perhaps it was due to Reformed Christians having a more established platform in the media and the political sphere than Islamic minorities, because of which they became placed on the forefront through their reactions. However, it might also be the case that the discrepancy is due to a more fundamental reason. The particular minority of Reformed Christians is not the usual prominent target of intolerance, as their Christian identity and 'white' Dutch heritage are more easily recognised and

partially shared by the majority and their view of 'the' national identity. This identification is different for Islamic minorities. Nonetheless, over the last years, the problematisation and stigmatisation of Islamic minorities have become increasingly less tolerated by the media and parts of its most prominent and vocal audience. Consequently, issues of racism, discrimination and public cases of hefty critique of the Islam associated with these minorities have been actively condemned, and there seems to be active prevention of this minority being scapegoated.

Perhaps, the apparent lack of active prevention of stigmatisation and problematisation of Reformed Christians in the reporting has enabled the heightened scapegoating of this minority. In an increasingly secular context in which the majority of the population has difficulty relating themselves to people's lived religion, the conditions in which increased stigmatisation and problematisation of religion can thrive increase. This process is reflected in the increased distortion of tolerance for religion as a whole and the commensuration of religious and cultural motives for divergence. The minority is perceived as progressively divergent from the increasingly secular majority, and thereby it becomes increasingly difficult to tolerate them (Caetano, 2020). In line with the theoretical framework, a more negative attitude and more considerable social distance are visible for the minority of Reformed Christians. Secular society sees the expressed divergency as increasingly being too divergent, which simultaneously threatens to distort the balance of tolerance for this group.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have made the abstract concept of tolerance concrete by performing a discourse analysis of a case in which the crux was religious tolerance for divergent practices. This chapter has analysed the articulation power of the majority group, which allows the majority to categorise and identify who is in need of tolerance and who belongs (Bourdieu 1990). The analysis showed that the opinions of the majority in society have much articulatory power. Their views determine the 'tone' of the public debate and directly and indirectly influence the political debate, leaving little room for other views.

In the analysis and its subsequent discussion, I demonstrated the perceptions that the majority held of Reformed Christians in the analysed time period. Moreover, I determined that all aspects of the nature of tolerance were visible in this discourse, albeit to varying degrees. Furthermore, I revealed the socio-political dynamics caused by the nature of tolerance, such as the weighing process of the majority in choosing whether to tolerate the divergent practices or not. The discourse analysis showed signs of stating difference, othering and exclusion. Therefore, hypothesis 2 has been met. Moreover, the indirect and direct influence of the media in the particular case of the exemption rule

became apparent as the moral and value-based decision making shifted along with the changing perception of Reformed Christians after hefty media coverage.

Tolerance always flips over into intolerance once the inevitable boundaries are traced between what can and cannot be tolerated (Forst, 2013). In the analysis, I have shown how the context of crisis is aligned with the increasingly rigid tracing of boundaries. Tolerance's 'double burden' (Seligman, 2008) became explicitly present. It demanded that the divergent practices of this religious minority were accepted, even when the majority, visible through the media discourse, found it objectionable. Moreover, it demanded that the majority would suffer real and tangible discomfort in accepting it. This discomfort was felt not only individually but also at a societal level in terms of health risks. With the increased uncertainty in times of crisis, the incentive to avoid this double burden became visible in the discourse. As Reformed Christians were particularly perceived as threats to the common good and as competitors to perceivably scarce exemptions, the sense of shared identity was increasingly undermined.

A relevant question arising from this analysis is the degree to which people identifying as Reformed Christians experience this increased pressure on tolerance for religious divergence and whether they took over the subordinate moral position they were placed in. In the theoretical framework, I stated the expectation that if Reformed Christians are identified as being an outgroup in the public discourse, their identification with 'the nation' should be negatively affected. This discourse analysis has shown that the minority is indeed identified as an outgroup. Whether their identification with 'the nation' is negatively affected by this will become apparent through the in-depth interviews.

Chapter 3 - The Impact of Tolerance

An exploration of Reformed Christian individuals' lived experiences of tolerance and their identification with 'the' national identity

Introduction

In this chapter, I look at the influence of tolerance on identification in processes of belonging. I do so by analysing the experiences and views of people who belong to a minority that is considered to be an object of toleration, namely, Reformed Christians. In doing so, I attempt to discern the influence of the discourse produced by the majority group on the individual's identification with their perception of the national identity of the Netherlands. Through the exploration of the lived realities of the interviewees, our understanding of the dynamics of tolerance can become more tangible and humanised. As stated in the theoretical framework, I take position between the concepts of identification with national identity and feelings of belonging. By examining these concepts in relation to the minority of Reformed Christians, I am able to analyse the experienced impact of toleration. In doing so, I do not study the well-being of these groups, but I do study the feelings of belonging.

In studying the lived realities of people who dominant groups consider to require tolerance, I remain open to the different meanings that individuals can ascribe to their experiences. In doing so, it is essential to acknowledge that identity is not a self-steered process but that social context is of great importance. Therefore, in this study, I view identification as coming into existence through an interrelated process of the 'self' and 'society' (Giddens, 1991, 32). In relation to the minority group of Reformed Christians, it can be the case that they self-identify as being part of the mainstream national identity but that the majority views this differently. There are processes of in- and exclusion based on norms, values, laws and ideologies held by the different groups. Groups, institutions, and discourses can then act as identifying agents. Belonging is directly influenced by discourses that emphasise or question the importance and value of difference (Verkuyten en Brug, 2004; Verkuyten, 2005).

