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The conservative embrace of progressive values

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THE CONSERVATIVE EMBRACE
OF PROGRESSIVE VALUES

On the intellectual origins of the swing
to the right in Dutch politics

Merijn Oudenampsen

The conservative embrace of progressive values

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PROEFSCHRIFT

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aan Tilburg University
op gezag van de rector magnificus,
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in het openbaar te verdedigen ten overstaan van een
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door

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Acknowledgements

In an essay written in 1950, *De Nederlandse auteur en de wereldcrisis* (The Dutch author and the world crisis), the writer W.F. Hermans noted that the world did not really care what the Dutch had to say, since the Dutch never dealt with crises that 'exceeded a fire in an ashtray'. Hermans admonished Dutch authors to stop copying foreign examples and to become fully provincial. Writing this dissertation often felt like following Hermans along that path, since this study departs from an insistence on the particularity of Dutch political thought, even if it does so through international comparisons. At conferences abroad, I sometimes felt I had become fully provincial, and somehow blamed Hermans for it. I have dug myself deep into the Dutch context, in the hope that I can escape the dilemma, and that the Dutch case is indeed more compelling than a fire in an ashtray.

At the same time, this thesis has been the work of a relative outsider. Someone with no obvious belonging to a single academic discipline in the Netherlands. A relative outsider, too, when it comes to the Dutch political culture of consensus and moderation. Prominent inspirations such as Stuart Hall and Edward Said have written on the scholarly merits of being a relative outsider. Arguably, it allows one to develop a critical vision of the things that insiders generally take for granted. Stuart Hall's saying that 'fish have no concept of water', is something that stuck with me with respect to Dutch consensus culture. You need to be located outside of that political culture, banging your head against it so to say, to be able to trace its contours.

Often I found myself lost without purchase, manoeuvring a slippery slope with nothing to hold on to, without the clear contours of public and academic debate that I knew from surrounding countries. Typically, I only found out how to frame and situate what I was concretely doing at the very end of the project. As such, writing the dissertation has also been a humbling experience. One often starts a PhD with a very critical attitude towards the things that have already been written. Being somewhat of an angry young man, I had internalized the notorious motto of Marx, the ruthless criticism of everything that exists. At the end of the dissertation, that sentiment has given way to something milder and above all, more modest. Deconstructing an existing narrative is a lot easier than constructing one's own edifice. You come to appreciate how difficult it is to develop a coherent and convincing analysis in the first place. While I do not believe I have fully achieved that goal, I hope this dissertation at least comes close to offering such an analysis.

It is perhaps also good to mention that the writing of this thesis has been interrupted by a severe accident. Rehabilitation has taken me some time. There was a notable intervention from a cognitive psychologist who confidently concluded after

some standardised tests that my mental functions corresponded to the lowest Dutch education level, meaning that I would never be able to finish my PhD. I have taken the liberty of interpreting that as an encouragement. Finishing this project therefore carries some extra symbolic weight.

All the more reason to thank those who have helped me along on my path to completing this manuscript. First my supervisors, Odile Heynders and Piia Varis, who have pushed me to make the most of it, at a moment when I was ready to submit 'the damned thing' in suboptimal condition. Thanks also to Jan Blommaert who helped me get to Tilburg in the first place. We have had great conversations, connecting everything with everything. Colleagues such as Tom van Nuenen, Paul Mutsaers, Ico Maly and Geertjan Vugt have made the remote department in Tilburg feel like home to a geographically prejudiced *Amsterdammer*. And Carine Zebedee has been a great help with the final editing and layout of the text.

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And let me extend my gratitude in advance all the readers, critics, adversaries and kindred spirits to come. Writing can be a lonely activity. It need not be so.

The critic's symbol should be the tumble-bug: he deposits his egg in somebody else's dung, otherwise he could not hatch it.

Mark Twain

Introduction

The swing to the right

The Old Testament prophets did not say ‘Brothers I want a consensus’. They said: ‘This is my faith, this is what I passionately believe. If you believe it too, then come with me.’

Margaret Thatcher¹

The observation that a significant rupture occurred in Dutch political culture at the turn of the century is by now seen as one of the tedious truisms of the public debate. A country that perceived itself as a beacon of tolerance and progressivism quite rapidly became part of the European vanguard of the political revival of nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiment. The meteoric rise and dramatic assassination of the right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 resulted in a stunning election victory of his party List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). It became the second largest party out of the blue, winning 17 percent of the vote in what is commonly called ‘the Fortuyn revolt’. Ever since, national identity, immigration, and law and order have been the dominant themes in Dutch public debate. It set the stage for a Dutch culture war, pitting conservative defenders of restrictive immigration and integration policies against prudent progressives.²

The central question of this book is how to make sense of this shift in ideological terms. So far, the dominant frame in seeking to understand the twenty-first century political turnaround in the Netherlands has been that of (right-wing) populism; a focus that foregrounds style, technique and rhetoric, but undervalues ideas. Dutch populist leaders such as Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders were seen above all, as savvy political entrepreneurs expressing the ignored concerns of a marginalized electorate. They have less frequently been analysed in terms of their political ideas, as part of a broader intellectual movement.³ Not the head but the underbelly, not ideas but the empirical realities of ‘the man on the street’ were presumed to be the decisive factors, reinforced by the newfound power of the media and the personal charisma of the populist leader.

¹ Cited in: Gamble (1988, p. vi)

² De Beus (2006a); Pellikaan, De Lange and Van der Meer (2016); Pels (2005); Schinkel (2007); Uitermark (2012).

³ There are some good ideological profiles with a more individual focus: Lucardie and Voerman (2002); Pels (2003); Vossen (2011).