The study of the consequences of tolerance is gaining traction. The approach taken towards tolerance is generally positive, focussing on the majority groups and their willingness to tolerate. However, the perspective of the tolerated has not been widely studied. As a result, little is known about the implications of feeling tolerated on a person's sense of belonging to the national identity. Meanwhile, there are many policies, on every level, governmental and public, that base themselves

on the dynamics of intergroup toleration. Bearing that in mind, the lack of knowledge about this concept and its workings is regrettable. This chapter aims to understand tolerance from the perspective of 'the tolerated' as it can aid in developing, implementing, and assessing more suitable policies that are truly geared to accommodating and representing everyone equally.

This chapter will first look at how the interviewees relate to the concept and practice of tolerance. Thereafter, I will explore the specific context of COVID-19 and analyse the perceived role of the media as the representatives of the public discourse. Then I will address the influence of secularity and the agency of the interviewees. Finally, I will look at the identified identification processes and how they relate to feelings of belonging to the national identity. This chapter will conclude by analysing whether the hypotheses have been met. I argue that even though certain freedoms are implied for a person who belongs to a tolerated minority, it simultaneously indicates negative feelings that affect a person's sense of belonging. The experience patterns found in the volunteered accounts of toleration were clustered around faith, identity, secularity and (media)trust. In analysing this minority, this chapter adds theoretical arguments to a scientific domain that is still sparse.

Tolerance

Defining tolerance and its objects

When looking at how the interviewees defined tolerance, their definitions varied in complexity and detail but were similar in meaning. They followed the more traditional definition of tolerance, in which it is emphasised that there is something one chooses to bear. It is also about 'dialogue' (Gerrit), and it is 'not based on indifference' (Margot), you leave the others' worth' intact (Joas), 'not imposing' (Gerben) on others, 'living and let live' (Killian) and reciprocity. Almost all interviewees also touched upon the importance of 'experiencing reciprocity' (Gerrit), such as Gerben, who mentioned the importance of 'deepening the understanding' of each other's backgrounds and norms and values in communication. Statements of interviewees also pointed to the importance of an element of respect when speaking about tolerance. When speaking about moments in which religious tolerance felt concrete to them, tolerance is approached in a positive manner. It is mentioned in regards to positive situations, relating to instances of feeling heard and respected (Margot) as long as tolerance 'takes place accurately' (Gerben).

When asked whether they feel that Reformed Christians tolerate, the interviewees answered in the following purport; 'Reformed Christians are no less tolerant than others' (Gerrit). Most interviewees also addressed that they do not have the possibility to impose their views on others in their perception. However, when asked whether they think they are a tolerated minority, all interviewees

stated that they did feel that Reformed Christians are a tolerated minority. In addition, it was stated a couple of times that 'there is more [tolerance] asked [of Reformed Christians] than is given' (Gerben).

The changing nature of tolerance

While the interviewees did identify Reformed Christians as a tolerated minority, they also expressed that the minority is increasingly confronted with intolerance and a decrease in acceptance. The interviewees repeatedly expressed statements along the line of, 'It is absolutely not a case of discrimination, but there is definitely a lessened amount of acceptance in tolerance' (Gerben). In addition, a visible pattern in the interviews was people expressing that they felt that the nature of tolerance was changing, becoming different from the classical interpretation. A statement in which this became clear is 'I have the idea that nowadays it [tolerance] is primarily seen as that you are not allowed to have certain opinions about things, while I believe it is about bearing things you find reprehensible' (Arjan).

Experiencing tolerance

When analysing the feelings associated with being tolerated, it is interesting to see a certain discrepancy between the indirectly expressed experience and the directly stated experience. Theoretically, they stated tolerance to be a positive thing, something desirable that you also do out of religious motivation (e.g. Margot) because you also want to be tolerated. Moreover, when interviewees were directly asked how they felt about belonging to a minority they identified as tolerated, there was a high degree of abstractification of their personal experiences⁸. Multiple interviewees expressed that they themselves are not bothered by it because they are 'abstract', 'analytical' and 'logical' thinkers, and some interviewees felt a certain distance to the perception that was portrayed of their minority, churches and towns (e.g. Killian). Some interviewees described how their reactions and approach might be different from the people around them. For example, Gerben clarified that he might have a different experience and reaction 'because he has studied' and can include more 'nuance' (Gerben). In the same line, Gerri mentioned that 'not everyone has the ability to do that [engage in dialogue], to find the right words or to hold a calm conversation' (Gerri), and Killian mentioned; 'I think that the people 'home-home'⁹ have reacted more intensely', 'there was

⁸ The pattern of abstractification that is found in the volunteered accounts may be due to the composition of the interviewees and their, overall, particularly highly educated background.

⁹ A common expression among Dutch students to indicate the place you grew up and where your parents live.

quite some anger' (Killian). Another interviewee stated that he himself had not been 'attacked' (Joas), but that that was the case as a group. However, it was also personally felt through the strong identification with the group. One interviewee felt it on a more personal note, stating that when she expressed divergent beliefs, she was 'a bit personally attacked' by her classmates. She indicated that she thought that occurred because the persons in question felt attacked by her beliefs (Ymke).

The theoretically positively deemed dynamic of tolerance was linked to expressed negative feelings when discussing concrete examples of toleration in which people articulated feelings in a less direct sense. These feelings centred around being *unheard, treated/portrayed unfairly, misunderstood, defenceless, being dismissed, and feeling threatened in being able to diverge in beliefs and practices in the future*. I will delve into these feelings in the following sections.