The overwhelming focus on populism in the Dutch academic debate has produced a large and rich literature. But in analysing the profound political changes in the Netherlands, I believe it is too narrow a lens. Right-wing populism, in other words, is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. How to explain that a political current that never managed to capture more than a fragment of the vote, has been able to exercise such an outsized influence on the Dutch political climate? After the rapid demise of Fortuyn's LPF party in 2003, Dutch populism remained an electorally marginal phenomenon for quite some time. The right-wing populist Geert Wilders, who successfully positioned his Party for Freedom (PVV) as the heir of Fortuyn's legacy, could count on only 9 out of 150 seats in the period until 2010. Yet there was no obvious let up in the Dutch culture wars. The relation between the electoral popularity of right-wing populism and the swing to the right in the Netherlands is neither simple nor direct. As a result of the populist preponderance in the analyses of the rightward shift, the revolt has often been reduced in the public imagination to the triumph of style over content. When I explained my intention of exploring the political ideas behind the Fortuyn revolt at the proverbial birthday parties, the prevailing reaction has been one of amused scepticism: 'Are there any?' Due to this common under appreciation of the role of ideas, the change in the Dutch opinion climate has often elicited a sense of bafflement from observers. 'Sometimes it seems like the entire political discourse after the murder of Fortuyn has been picked up by an invisible hand, and brusquely put down again several meters to the right,' the late law professor and social democrat senator Willem Witteveen remarked in 2005.⁴

A series of studies have sought to question this view by pointing to the debates on immigration and national identity that formed the long run-up to the voter rebellion.⁵ Yet there is still a common conception that Fortuyn appeared like a *deus ex machina* on the stage of Dutch politics, picking up unsuspecting Dutch political discourse and bluntly hurling it to the right. This book aims to further dispel that *idée reçue*, by exploring the intellectual origins of the Fortuyn revolt, by foregrounding the revolt of the mind rather than that of the gut. At the same time, this study is also concerned with the academic ideas that have framed the reception of the swing to the right in Dutch politics. Hence, the focus is not confined to the ideas of the right-wing actors that have played the role of the invisible hand in Witteveen's metaphor, pushing Dutch discourse to the right. The accompanying aim is to contest a still prevalent scholarly understanding of the rightward shift in Dutch politics as a natural expression of long-term societal trends that simply needed to be accommodated. In that perspective on political change, ideas are accorded a marginal role.

Alexis de Tocqueville, writing on the lessons to be drawn from the French Revolution, noted that elites were often unaware of the influence of ideas in creating the intellectual atmosphere shaping the events leading up to the revolution:

⁴ Witteveen (2005a, p. 48).

⁵ Duyvendak (2011); Lucassen and Lucassen (2011); Prins (2002); Schinkel (2007); Uitermark (2012); Van Reekum (2014).

What political theory did here with such brilliance, is continually done elsewhere, although more secretly and slowly. Among all civilized peoples, the study of politics creates, or at least gives shape to, general ideas; and from those general ideas are formed the problems in which politicians must struggle, and also the laws which they imagine they create. Political theorists form a sort of intellectual atmosphere breathed by both governors and governed in society, and both unwittingly derive from it the principles of their action.⁶

Some of the most influential minds have tended to concur. John Maynard Keynes argued that it is the ‘gradual encroachment of ideas’, that defines the actions of practical men, often unwittingly.⁷ Friedrich Hayek admonished pragmatists in power for neglecting the crucial intellectual dimension of politics; he proposed a long-term battle of ideas to turn the tide.⁸ Irving Kristol pointed out that it is ‘ideas that form men’s minds, inflame their imaginations, soften or harden their hearts, and end up recreating the world which in the first instance gave birth to them’.⁹ From the other end of the spectrum, Antonio Gramsci stated that ideologies ‘have a validity which is psychological; they organize human masses, create the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle’.¹⁰ As we shall soon see, some of the leading figures in the movement that pushed for a shift to the right in Dutch politics, shared this belief in the power of ideas. This study is informed by a similar conviction that ideas matter. While the intellectual dimension is ultimately only an aspect of the larger story to be told, ideas have a crucial role to play, even in a society of exceedingly practical men such as the Netherlands.

This introduction elaborates on the research question, it addresses some common preconceptions that the study seeks to challenge, and it sets out the basic approach and structure of this book. It begins by highlighting the particularity of Dutch political transformation, and the challenge this poses for scholarly study. Subsequently, it outlines the central argument, the basic framework through which I propose to understand the ideational aspect of the swing to the right in the Netherlands. Then I will explore some methodological questions, in particular the reason for choosing an approach based on the tradition of political ideology research and the consequences of that choice. The introduction closes with an overview of the structure of this study.

From New Left to New Right

An important stepping-stone in my interpretation of the swing to the right is that other seismic shift in Dutch political culture, the ‘cultural revolution’ of the 1960s. The analysis developed in this book draws on the influential interpretation of that period

⁶ Cited in: Steinfels (2013 [1979], p. 41).

⁷ Keynes (2007 [1936], p. 242).

⁸ Hayek (2005 [1944]).

⁹ Kristol and Weaver (1976, p. viii).

¹⁰ Gramsci (1971, p. 377).

developed by the American-Dutch historian James Kennedy and builds on his suggestion that there are important parallels between the two instances of political metamorphosis.

In the US and the UK (both politically and intellectually, the all-important reference point for the Netherlands), the 1960s and 1970s were a period of polarization that gave rise to both the progressive movements of the New Left and their conservative counterparts, the New Right. To echo one of the book titles on this period, the baby-boomer generation was in a very real sense 'a generation divided'.¹¹ Especially in the US, the conservative response to the 1960s took hold at an early stage, when Nixon assumed power in 1969 and administered a devastating defeat in 1972 to McGovern, the candidate of the New Left. In that same year, the writer and 'gonzo' journalist Hunter S. Thompson famously chronicled the turning point:

San Francisco in the middle sixties was a very special time and place to be a part of. [...] There was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning. And that, I think, was the handle. That sense of inevitable victory over the forces of Old and Evil. [...] We had all the momentum, we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave. So, now, less than five years later, you can go on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look west. And with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the High Water Mark. That place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.¹²

In the Netherlands, the image of this historical period is strikingly different. The 1960s and 1970s had an almost singularly progressive character. The country changed in a short period of time from a conservative, conventional and overwhelmingly Christian society, to a progressive, critical and secular one. The breadth, speed and depth of this transformation were exceptional from an international point of view. In a matter of years, the country became susceptible to progressive politics; it embraced a hedonistic attitude to life and criticism of the constraints of Christian morality developed into a new, established tradition. Meanwhile, a convincing conservative countertendency failed to emerge. Not for nothing, a classic work on the period describes it as 'the endless 1960s', with a life span lasting till at least 1977.¹³ The wave met no resistance and kept on rolling until its momentum dissipated of its own accord, until its mercurial fluids were fully absorbed in the Dutch mud.

The predominant narrative of the Dutch 1960s identifies the baby-boomer generation as the primary engine of that transformation. The innovative contribution of James Kennedy was to point to the crucial role of traditional Dutch elites. Kennedy attributed the profundity of the changes to a peculiar dialectic between the romantic radicalism of the youth and the old-fashioned historicist views of Dutch elites. 'With the active protestors on one side and accommodating historicists on the other, Dutch

¹¹ Klatch (1999). See also: Andrews, Cockett, Hooper and Williams (1999); Lyons (1996).

¹² Thompson (1972, p. 72).

¹³ Righart (2006 [1995]).

political culture shifted to the left in the 1960s', he argued.¹⁴ It was not the effervescent political activism of the baby-boomer generation that set the Netherlands apart. What stood out internationally were the ideas and behaviour of Dutch elites who chose to embrace the changes, rather than digging in their heels:

It is ironic that the 'cultural revolution' of the 1960s was facilitated, directed and even encouraged by moderate and in reality old-fashioned elites. [...] Exactly because it was *conservative* (with a historicist vision of change) and because it was *elitist* (not interested in mobilizing a reactionary populism) this group cooperated in the great transformation.¹⁵

Instead of resisting, mobilizing a Gaullist majority or Nixon's silent minority in defence of the moral order, Dutch elites focused on restoring equilibrium by organizing a new consensus, accommodating and depoliticizing protests from below by a passive revolution from above. As Kennedy observed, 'a reactionary politics and rhetoric, in which forces are mobilized to conserve the status quo or return to a lost golden age, was absent among Dutch elites.'¹⁶

Kennedy pointed to the dominance of organicist and historicist thought among Dutch elites as influential in their accommodating attitude.¹⁷ The organicist perspective understands society as a complex organism that grows and develops according to its own unfathomable logic, eluding rationalist models of understanding. The Dutch, Kennedy suggests, still use organicist expressions often, such as 'the society develops itself'. Historicism, a closely related style of thought, can be understood as the romantic or religious belief in 'the hand of history', a view of history as preordained and beyond human control. In the historicist perspective, politics cannot shape historical developments; it can only reflect them. The belief of Dutch elites in the inevitability of historical change and modernization led them to facilitate and stimulate behaviour that was met with elite hostility in other countries. This accommodating response to the progressive wave functioned as a double-edged sword. The traditional Dutch elites let their hair down (sometimes literally) and rapidly became more progressive. The baby boomers, in their long march through the institutions, soon repudiated their youthful belief in social engineering and adopted the moderate, consensual and historicist views of their previous adversaries. In proper Hegelian fashion, the dialectic of the 1960s evolved into a 'prudent progressive'

¹⁴ Kennedy (1995, p. 19).

¹⁵ 'Het is ironisch dat de "culturele revolutie" van de jaren zestig werd vergemakkelijkt, gestuurd en zelfs aangemoedigd door gematigde en in wezen ouderwetse elites. [...] Deze groep heeft, juist omdat ze *conservatief* was (een historicistische kijk had op verandering) en juist omdat ze *elitair* was (niet geïnteresseerd in het creëren van een reactionair populisme) meegewerkt aan de grote verandering.' (Kennedy, 1995, p. 20)

¹⁶ Kennedy (1995, p. 14).

¹⁷ Kennedy (1995, p. 16).

synthesis, a 'Burkean progressivism' articulated by intellectuals such as Dick Pels, Bas van Stokkom and Hans Achterhuis.¹⁸

In an essay from 2010 on the Fortuyn revolt, Kennedy pondered on the remarkable similarities between the transformation of the 1960s and that of the 2000s. In this latter period, Kennedy observed another sweeping change, this time in opposite direction: a swing to the right, reaching its full momentum after the brutal political assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh. Where conservatism was repudiated in the 1960s, now it was at least partially embraced: law and order, Dutch national identity, immigration and moral restoration were at the centre of the debate. In a short period of time, criticism of the 1960s and the baby-boomer generation, associated with permissiveness, moral relativism, political correctness and multiculturalism, became the omnipresent tune that all contenders on the public stage had to tailor their steps to.¹⁹

Not the content of these two paradigm shifts, but their sweeping nature fascinated Kennedy the most. To him the remarkable aspect was that the whole of Dutch society seemed to shift in unison to the right, as it had collectively swerved to the left in the 1960s and 1970s. In both periods, he observed a 'decisive collective break with the past, in which confident defenders of the *ancien régime* are difficult to find and new dogmas are proclaimed with missionary zeal'.²⁰ Kennedy attributed the collective nature of both transformations to the importance attached to consensus in the Netherlands. In ordinary times, the aversion to political disagreement and ideological conflict restricts Dutch public debate to a limited spectrum of opinion. When a consensus takes hold, there is little interest in philosophical discussions concerning the nature and foundations of that consensus. In quiet times, debate is focused on refining the existing consensus. For that reason, Dutch political debate is commonly seen as dull and uneventful by international observers. Eventually, the dominant consensus erodes, due to societal changes and contestation. At first, the gatekeepers of the existing consensus resist outside critique. But soon, the dominant narrative collapses, and work starts on negotiating a new consensus.

For many, the implosion of a consensus is a liberating experience: finally they are allowed to express what they really feel. For others, it means a new way of seeing the world, as if the scales have fallen from their eyes. Perhaps, Kennedy suggested, 'sudden, radical and massive conversions and huge paradigm shifts are the more or less predictable result of a political culture in which the desire for consensus hinders

¹⁸ The term 'prudent-progressive' originally stems from former Christian Democrat Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers (in power from 1982-1994) who used it to qualify the sentiments of the Dutch population. Leading empirical studies have characterized the value patterns of the Dutch population since the 1970s in terms of a 'prudent progressivism': a self-evident progressive morality regarding sexual morality and hierarchical authority, connected with a widespread belief in the necessity of redistribution of wealth. This progressive common sense also contains a more prudent – or conservative – stress on the need to restrict government bureaucracy and an endorsement of disciplinary intervention with regards to crime and other socially deviant behaviour. See: Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (1998).

¹⁹ Kennedy (2010).