The influence of COVID-19

Overall, the interviewees expressed that they experienced tolerance the same as before, at most 'intensified' (Gerben) as critical aspects of toleration debates have revolved around sexuality and education. However, with the added pressure on deviant practices regarding church attendance for all and vaccination for some, interviewees name COVID-19 as a situation in which tolerance became more concrete, heightened and moved towards intolerance. Interviewees described how the religious privileges/rights associated with their tolerated minority were increasingly threatened and how they expected that the room for divergence in the public space would decrease. Moreover, they expressed uncertainty about whether the freedom of religion that remained during COVID-19 was due to tolerance or a lack of juridical possibilities to prohibit deviating practices. However, many felt that there 'remained space' (Joas) to live out their beliefs, even when there were simultaneous feelings of being 'restricted' in their 'freedom' (Joas). Some interviewees, such as Margot, stressed the importance they gave to 'the space they did receive [to congregate]' and to remain 'thankful' for the 'opportunity that remained to go to church, even when it was also limited for us'.

Even though all interviewees mentioned how COVID-19 impacted their minority, they also addressed how 'it blew over' (Killian) once the perceived relevance of the pandemic decreased. With the decreasing perceived relevance of COVID-19 at the time of the interviews, it is also mentioned that the 'anger' and the 'incomprehension' (Joas) towards Reformed Christians is decreasing and returning to the level at which it was previously. Gerben mentioned how it felt like the previous debates were 'frozen' during COVID-19. Moreover, most interviewees addressed that they did not necessarily become more aware of their Reformed identity. However, many did gain an increased awareness of diverging beliefs and practices that were not at the forefront before the pandemic. This

was reflected in statements such as; 'You start to think more consciously about what you stand for' (Gerben). The increased awareness of diverging was present in relation to the perceived majority as well as when asked about the category 'Christians'.

The role of the media as an extension of public discourse

In the context of the dynamics of tolerance and COVID-19, 'the media' were assigned a fundamental role. In addition, when asked about whom the interviewees viewed as the group who tolerated Reformed Christians, the interviewees often focused on the role of the media in a direct sense and as a reflection on the public discussion.

When the interviewees approached tolerance from a negative point of view, and when there were statements about the increasing role of intolerance, they often mentioned the 'mainstream' media. Overall, the media are seen as the instigators/'catalysts' (Gerrit) of society moving to a 'tipping point' (Gerben) of intolerance, simultaneously being identified as a destructive force for the remaining tolerance. Interviewees described feelings of being attacked; 'they immediately had an attitude like well, we should really tackle them instead of starting a dialogue.'; and 'I found the media to be quite condemning' (Joas). Another interviewee mentioned the friction that arose in his hometown because of the style and intensity of the media coverage (Killian). In addition, a couple of interviewees find the media to be biased towards particular groups, 'the media in the Netherlands at the moment, they call themselves tolerant, but they have a certain group in mind of which they say: this is the mainstream. And if you belong to that, then you are considered tolerant, and if you do not belong to that [group], then you are intolerant.' (Gerrit). Furthermore, he describes how the aspects on which this minority is tolerated are catalysed by the media that finds the aspects related to Reformed Christians to be 'outdated'. Some interviewees confirmed that their practices might be justly characterised by the media, such as a notion of living in the past. However, they did not take over the subordinate moral position they were placed in by being tolerated.

Interviewees also expressed having experienced that they were unjustly chosen as the main objects of tolerance compared with other groups, therefore also finding themselves at the forefront when the dynamic moved toward intolerance. This dynamic is reflected in statements such as; 'I think many Reformed Christians have experienced that they had to ask for a bit of tolerance when, in my view, they actually did not do things that were not according to the rules. And that [toleration] has happened to a lot of other groups, who did break the rules, but who were not called into account.' (Gerrit). Other aspects that relate to this feeling are feelings of constantly needing to defend themselves for their practices and beliefs when other groups do not need to do so.

In relation to the media portrayal of this minority, interviewees expressed feelings of being dismissed and how that more easily happened through the media. Moreover, they expressed feelings of being unheard in the experienced lack of reciprocity in the socio-political dynamics of tolerance and in the perception of a few interviewees that the efforts they made, for example, by taking extra measures in churches, were not seen and recognized, especially in the media. 'Then you actually start calling for a bit of tolerance, while you do not want that at all, because you actually just do the things the government asks of you and you try to meet the conditions' (Gerrit). Feelings of being scapegoated, in particular by the media, were prominent in this. The following statement exemplifies this: 'When at some point, in the Netherlands, you belong to a certain group that the media has focused on, it's like 'they are the cause'. Yes, then you did it.' (Gerrit). Some interviewees also felt that the public's frustration about the government's choices not to maintain certain rights for other groups was lived out on them, while it should have been addressed with the government (Gerben).

However, the interviewees did not see these dynamics as stemming from a lack of professionalism from the media. As one interviewee states, 'Of course journalists have studied to identify; what is nonsense, and what is not' (Arjan). Instead, when analysing all statements made about the media, the issue seems to be the style of reporting, the media functioning as 'echo chambers' (Gerben) and the secular lens with which 'the media' approaches the minority. These aspects lead to reporting in which they do not feel represented.

The secular lens

The perceived secular lens is explained by some interviewees, for example by Gerrit, who states 'it is difficult, when someone has a completely different context, to explore what moves the other and why some things are so extremely valuable for someone'. The interviewees particularly felt this secular understanding of the world that is becoming the dominant view in the context of church exemptions. This is visible in statements such as 'There are many people that think very differently, 'but then [in COVID-19], for example, you see that people, when they want to go to soccer on Saturday with their children, they equate it. While I would say one is a hobby and the other a religion that is truly different from a hobby. But that is something elementary that many people simply do not view as such anymore.' (Arjan)

Increasing secularisation is perceived as a threat to the interviewee's ability to live out divergence in the public sphere. Most interviewees expect that certain aspects of their divergence will be restricted to the private sphere in the near future. The common tenor is the expectation that with increasing secularisation, religion will come to be viewed as something for 'behind the door' (Gerrit & Gerben).