²⁰ Kennedy (2010, pp. 148-149).

the continuous debate.²¹ In such a context, opposing visions do not clash but succeed one another. Switching to metaphor, one could argue that Dutch political convictions move in a herd-like manner: at one point quietly grazing a grassy meadow, only to suddenly break into a panicky stampede and collectively migrate from one political pasture to another.

Kennedy's description of Dutch consensual transformation closely resembles the logic of Kuhnian paradigm shifts. In his seminal work on scientific revolutions, Thomas Kuhn argued that scientific progress could be understood in terms of the emergence and succession of relatively stable paradigms. The continued existence of such paradigms is interrupted by 'revolutions', in which the suppositions of the old paradigm are contested and overturned. In times of 'normal science', a single paradigm dominates and is for the most part unchallenged and taken for granted. In periods of 'exceptional science', a growing series of irresolvable anomalies that cannot be explained by the old paradigm, urges some entrepreneurial scientists to break away from the old paradigm. They search for an alternative theoretical model that could replace the old paradigm, heralding a new period of 'normal science'. Prominent scholars have applied Kuhn's model to the study of political ideas.²² The naturalized, taken-for-granted character of Kuhn's dominant paradigm seems particularly relevant for the Netherlands, a country that often perceives itself as post-ideological. As the sociologist and top public official Paul Schnabel argued, change in the Netherlands generally occurs in shockwaves across the entire the political spectrum: 'For long periods, there is consensus and understanding, until things don't work any longer, and then there is a radical impulse. The undercurrent becomes the mainstream.'²³

The conservative undercurrent

The conservative undercurrent referred to by Schnabel, started to emerge in the beginning of the 1990s. In his first book published in 1990, Frits Bolkestein, who had just been appointed as leader of the right-wing liberal party (VVD), proclaimed the beginning of a sustained battle of ideas to contest what he described as a progressive *pensée unique*. Prefiguring the work of Kennedy, Bolkestein expressed his astonishment concerning the ease with which the 'hare-brained schemes' of the *soixante huitards* had found their way into Dutch government policy. He blamed Dutch elites, who 'had surrendered without firing a shot'. In his view, the Dutch political culture of consensus and the lack of civil courage among Dutch elites to confront the protestors had deepened the hubris of the 1960s. 'The tidal wave of the New Left has swept the country and flowed away again,' Bolkestein wrote. 'Here and there it has left residues: corroded cans, stained pieces of wood.' Now was the time for a conservative countercurrent to clear away the mess.²⁴

²¹ Kennedy (2010, p. 150).

²² See: Blyth (2002); Boucher (1985); Hall (1993); Skinner (2002, p. 88).

²³ Cited in: Sommer (2008).

²⁴ Bolkestein (1990, p. 238).

The early 1990s saw a crescendo of critiques of the ideals of the 1960s and the baby boomers, and a pervasive nostalgia for Dutch national identity, depicted as lost or in a state of prolonged progressive neglect. A series of publications gave testimony to this rising undercurrent. In an essay called *Het Conservatieve Offensief* (The Conservative Offensive), the journalist Marcel ten Hooven observed that 'the unrestrained tolerance of the permissive society had awakened a conservative temperament'. He cited pleas from Christian Democrats (CDA) and right-wing Liberals (VVD) for a 'conservative alliance', focused on moral restoration and a concerted campaign against 'the legacy of the 1960s'.²⁵ In his book *De Conservatieve Golf* (The Conservative Wave), the conservative journalist Hans Wansink announced with much fanfare the rise of a new conservatism in the Netherlands, inspired by Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, John Gray and Francis Fukuyama. 'Conservative thinkers and politicians reveal themselves as the social critics of the 1990's,' he observed. 'Leftist illusions are challenged, old-fashioned virtues and traditional forms of community are infused with new life.'²⁶

Dutch conservatives ascribed the relative late occurrence of the conservative response in the Netherlands to the penchant for consensus among Dutch elites, which became a central target of critique. The figureheads of the conservative undercurrent, in particular Frits Bolkestein and Pim Fortuyn, wrote searing condemnations of consensus politics, now depicted as the reason for elite negligence of societal problems. We live in a 'consensus society', Bolkestein noted in 1990, where 'the ideal is not to cut the Gordian knot, but to strive for political accommodation'. It frustrated the ability of politics to deal with controversial issues such as immigration and integration. In order to solve a societal problem, Bolkestein argued, 'it has to be addressed in a frank and incisive manner, but that evokes so much irritation and opposition that it delays a possible solution.'²⁷ Not much later came the opening salvo of Pim Fortuyn's career as a right-wing opinion maker, a polemical plea to 'remove the gloriously warm blanket of consensus from our Dutch little bed'.²⁸

The most powerful intellectual attack on consensus politics however, arrived in the form of the 1997 bestseller *Correct*, written by the conservative social democrat journalist Herman Vuijsje.²⁹ His analysis of the political correctness of the baby-boomer generation soon developed into a central reference point for the coming conservative assault on the institutions. The argument of the book echoed existing critiques of the 'permissive society' of the 1960s, the rise of the 'New Class' and the 'crisis of authority' that had been voiced in the decades before by the New Right in the US and the UK. According to Vuijsje, the baby-boomer generation had never really challenged the prevailing political culture of consensus in the Netherlands. The baby boomers claimed to be self-asserted individualists who had broken with the taboos and conformism of their parents. But the protest generation had simply erected a new

²⁵ Ten Hooven (1995).

²⁶ Wansink (1996).

²⁷ Bolkestein (1990, p. 70).

²⁸ Fortuyn (1991, p. 8).