More fundamentally, interviewees express concern about people elevating themselves as the norm in a secular context, leading to intolerance, which 'quickly turns into discrimination' (Gerrit).

Agency in the dynamic of tolerance

While discussing tolerance with individuals who identified with a tolerated group, it is essential to remember that the interviewees have agency in these situations. Therefore, this section describes the different manners in which the different individuals cope with being tolerated and how they influence their positioning in the dynamic and exert influence.

One approach to being tolerated stressed by an interviewee was that she felt it was important not to assume the role of victims, stating that she chose to focus on people who choose to tolerate instead of on people who 'hate' Christians (Margot). Moreover, feelings of being threatened in the freedom to deviate were mitigated by personal experiences, 'it feels quite natural, subconsciously, that it will always remain that way [having your own 'pillar', as he grew up in it]' (Arjan). Another approach was to focus on the possibilities that will always remain. As Arjan expresses, 'I do not necessarily feel threatened' as 'It will always remain possible to transfer your values, even if that possibility would decrease in schools and the public domain'.

Moreover, multiple interviewees explained how they think their minority could counteract the increasing intolerance stemming from increasing secularisation, also stating their own influence on the dynamic.' Because we have locked ourselves in our pillar, we have also created a distance from people who do not believe. And now, with that group [secular groups] increasing in number, I think that is our job [to take up a missionary role in our society, in which churches show the added value of being church]' (Gerrit).

Identification processes

The three dimensions of identification as described in the theoretical framework are all visible in the interviewees' statements. Namely, functional identification, normative identification and emotional identification (WRR, 2007). Understanding the role these processes play for this minority is important in discerning the influence belonging to a tolerated minority has on them and their identification with the Netherlands.

Functional identification

Multiple interviewees emphasised the importance of reciprocity in the socio-political dynamics of tolerance. Reciprocity is especially important for functional identification, which is the result of it.

Functional identification has been found to be able to lead to less prejudice and more tolerance (WRR, 2007). However, in multiple statements, I found that interviewees experience a lack of reciprocity. They feel that secular society expects them to tolerate multiple issues, while this tolerance is not extended back to them. The lack of experienced reciprocity leads to the maintenance of a degree of categorization of social groups in the interviewee's minds. Due to this categorization, in which existing group boundaries remain in place, the achievement of a broader sense of 'we' is hindered. It has often been stated that minority members that are tolerated are primarily interested in being respected (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Shnabel & Nadler, 2015; Wymia, 2017). Many interviewees articulated a fond need to being listened to, and a yearning to feel reciprocity in the socio-political dynamics of tolerance that did not occur because the dominant majority does not feel the need to extend this.

Normative identification

Interviewees expressed the importance of shared norms, codes and traditions in the formation of the normative systems with which they orient and relate themselves in daily life. The widely held discussion of religious practices and beliefs influences processes of normative identification, primarily by strengthening the identification with the 'ingroup' of Reformed Christians. This was the case even when interviewees showed awareness of internal differences, 'polarisation' (Gerben) and even a certain movement toward the pillarization of multiple groups within the ingroup (Gerben). Possibly this dynamic was catalysed by the experienced exclusion from the norms of the majority. The dominant majority created tension around different normative systems by explicitly distancing themselves from the beliefs and practices of this minority in public discourse. The interviewees especially mentioned this dynamic in regards to norms around sexuality.

The majority of interviewees express statements that lead to the conclusion that their primary identification as Reformed Christians and the practices and beliefs associated with it are not easily changed as the 'footprints' (Jenkins, 2004) are deeply ingrained. More importantly, it seems that the demands for assimilation to the practices and beliefs of the majority, as experienced by the media, influence the process of identification by increasing their importance. Some interviewees express statements that show a firming stance toward their footprints. This observation is in line with a report of the WRR (2007), in which the ideas of Jenkins are elaborated on. The report states that people can influence their footprints themselves and others also influence the process of identification by confirming, reproducing, or contesting them.

Emotional identification

The strongest form of identification expressed is emotional identification (WRR, 2007), which concerns emotional connectedness. All interviewees expressed loyalty to an emotional connection to a group or community. The group/community that this was expressed to most often and to the highest degree was their 'ingroup', even when they expressed and experienced internal difference and tolerance within this ingroup. However, there were also interviewees who expressed a certain form of distance, especially someone who recently moved to another city (Killian). This ingroup was primarily defined by Reformatory Christians, as the broader category of Christians was seen as the same but also different. Overall, the interviewees described the relationship with other Christian denominations in a positive and stable manner, describing dynamics of mutual tolerance in difference. The aspects on which some interviewees experienced fundamental difference was, among other aspects, that other Christians would be more 'worldly' and 'looser' (Ymke & Joas). As Gerben stated; 'You are part of it [the 'general' Christian identity], but that is not the identity you connect/align with the most'.

Feelings of belonging to 'the' national identity

Emotional identification is especially interesting as it is the form that is concerned with feelings of belonging to more abstract entities, such as parts of national identity through notions of 'the fatherland', family or national sports teams (WRR, 2007:60), which interviewees expressed in a limited manner. The following statement exemplified this; *'I am a Dutch person, I feel like a Dutch person, and that counts for a lot of things. I am not involved with soccer, but I am glad when my country performs well.'* (Gerben). The presence of this identification pattern concerning the perceived national identity and feelings of belonging was especially present in the articulation of an 'embodied history' and 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1990:56). The embodied history most of the interviewees express gives their identity formation continuity in the form of habitus.