²⁹ Vuijsje (2008 [1997]). Published in English as: Vuijsje (2000).

series of totems and taboos on terrains such as race relations, government compulsion and privacy. Because the Dutch were not allowed to talk frankly about the problems created by the anti-authoritarian and progressive ideals of the 1960s, problems had festered and struck the most vulnerable: exactly those that the baby boomers had vowed to protect. Consensual conformism had delayed a much-needed conservative correction to the 1960s from arising. Vuijsje employed an arsenal of metaphors to explain this Dutch particularity. In his introduction, he described the situation in the 1970s and 1980s in the Netherlands in terms of a *surplace* (tactical standstill) in a cycling race:

The moment the cyclists stand motionless on the track, balancing and closely keeping check on one another. No one dares to move first, but as soon as one departs, everyone has to sally forth. Only in the 1990's did it finally happen: a sudden and wild sprint erupted, in which the unassailable dogmas were finally breached.³⁰

Yet another metaphor was portrayed on the cover of *Correct*. It featured a work by the Italian painter Wainer Vaccari, depicting a line of crouched figures, closely following one another in a circular movement. It symbolized Dutch society, and its tendency to change in unison. Vuijsje compared it to a collective dance such as the polonaise or the conga. Even if some were at the front of the line and others in the back, the entire line was moving in the same direction. The dancers were guided by a mysterious group dynamic, which at given occasions urged the entire group to collectively change its course. Naturally, by writing this book, Vuijsje positioned himself at the front of the line, guiding the Dutch to a new, more conservative consensus. In an almost ritualistic repetition of the imaginary of the 1960s, he proclaimed this new consensus to be free from conformism and taboos. The Dutch were finally liberated. In paradoxical fashion, the transgressive, taboo-breaking imaginary of the 1960s was now mobilized against the baby boomers themselves.

Returning to Kennedy's interpretation of Dutch political transformation in terms of dialectics and paradigm shifts, I propose that a similar dynamic explains the breadth and speed of the swing to the right in the 2000s. As in the 1960s, established elites ultimately chose to accommodate the conservative undercurrent, rather than digging in their heels. In his more recent writings, Kennedy points to the persistence of historicist patterns of thought among Dutch elites. Dutch political language is pervaded by 'the passive use of verbs, referring to overarching and inevitable political and social developments, to which politics can only conform itself'. 'Large, impersonal powers' seem to be in control of the country:

³⁰ 'In de jaren zeventig en tachtig leek de situatie in weldenkend Nederland op een *surplace* in een wielervedstrijd, waarbij de renners bewegingsloos op de baan staan, balancerend en elkaar beloerend. Niemand durft als eerste in beweging te komen, maar zodra er een rijdt, moet iedereen mee. Pas in de jaren negentig was het zo ver. Een plotseling en wilde sprint brak los, waarbij al gauw de onaantastbaarheid van alle nieuwe geboden werd doorbroken.' (Vuijsje, 2008 [1997], p. 10)

Dutch elites, whether we're talking about politicians or public officials, are apparently at the mercy of powers beyond their control: *'the changing society'*, *'the demands of the times'*, *'the inevitable developments'*, et cetera. Even the rhetorical references to the citizen (in singular form) suggest a *deus ex machina*, a frightening appearance entering the stage that needs to be placated with peace offerings. With this image of reality, there is only one thing left to do: adjust.³¹

Kennedy called this historicist language 'the rhetoric of circumstances beyond one's control'. In the perception of Dutch elites, the 'hand of history' was pointing in the other direction in the 1990s and 2000s, the pendulum swinging firmly to the right.³²

In countries where politics is practiced in a more confrontational manner, political competition gives rise to protracted battles of ideas. Different paradigms are continuously contrasted to one another. Political ideas are marshalled to defend or attack certain positions, making the identification of ideological positions easier to accomplish. In contrast, the tendency of Dutch elites to not confront but rather accommodate challenges to authority, results in a far more fuzzy reality. The concerted nature of paradigm shifts in the Netherlands has the effect of making these seem logical, even inevitable adaptations to what is often called 'reality', or the 'spirit of the age'. Witteveen's metaphor of the invisible hand that we started out with can be seen as part of the same historicist style of thought. Vuijsje's image of Dutch transformation as a collective dance guided by a mysterious group dynamic, appeals to a similar sentiment. After extensive study of the writings of Dutch journalists and academics, an outside observer might conclude that the paradigm shift under review here was not so much a shift on the ideological terrain from the left to the right, or from cosmopolitan progressivism to nationalist conservatism, but rather an awakening from a state of political naiveté to one of hard-boiled realism. This study questions that naturalized view, and traces the rise of an alternative, conservative paradigm challenging the 'prudent-progressive' paradigm that formed the legacy of the 1960s.

A complex conservative backlash

What analytical frame can we use to understand this emerging alternative paradigm? In this study, I seek to cast a wider conceptual net than what is common in existing scholarly accounts. I argue that political leaders such as Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders are only the most visible exponents of a broader conservative political and intellectual tendency that I refer to as the Dutch New Right. Paraphrasing Hunter S. Thompson, figureheads such as Bolkestein, Fortuyn and Wilders were riding the crest of a larger conservative wave. The political success of right-wing populism in

³¹ 'Nederlandse elites, of we het nu hebben over politici of bestuurders, zijn blijkbaar overgeleverd aan krachten die hen te boven gaan: 'de veranderende samenleving, de eisen van de tijd, de onvermijdelijke ontwikkelingen, et cetera. Zelfs de retorische verwijzingen naar de burger (vooral in enkelvoud) suggereren een *deus ex machina* die ten tonele komt als een angstaanjagende verschijning en met vredesoffers moet worden verzoend. Met dit beeld van de realiteit is er slechts een ding dat gedaan kan worden: aanpassen.' (Kennedy, 1995, p. 191)

³² Kennedy (1995, p. 195).

the Netherlands cannot be understood in separation from the broader accomplishments of this loose and heterogeneous current of politicians, journalists and intellectuals in gaining acceptability for a series of once marginal and now pervasive ideas.

This analytical move might seem rather unorthodox, since the New Right is not a household name in the Netherlands. The term 'New Right' came into use in the US and the UK to describe conservative movements that emerged in parallel with – and partly in response to – the rise of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s.³³ Most prominently, the politics of Thatcher and Reagan are associated with the term. The newness of New Right, on the one hand, lies in the combination of a free market strand and a culturally conservative strand. The ideology of the New Right is a complex and often contradictory fusion of neoliberal and (neo)conservative ideas.³⁴ On the other hand, the New Right is seen as departure from the moderate, gradualist politics of the post-war consensus, when liberal and conservative currents participated in the construction of the welfare state. The New Right is more radical in nature; it sought to contest and replace the previous social contract. The 'backlash politics' of the New Right challenged existing elites and institutions, seen as tarnished by the legacy of the 1960s, with the aim of reinstituting the free market and traditional forms of moral authority. In so doing, it embraced social engineering and accorded a central role to the battle of ideas in achieving political change.