There was an active presence of the past, in the form of a narrative of history in which this group reflected themselves, of which their articulated identities were (partially) the product. Examples of statements in which this is visible are; *'A very important part of the motivation behind the emergence of the Netherlands and that revolt against Spain and such was simply the struggle for, say, freedom of conscience.'*; *'I would say that it is quite formed by Christianity and freedom of conscience'* (Arjan); *'The Dutch history connects me [to a national identity] in a certain manner'* (Gerben); and *'One of the strong points of Dutch society, ever since Willem van Oranje did his best to make this country one, one people, one, one nation, is precisely that tolerance towards each other.'* (Gerrit). Given that this

embodied history was closely linked to a version of the Dutch national identity, they could strongly identify with it, regardless of more current and dominant majority narratives.

Even if their identification with the national identity was not fully inhibited because of the historical narrative, the interviewees did state how the majority view is fundamentally different to theirs. Aspects mentioned in this regard are the Netherlands being viewed as a 'progressive guide country' (Arjan), becoming 'looser' and 'indifferent' (Joas). Some interviewees also expressed a lack of identification, such as Joas, who stated that 'I do not know whether I really feel like a Dutch person'. When asked about what influenced this absence of identification with the Netherlands, he responded that it was 'developments [referring to secularisation] that make you more cautious about things', 'In that sense, I feel increasingly less Dutch'. This sentiment was shared with others, for example, with Ymke, who stated she sometimes felt 'Reformed people are a separate group' compared to how she perceived other minorities to fit into the national context. Multiple interviewees also stated that it was not a major concern of them to identify with the Netherlands as 'In first instance, you are a Christian, and after that a Dutch person', 'and that [being Christian] is a world-wide thing' (Arjan); 'That identity [Reformed Christian] rises above the identity of the Netherlands. You feel more connected with people from other countries' (Gerben).

A common theme identified in the interviews revolves around the dynamic nature of identity and belonging. Most interviewees expressed that they feel they belong to the national identity as they understood it in multiple aspects and not in others. The interviewees also expressed that the extent of these feelings can diverge over time depending on the presence of multiple factors such as sports events, or negatively influencing factors. This observation is in line with other research findings (e.g. Giddens, 1991; Appadurai, 1986; Baumann, 1996). In the descriptions the interviewees gave, there were markers of inclusion and exclusion, focussing both on what they feel makes them distinctive as members of this particular minority and what they have in common with the majority.

Their feelings about their identity expressed a high degree of continuity and stability. However, a dependence of their identity on factors such as the context of the pandemic was also expressed by some, stating how this led to the reinterpretation and adjustment of their sense of belonging and identity. In this sense, identity and feelings of belonging to 'the' national identity were found to contain a situational element, while also being experienced as something more permanent.

Group strategies

In the identification processes, the interviewees have shown to engage with various group strategies. An apparent group strategy was social creativity. The interviewees changed the negative perception of a belief or practice on which they were tolerated into a positive self-perception. There was also a degree of inter-group comparison visible in the interviewees distancing themselves from certain behaviours of their 'in group' that were considered especially deviant in the majority discourse, such as the explicitly defensive and sometimes even aggressive reactions of certain members towards the media. Other group strategies identified in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1979), such as social competition and inter-group comparison, were not identified.

Conclusion

In the theoretical framework, I hypothesised that, following social identity theory, it can be assumed that the discourse about the minority of Reformed Christians influences the relative positioning this group perceives themselves to be in as people strive to belong to social groups. Through the statements in the volunteered accounts, it becomes clear that the discourse of the majority has indeed influenced the relative positioning members of this minority group perceive themselves to be in, confirming the hypothesis. The interviewees have gained awareness of power hierarchies, and some describe feelings of thankfulness in response to them being granted the space to deviate and live out their beliefs. When looking at the perspective of realistic conflict theory, both possible reactions of the minority, namely 'stable suppression' and 'unstable suppression', are visible to a certain extent. Stable suppression was visible as some interviewees expressed accepting the preferred practices of the dominant group to evade conflict, especially when considering church attendance practices. I also recognized unstable suppression, to a degree, in some interviewees expressing how they characterised the majority's approach as suppressing. Nevertheless, the two reactions are expressed by different interviewees and do not form a broad pattern. Therefore, they need to be taken as personal reactions that do not necessarily reflect the reactions of the whole minority.

While it is important to note that the nature of the interview design has led to interviewees' reasoning from hindsight, the hypothesis that formulated the expectation that there will be different reactions during different phases of the pandemic can be stated to be true. At periods of heightened tension, in which the balance of tolerance became especially fragile, signs of 'unstable suppression' were visible. These interviewees came to see the majority in a different manner than before, as more of a suppressor of rights and practices. However, there were also signs of 'stable suppression'

amongst some interviewees, who accepted the beliefs and practices that were more commonly associated with the majority group, thereby deviating from the practices of the minority group.

In another hypothesis I stated the expectation that if Reformed Christians are identified as an outgroup in the public discourse, their identification with 'the nation' should be negatively affected. In Chapter 2, the identification of this minority as an outgroup was verified. Furthermore, this chapter has confirmed the second part of the hypothesis as the interviewees overall describe a declining identification with the nation outside of historical facets because they increasingly feel more 'othered'.

As became clear in Chapter 1, research shows how knowledge of being tolerated can be anxiety-inducing and might socially function as a form of oppression (Honohan, 2013; Lovett, 2010). When looking at empirical evidence from the psychological field, it is evident that the perceived or real threats to one's identity lead to negative psychological consequences (Major et al., 2013; Major & O'Brien, 2005; Meyer, 2003). Not only do threats to one's identity instigate negative psychological consequences, identity devaluation has the same effect. The accounts show knowledge of being tolerated, a degree of perceived threat to the ability to live out certain practices, and an experience of identity devaluation.