The central thesis of this book is that the swing to the right in the Netherlands can be understood along similar lines, as a belated iteration of the New Right backlash that occurred overseas. My proposition is that the New Right fusion of free market ideas and cultural conservatism, combined with opposition to the 1960s and a critique of political moderation, provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the politics of figures such as former VVD-leader Frits Bolkestein, the right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn, the early Geert Wilders ideologue Bart Jan Spruyt, the conservative new atheist Paul Cliteur, the conservative social democrat journalist H.J. Schoo, Islam critic Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders himself, the leader of the Freedom Party (PVV). At the same time, the Dutch New Right is not a simple copy of its Anglo-American counterparts. Due to the late birth of the Dutch New Right and the exceptional impact of the progressive wave of the 1960s and 1970s, the Dutch current had to contend with an overwhelming progressive common sense on the so-called 'social issues' that were the subject of the culture wars in the US: sexual morality, abortion, euthanasia, drugs. The rise of the Dutch New Right is the result of a messy process of translation of political ideas between very dissimilar contexts.

Crucial to the analysis is the contradictory character of the conservatism of the New Right. It emerged as a backlash movement, an anti-establishment current challenging existing elites and institutions. Of course, conservatism is often understood as an ideology that emerged in defence of existing institutions and elites, in opposition to

³³ King (1987); Levitas (1986); Lowndes (2008). See also the references at note 11.

³⁴ Brown (2006, p. 692); Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010).

radical challenges to the status quo. When progressives are seen to have taken over the institutions however, conservatives have little choice but to adopt an anti-establishment position and to vie for popular appeal. The political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset used the term 'backlash politics' to qualify the contradictory nature of such a conservative anti-establishment politics. The term referred to the paradoxical reality of 'right-wing groups [that] have to appeal to the populace in a framework of values which are themselves a source of right-wing discontent in the first place: anti-elitism, individualism and egalitarianism'. The reason was simple: these were the 'supreme American political values' that no movement could ignore. 'Commitment to these values is the American ideology,' Lipset proposed.³⁵

Such a contradictory logic seems to apply to an even greater extent in the Dutch case. A Dutch New Right backlash needed to frame its appeal within the context of supreme Dutch values. And the depth of the wave of the 1960s meant that commitment to progressive sexual and secular morality had become 'the Dutch ideology'. Due to its belated occurrence, the conservative countercurrent came to incorporate to a much larger degree the progressive sexual, anti-authoritarian and secular ethos that had become engrained in the Netherlands after the 1960s and 1970s. In the wake of Pim Fortuyn, Dutch New Right intellectuals embraced the Enlightenment and progressive values such as individualism, secularism, women's equality and gay rights, presenting themselves as the true defenders of the progressive accomplishments of Dutch culture against the 'backward culture' of Muslim immigrants. Paul Schnabel called this 'modern conservatism': 'Wilders wants to hold on to the country's achievements. He does not want to go back to the time where gays and women were rated inferior. He does not want to restore old values, he wants to maintain new ones.'³⁶ In his justly acclaimed book on the murder of Theo van Gogh, the essayist Ian Buruma commented extensively on this contradictory conservative politics:

Because secularism has gone too far to bring back the authority of the churches, conservatives and neo-conservatives have latched onto the Enlightenment as a badge of national or cultural identity. The Enlightenment, in other words, has become the name for a new conservative order, and its enemies are the aliens, whose values we can't share.³⁷

On the one hand, this conservative embrace of progressive values has an instrumental quality to it. The conservative interest in feminism and gay rights is largely a function of their opposition to Islam and does not seem to have much salience on its own. Many have pointed out that women's rights and gay rights have been instrumentalized for a nationalist and anti-Muslim politics, a development that has been debated by scholars under terms such as sexual nationalism, homonationalism and femonationalism.³⁸ On

³⁵ Lipset and Raab (1970, pp. 29-30).

³⁶ Cited in: Sommer (2008).

³⁷ Buruma (2006).

³⁸ Farris (2017); Mepschen and Duyvendak (2012); Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens (2010); Puar (2007).

the other hand, this paradoxical position expresses a reality on the ground: the aforementioned depth and uncontroversial nature of the sexual revolution of the 1960s has led to a widely shared progressive sexual morality in the Netherlands that could no longer be challenged by a conservative countercurrent. Pim Fortuyn, himself an openly gay baby boomer and a product of the 1960s, described this legacy as an unassailable 'cultural sediment' and advised Dutch conservatives against attempts to overturn it. The conservatism of the Dutch New Right is therefore a far more ambiguous and contradictory affair than that of its British and American counterparts. Drawing on Angela McRobbie's notion of a 'complex' conservative backlash, I describe the Dutch New Right as a conservative countercurrent that selectively incorporates some of the accomplishments of the 1960s, while successfully challenging the progressive agenda on a broader set of terrains, such as law and order, immigration, social policy, environmental policy, internationalism, cultural policy, economic policy, the work ethic, development aid, human rights and anti-terrorism.³⁹

Research approach

While this book is necessarily an interdisciplinary work, drawing on a diverse literature that includes political history, sociology, political theory and political science, the core of the approach is informed by intellectual history and political ideology research. The study could be described as an intellectual history of the Dutch swing to the right, albeit an unusual one. The oddity pertains to the fact that intellectual history is often characterized as a means to gain insight into a certain historical epoch other than that of our own, while the period under review here is still very much part of our present. Furthermore, intellectual history (and the connected disciplines of the history of ideas and political theory) focuses on great thinkers, classic texts and grand theory, all of which are admittedly in short supply in the Netherlands.

The Netherlands has often been associated with deep-seated anti-intellectualism by both Dutch and foreign observers alike. In *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain*, the intellectual historian Stefan Collini argued that the denial of the existence of real intellectuals has always been a prominent aspect of national self-definition in England.⁴⁰ The word intellectual evoked associations with pretentiousness, arrogance and *hubris*. The Netherlands seems very similar in that regard. When the weekly opinion magazine *Vrij Nederland* once asked around to take stock of the country's most influential intellectuals, it was met with the typical reaction that the word intellectual is a pejorative term, that intellectuals do not exist in the Netherlands, or at the very least, that Dutch intellectuals are a rare species in a process of extinction.⁴¹

For reasons more fully explored in the first chapter, the Dutch intellectual climate could be described in Virginia Woolf's eloquently snobbish terms as unabashedly 'middle-brow'. While the highbrow is the one 'who rides his mind at a gallop across

³⁹ McRobbie (2009).