Nevertheless, in this chapter, I find that being tolerated also seems to bear relatively positive effects for these specific individuals who belong to the minority of Reformed Christians. Perhaps this is the case because of the dynamic which seemed to shift to intolerance or discrimination during COVID-19. More fundamentally, the negative effects of tolerance might be mitigated because of this minority expressing a fond identity which exists and is valued outside of the majority view of them. Not only do they have a relatively secure and separate identity, but this identity is also directly rooted in their particular understanding of the historicized national identity of the Netherlands, which provides a certain anchoring. Nevertheless, feelings of being tolerated had fewer positive outcomes compared to the feeling of being accepted, accurately portrayed, heard and recognized. These findings are supported by empirical evidence from other studies (e.g. see Cvetkovska, Verkuyten, & Adelman, 2020).

Conclusion

Through this research, I have aimed to gain a better understanding of tolerance and its relation to a minority's sense of belonging. The question that I have attempted to answer is:

How does the nature of tolerance and its socio-political dynamics influence a tolerated minority's sense of belonging to the mainstream national identity of the Netherlands?

Based on qualitative analysis, consisting of an integrative review, a discourse analysis and in-depth interviews, it can be concluded that tolerance is negatively as well as positively related to the identification of this minority with the mainstream national identity. However, the positive relation to feelings of belonging is insecure and declining. This outcome reflects the inherent complexity of tolerance.

As emphasised in Chapter 1, tolerance carries the potential for minorities to live out their divergent identities. Therefore, when the mainstream national identity contains notions of tolerance, this facilitates the feelings of belonging of divergent minorities, such as Reformed Christians. The positive relation between tolerance and national identity is primarily present in the interviewee's theoretical statements of tolerance, in which the positive aspects of tolerance, such as reciprocity, are emphasised. Moreover, the positive relationship is rooted in this particular minority's view of the role of (religious) tolerance in their historicised perception of the national identity of the Netherlands. Due to this anchoring, a sense of inclusion in the current mainstream view of national identity remains present as a reflection of the past.

Based on Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, I expected a negative relationship between tolerance and a minority's sense of belonging to the mainstream national identity. This was indeed the case as the socio-political dynamics of tolerance found in the discourse reflected the unequal, hierarchical, conditional, devaluing and excluding aspects of its explored nature. These findings are also reflected in Chapter 3. In the analysis, I have demonstrated how the positively experienced relation between tolerance and belonging seems to be heavily influenced by the imminent threat of intolerance. Overall, the interviewees describe a declining identification with the mainstream national identity outside of historical facets. Primarily because they increasingly feel the conditionality the majority imposes on their divergent practices and beliefs and the majority's devaluing attitude. The socio-political dynamics that stem from the nature of tolerance increasingly make them feel like an outgroup.

In conclusion, tolerance might be stated as 'a necessary evil' in the current state of the public debate. The analysis indicates that religious tolerance is decreasing in the direction of intolerance in some aspects. Acceptance and accommodation of divergence might be considered ideal for the inclusion of all societal groups, thereby facilitating feelings of belonging towards the mainstream view of the national identity. Aiming for an inclusive view of national identity is important as research concerned with identity has shown that a shared national identity minimises the presence of intergroup bias and decreases intergroup threat, which benefits society as a whole. Therefore, a renewed plea for tolerance is needed if society wishes to maintain religious freedoms and a national identity to which religious minorities feel they can belong. Nevertheless, tolerance has once again been shown not to be sufficient as a basis for human rights. This is the case as, in addition to conditional acceptance, active respect for people and their practices is also required to maintain long-term feelings of certitude that one is allowed to diverge.

Reflections and recommendations

Overall, the methodology and approach taken effectively answered my research questions and mitigated possible limitations. The adopted principles of care (Boellstorff, 2017) have aided my striving toward ethical reflection and awareness throughout the process. Multiple things come to mind when reflecting on my position as a researcher and considering how my participation and perception might have influenced the results. First off, my particular socio-cultural and religious background has enabled me to relate to the interviewees and reporters and understand their accounts in a nuanced manner, while also keeping a certain analytical distance. My particular background aids me in simultaneously being critical of orthodox statements of religion as well as certain forms of progressive secularity.

Possible limitations of this study are that, while the in-depth interviews clearly show patterns, they might not accurately reflect the overall sentiment of Reformed Christians. A more extensive research design would need to be set up for this limitation to be tested. Moreover, this research clearly illustrates the relationship between tolerance and belonging for the minority of Reformed Christians in the context of COVID-19. However, the focus on one particular case does limit the generalizability of the results for other minorities and contexts. This possible limitation is supported by the discourse analysis showing apparent discrepancies in the reporting on different minorities, which is a subject that I have speculated on in Chapter 2. To better understand the generalizability of the findings, explain the apparent differences in toleration, and test the influence of the context, further research is needed. For example, further studies could address different minorities in different contexts or

perform comparative research. Moreover, specific attention should be given to the importance of a historical narrative in identification processes and the influence of its lack.

Contributions of this research

In this research, I have contributed to the understanding of the socio-political dynamics of tolerance and its effects. Furthermore, I have addressed a gap in research on public discourse by focussing on a western Christian minority, leading to the main aspects of analysis being different from Islam, ethnicity and nativism. In doing so, this thesis contributes to the field of religious studies by concentrating on a different subject and to the development of critical languages for speaking of diverging religious practices. In doing so, this research makes key contributions to existing studies about nationalism, minorities, religion, secularity, identity and tolerance.