⁴⁰ Collini (2006).

⁴¹ Boerstra and Martijn (2008).

country in pursuit of an idea', the middlebrow in contrast 'are the go-betweens; they are the busy-bodies who run from one to the other with their tittle tattle and make all the mischief.'⁴² The foremost Dutch public intellectuals conform to Woolf's image of 'busy-bodies'. They are typically journalists and columnists whose role consists of popularizing existing ideas, rather than developing elaborate theories of their own. The Dutch intellectual is more of a translator, a mediator between worlds: both between the international context and the Dutch one, and between the higher spheres of political thought and the this-worldly realm of the larger lay audience. The eminent social democrat intellectual Bart Tromp was once accused of being an 'intellectual window-cleaner', a pejorative term denoting everyday ordinariness in opposition to greatness and originality.⁴³ Not wholly without reason, he immediately adopted this as a badge of honour – the window cleaner rinses the windows that offer views to the outside world. Perhaps the ideal type of the Dutch intellectual is that of a window cleaner. The public intellectual, Odile Heynders notes, has always been a 'bidimensional being', at home in both the autonomous intellectual field and the engaged public debate.⁴⁴ The relative weakness of the autonomous intellectual field in the Netherlands and the dominance of the latter dimension of intellectual activity make the Dutch context a challenging terrain for more traditional approaches to intellectual history. At the same time, intellectual history is an eclectic discipline, bringing together a large variety of approaches; it won't mind if we pitch our camp at one of the far ends of the field.

This book takes from intellectual history three guiding principles for the study of ideas. The first is the ambition to trace the trajectory of a set of political ideas over time and place while examining conceptual change. Hence, it is not the classic approach to the history of ideas as described by Arthur Lovejoy – one of the discipline's founding fathers – as essentially unchanging, transhistorical 'unit ideas'. But rather, following Quentin Skinner, political ideas are conceived as continuously 'shifting conceptualizations' constituting 'the very stuff of ideological debate'.⁴⁵ The second guideline is the aim of intellectual historians to contextualize and historicize ideas. Studying political ideas in the Netherlands necessitates an understanding of the historical particularities of the Dutch political and intellectual context. We have already briefly touched upon the third guideline, which is the understanding of ideational change and conceptual revolution through the framework of Kuhnian paradigm shifts. It allows us to distinguish between two different forms of ideational transformation. On the one hand, there is a more continuous and moderate process of change, leading to the alteration of certain elements within a prevailing paradigm without necessarily constituting a break with the paradigm as such. On the other hand, a more radical version of change occurs when an entire paradigm enters into crisis and is contested by an alternative paradigm. Taking our cue from the work of Kennedy and Uitermark, we

⁴² Woolf (1942, p. 115). For the American discussion on Middlebrow culture, see: Macdonald (1962); Ross (1989); Rubin (1992).

⁴³ Tromp (2009).

⁴⁴ Heynders (2016).

⁴⁵ Skinner (2002, p. 176).

will consider the swing to the right as an instance of this latter, more radical form of change.

The other scholarly tradition I am drawing from is that of political ideology research, an interdisciplinary field of study located at the border region of intellectual history, political science, political theory and political sociology.⁴⁶ Due to its sensitivity to ideas at every level of iteration, this approach lends itself better to the ‘middle-brow’ character of Dutch intellectual life.⁴⁷ The tradition of political ideology research can be traced back to the German/British sociologist Karl Mannheim and his sociology of knowledge. In his 1929 book *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim provided the basis for a sociologically informed political science, geared to the study of political ideas, which is still surprisingly modern and sophisticated. Before turning to the consequences of this approach for the study of the ideas behind the swing to the right, let me shortly sketch the major themes of this field of study, which have been outlined in a far more extensive and sophisticated manner in Michael Freeden’s ‘morphological analysis’ of ideology.⁴⁸

Mannheim’s sociology of ideas

First, political ideology research derives from Mannheim its non-pejorative conception of ideology, in contrast with singularly negative and derogatory perspectives on ideology. On the one hand, there is the orthodox Marxist definition of ideology as mystification, or merely a form of false consciousness that serves dominant class interests. Since the Marxist view is not a significant presence in the Netherlands, there is no need to expand on this perspective. On the other hand, there is the conservative conception of ideology as a dogmatic, fanatic, extreme, totalizing, irrational or simply unrealistic way of seeing the world. Originating in the polemics of Burke and Napoleon against the ‘ideologues’ of the French Revolution, this negative conception of ideology once again rose to prominence during ‘the end of ideology’ debates in both the 1960s and the 1990s. From this point of view, ideology is considered to be a schematic and inflexible way of seeing the world, as against some more modest, piecemeal, and pragmatic sets of ideas. Only the extremes on the left and the right are deemed to be ideological; the political mainstream is considered to be non-ideological. This pejorative view is generally associated with the work of Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, Raymond Aron and what Terry Eagleton mischievously calls ‘the “end-of-ideology” ideology’.⁴⁹ It is a pervasive, if not dominant view in the Netherlands.

Political ideology research rejects both pejorative conceptions and takes ideologies in a more neutral sense as a ‘crucial resource for ordering, defining and evaluating

⁴⁶ Eagleton (1991); Heywood (1992); Freeden (2003); Freeden, Sargent and Stears (2013); Seliger (1976).

⁴⁷ In the Netherlands, the political scientist Cees Middendorp has worked with Mannheim’s non-pejorative conception of ideology. Middendorp has been the leading figure in Dutch political ideology research, but with a quantitative focus on the mass level, while leading figures in the field of political ideology research, such as Michael Freeden, reject quantitative modelling of ideologies, due to the complexity involved. See: Middendorp (1991).

⁴⁸ Freeden (1996).