Qualitative research of this type may serve to illustrate the complexity of toleration and the processes and dynamics whereby tolerance is internalised and may shape behaviour. Such an understanding may assist policymakers in identifying and remediating the impact of practices of tolerance. In addition, increased awareness amongst journalists may also aid in the formation of renewed reporting guidelines in times of crisis.

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Appendix I - Ethical Guidelines

- Avoiding deceptive practices
 - I have provided my own identity to the interviewees.
 - I have provided the information about the research from which my research purposes become clear, bearing in mind that this research may be subject to change and that provisional results can not be provided as this research method is integral to the final research project.
- Being respectful to the interviewees
 - I have been aware of the tone of my discussion, analysis and reporting and have portrayed interviewees accurately.
 - I have avoided imposing my view on interviewees, showing how they are 'wrong', or trying to teach them things. The interviews will aim to assess the interviewees awareness, knowledge, but most importantly, experience. The aim was not to lecture them and to make them feel tested or ignorant.
 - In the interviews I have tried to ensure that I do not set up a hierarchy between the interviewee and myself.
 - Another measure I have installed to behave ethically is to end the interviews on time. The interviewees have taken time out of their day, therefore, it is only respectful to end the meeting in time. I cannot be fully aware of their motivations and perceived pressure, thus, these kinds of basic agreements have been thoroughly held.
- Protecting anonymity and confidentiality
 - In order to protect privacy in the final reporting, personally identifiable information has been removed from quotes unless the participant explicitly allowed me to do otherwise, provided I believed this information to be non-harmful and necessary for the research.
 - I have protected confidentiality by ensuring careful storage of the transcripts and recordings.
 - I have sought confidentiality by asking the interviewees to accept a consent form prior to the interview. This ensure that there was consent and understanding on both sides on issues such as recording, the publishing of transcripts and the right to withdraw from the research.

Appendix II – Informed consent

EUR Informed Consent Form

Naam van het onderzoeksproject	Tolerantie en nationale identiteit
Doel van het onderzoek	Dit onderzoek wordt geleid door Rachel Koehoorn-Verstraete. U bent van harte uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek. Het doel van dit onderzoek is te achterhalen hoe tolerantie verband houdt met gevoelens jegens de nationale identiteit.
Gang van zaken tijdens het onderzoek	<p>U neemt deel aan een interview waarin aan u vragen zullen worden gesteld over tolerantie en (nationale) identiteit. Een voorbeeld van een typische vraag die u zal worden gesteld: “hoe zou u de Nederlandse identiteit omschrijven”.</p> <p>U dient tenminste 18 jaar te zijn om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek.</p> <p>Voorafgaand aan het interview vullen alle deelnemers een korte vragenlijst in. Hierin staan onder andere vragen over achtergrondgegevens en persoonlijke eigenschappen.</p> <p>Tijdens het interview zal, aan de hand van een topic list, dieper worden ingegaan op de aangegeven thema’s. Van het interview zal een audio-opname worden gemaakt, zodat het gesprek later ad-verbatim (woord voor woord) kan worden uitgewerkt.</p> <p>Dit transcript wordt vervolgens gebruikt in het verdere onderzoek.</p>

<p>Potentiële risico's en ongemakken</p>	<p>- Er zijn geen fysieke, juridische of economische risico's verbonden aan uw deelname aan deze studie. U hoeft geen vragen te beantwoorden die u niet wilt beantwoorden. Uw deelname is vrijwillig en u kunt uw deelname op elk gewenst moment stoppen.</p> <p>- Er kan enig ongemak verbonden zijn aan uw deelname aan deze studie, vanwege de mogelijk gevoelige aard van het onderwerp. U hoeft geen vragen te beantwoorden die u niet wilt beantwoorden. Uw deelname is vrijwillig en u kunt uw deelname op elk gewenst moment stoppen.</p>
<p>Vergoeding</p>	<p>U ontvangt voor deelname aan dit onderzoek geen vergoeding . Door deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek zult u meer inzicht krijgen in thema's als tolerantie en nationale identiteit en hoe u zich hiertoe verhoudt.</p>

Vertrouwelijkheid van gegevens

Uw privacy is en blijft maximaal beschermd. Er wordt op geen enkele wijze vertrouwelijke informatie of persoonsgegevens van of over u naar buiten gebracht, waardoor iemand u zal kunnen herkennen. Voordat onze onderzoeksgegevens naar buiten gebracht worden, worden uw gegevens **anoniem** gemaakt: geanonimiseerd. Enkele eenvoudige voorbeelden hiervan: uw naam wordt vervangen door anonieme, op zichzelf betekenisloze combinatie van getallen; uw leeftijd zelf wordt niet verwerkt, maar in een categorie geplaatst. Bijvoorbeeld: leeftijd: tussen 18-25 jaar / tussen 25-35 jaar etc; uw woonplaats wordt niet gebruikt, maar de provincie waarin u woont.

Bij de start van ons onderzoek krijgt uw naam direct een **pseudoniem**; uw naam wordt gepseudonimiseerd ofwel 'versleuteld'. Op deze manier kan wel worden onderzocht wat u in het gesprek aangeeft, maar niet dat u het bent. De onderzoeksleider is zelf verantwoordelijk voor dit pseudoniem en de sleutel en zal uw gegevens niet delen met anderen. In een publicatie zullen of anonieme gegevens of pseudoniemen worden gebruikt. De audio-opnamen, formulieren en andere documenten die in het kader van deze studie worden gemaakt of verzameld, worden opgeslagen op een versleutelde computer. De onderzoeksgegevens worden indien nodig (bijvoorbeeld voor een controle op wetenschappelijke integriteit) en alleen in anonieme vorm ter beschikking gesteld aan personen buiten de onderzoeksgroep; in dit geval aan een onderzoekscommissie, onderzoekers of docenten van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen die hiertoe bevoegdheden hebben.

Vrijwilligheid

Deelname aan dit onderzoek is geheel vrijwillig. Je kunt als deelnemer jouw medewerking aan het onderzoek te allen tijde stoppen, of weigeren dat jouw gegevens voor het onderzoek mogen worden gebruikt, zonder opgave van redenen.

Dit betekent dat als je voorafgaand aan het onderzoek besluit om af te zien van deelname aan dit onderzoek, dit dit op geen enkele wijze gevolgen voor jou zal hebben. Tevens kun je tot 3 werkdagen (bedenktijd) na het interview alsnog de toestemming intrekken die je hebt gegeven om gebruik te maken van jouw gegevens.

In deze gevallen zullen jouw gegevens uit onze bestanden worden verwijderd en vernietigd. Het stopzetten van deelname heeft geen nadelige gevolgen voor jou.

Als je tijdens het onderzoek, na de bedenktijd van 3 werkdagen, besluit om jouw medewerking te staken, zal dat eveneens op geen enkele wijze gevolgen voor je hebben. Echter: de gegevens die u hebt verstrekt tot aan het moment waarop uw deelname stopt, zal in het onderzoek gebruikt worden, inclusief de bescherming van uw privacy zoals hierboven beschreven. Er worden uiteraard geen nieuwe gegevens verzameld of gebruikt.

Als u besluit om te stoppen met deelname aan het onderzoek, of als u vragen of klachten heeft, of uw bezorgdheid kenbaar wilt maken, of een vorm van schade of ongemak vanwege het onderzoek, neemt u dan aub contact op met de onderzoeksleider:

Rachel Koehoorn-Verstraete, 0613286302,
rachelkoehoorn@gmail.com

Toestemmingsverklaring

Met uw ondertekening van dit document geeft aan dat u minstens 18 jaar oud bent; dat u goed bent geïnformeerd over het onderzoek, de manier waarop de onderzoeksgegevens worden verzameld, gebruikt en behandeld en welke eventuele risico's u zou kunnen lopen door te participeren in dit onderzoek

Indien u vragen had, geeft u bij ondertekening aan dat u deze vragen heeft kunnen stellen en dat deze vragen helder en duidelijk zijn beantwoord. U geeft aan dat u vrijwillig akkoord gaat met uw deelname aan dit onderzoek. U ontvangt een kopie van dit ondertekende toestemmingsformulier.

Ik ga akkoord met deelname aan een onderzoeksproject geleid door Rachel Koehoorn-Verstraete. Het doel van dit document is om de voorwaarden van mijn deelname aan het project vast te leggen.

1. Ik kreeg voldoende informatie over dit onderzoeksproject. Het doel van mijn deelname als een geïnterviewde in dit project is voor mij helder uitgelegd en ik weet wat dit voor mij betekent.

2. Mijn deelname als geïnterviewde in dit project is vrijwillig. Er is geen expliciete of impliciete dwang voor mij om aan dit onderzoek deel te nemen.

3. Mijn deelname houdt in dat ik word geïnterviewd door onderzoeker (s) van de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. Het interview zal ongeveer 60 minuten duren. Ik geef de onderzoeker (s) toestemming om tijdens het interview opnames (geluid) te maken en schriftelijke notities te nemen. Het is mij duidelijk dat, als ik toch bezwaar heb met een of meer punten zoals hierboven benoemd, ik op elk

moment mijn deelname, zonder opgaaf van reden, kan stoppen.

4. Ik heb het recht om vragen niet te beantwoorden. Als ik me tijdens het interview ongemakkelijk voel, heb ik het recht om mijn deelname aan het interview te stoppen.

5. Ik heb van de onderzoeksleider de uitdrukkelijke garantie gekregen dat de onderzoeksleider er zorg voor draagt dat ik niet ben te identificeren in door het onderzoek naar buiten gebrachte gegevens, rapporten of artikelen. Mijn privacy is gewaarborgd als deelnemer aan dit onderzoek.

6. Ik heb dit formulier gelezen en begrepen. Al mijn vragen zijn naar mijn tevredenheid beantwoord en ik ben vrijwillig akkoord met deelname aan dit onderzoek.

7. Ik heb een kopie ontvangen van dit toestemmingsformulier dat ook ondertekend is door de interviewer.

Handtekening en datum	Naam Deelnemer	Naam Onderzoeksleider Rachel Koehoorn-Verstraete
	Handtekening	Handtekening 
	Datum	Datum 22-04-2022

Appendix III – Guiding questions

The questions have been altered in order to include the visual aspects of the text, and make them suitable for analysing imagery. The visual aspects have been included by asking questions revolving around content, colour- and spatial organization.

VISUAL

How can the visual composition be characterized?

What meaning do the subjects and elements in the photograph generate?

How are photographic elements (such as framing, light, angles, movement, and perspective used?

How is there meaning created by combining visual and textual element which would not be generated separately?

How can the relationships that have been set up between photographs and textual elements be characterized?

TEXTUAL

Are actors constructed as active or passive subjects?

Which voices are hierarchized above other voices? (this is also a question that is important for intertextuality and interdiscursivity)

Are boundaries maintained between the representing and the represented voices, how can these boundaries be characterized? (Analysing the use of quotation, indirect speech forms, etc)

Are relationships established between actors, how can the relationships be characterized (or not)? (Ranging from the subjects to audiences, journalists, etc.)

Are there gendered narratives in play (and which ones)?

What ideologies are represented in the text? (both from the representing and represented discourse/voice)