⁴⁹ Eagleton (1991, p. 4); Freeden (1996, p. 17).

political reality and establishing political identities'.⁵⁰ As Michael Freeden argues, 'the study of ideology is most profitably recognized as the study of actual political thought'.⁵¹ Combining the Mannheim-inspired definitions used by Cees Middendorp and Martin Seliger, we can define ideology as 'a system of general ideas regarding the nature of man and society that posits, explains and justifies ends and means of organized social action for the particular social group(s) adhering to it'.⁵² This also implies that ideology does not necessarily refer to ideas that are untrue, biased or incorrect. Many basic ideological principles are not even open to empirical investigation; they are axioms about the nature of man and society. Furthermore, ideological thought is not necessarily rigid, dogmatic or fanatic. As we will see, political ideologies can be quite flexible, dynamic and tactical.

Mannheim constructed his sociology of knowledge on the basis of a critical dialogue with Marx and Weber. Marx originally employed the notion of ideology to situate a series of dominant ideas with regard to the relations of production. The classical political economy of Ricardo and Smith, Marx argued, contained an ideological distortion in the sense that it naturalized a specific historical situation, namely market exchange under capitalism. More generally, bourgeois political economy was deemed ideological by Marx in that it presented a one-sided view of these relations, ignoring their historical genesis and obscuring the exploitation of labour. Ideology thus served an important role in reproducing and legitimizing the existing state of affairs, which was portrayed as if arising from Nature itself.⁵³ For Mannheim, what is relevant to the Marxist conception of ideology is not its application to the ideas of an opponent that are considered to be simply false or a lie. Of course, an ideology can be in discord with reality, like the conservative idea of an organic and harmonious community or the liberal conception of society based on rational self-interest, or the Marxist idea of class conflict and the ever-impending collapse of capitalism. The more subtle use of the concept by Marx is that ideology is selective in its vision of reality. Indeed, Marx did not consider the scientific work of Ricardo and Smith to be untrue, he saw it is a significant body of scientific work that he drew inspiration from to develop his own ideas. The ideological distortion resided in the fact that classical political economy contained a prohibition, a limit in its thinking: it 'couldn't think outside the skin of the social relations reflected in it'.⁵⁴

Mannheim provided crucial amendments to Marx's view on ideology. The sociological study of ideas, Mannheim proposes, does not restrict itself to the economic interests that political ideas might serve, but looks at them relationally in terms of their social origin and the function they fulfil in organizing social forces. In this sense, also Marxism lends itself to be studied as an ideology. It can be analysed in terms of its situatedness in social relations and its functionality in mobilizing the

⁵⁰ From Andrew Gamble's foreword in Heywood (1992, p. xv).

⁵¹ Freeden (1996, p. 122).

⁵² Middendorp (1991, p. 66); Seliger (1976, p. 11).

⁵³ Seliger (1977).

⁵⁴ Hall (1986, p. 44).

workers' movement. Political ideology in the Mannheimian tradition of political ideology research is understood as a ubiquitous phenomenon, cutting across elite, professional and vernacular forms of political thought. People in all walks of life think about politics in discernable ideological patterns, even if the larger lay audience tends to absorb and employ ideologies in fragmented, contradictory and unconscious fashion. For Mannheim, echoing Nietzsche's perspectivism, there is no guaranteed non-ideological vantage point, no a-historical position from which the unmasking of ideology can be performed. While a discourse can be considered more or less ideological to the degree that it (implicitly or explicitly) contains normative assumptions about the nature of man and society, a completely non-ideological social science is a theoretical impossibility. Any sophisticated social scientific framework relies on certain a priori assumptions about the nature of man and society. In that sense, all social thought is ultimately ideologically determined. This also rids ideology of its purely negative connotation, as merely false ideas or as a force of oppression. What Mannheim takes from Weber is his neutral conception of ideology as worldview or *Weltanschauung*.

Second, Mannheim critiqued the methodological individualism of traditional ways of researching political ideas and insisted on the collective and contextual nature of all intellectual activity. For Mannheim, the problem of the existing approaches was that they attempted 'to explain meaning from its genesis in the subject', and that in so doing 'the individual mind was conceived as separate from the group'. This led to 'false assumptions' that Mannheim's sociological approach set out to correct:

The degree to which an individualistic conception of the problem of knowledge gives a false picture of collective knowing corresponds to what would occur if the technique, mode of work, and productivity of an internally highly specialized factory of 2,000 workers were thought of as if each of the 2,000 workers worked in a separate cubicle, performed the same operations for himself at the same time and turned out each individual product from beginning to end by himself.⁵⁵

Mannheim's political sociology seeks to map the field of the political as one of competing groups with their respective patterns of thought, all historically and socially situated. In more contemporary terms, one could call this a relational sociology of political thought.⁵⁶ For Mannheim, the most important principle of the sociology of knowledge is that it 'seeks to comprehend thought in the concrete setting of an historical-social situation out of which individually differentiated thought only very gradually emerges':

Thus, it is not men in general who think, or even isolated individuals who do the thinking, but men in certain groups who have developed a particular style of

⁵⁵ Mannheim (1960 [1936], p. 26).

⁵⁶ Emirbayer (1997).

thought in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations characterizing their common position. Every individual is therefore in a two-fold sense predetermined by the fact of growing up in a society: on the one hand he finds a ready-made situation and on the other he finds in that situation preformed patterns of thought and of conduct.⁵⁷

Mannheim applied this situational method in his classic study of conservative thought. Mannheim studied German Romantic conservatism as a historical response to the French Revolution leading to a style of thought that revolved around gradualism, irrationalism, and organicism. This style had a specific function in serving the interests of the German aristocracy, by forming a front against the radical, rationalist and linear thought that emanated from the French Revolution. In his account, societal conflict is a central driver of the development of political ideologies.

Third, while Weber adhered to the fact/value distinction and pleaded for value-free social science, even while maintaining that social science without presuppositions is ultimately impossible, Mannheim favours a more pluralistic epistemology. He contends that the aggregate of ideological perspectives on a given social-historical situation can serve as a vehicle through which insight is gained into that period. Ideally, social science would be home to a plurality of competing schools of thought, whose differences in perspective contribute to continuous self-reflexivity. In Mannheim's view, intellectuals occupy an exceptional position. Their relative autonomy from society allows them to attach themselves to different social groups and serve different societal interests. It is the *freischwebende Intelligenz* that can develop a higher insight in the differing political ideologies, because they can consider ideas in an ideological sense, 'from without':

If I take for instance, a theoretical statement simply as an idea, that is, from within, I am making the same assumptions that are prescribed in it; if I take it as ideology, that is, look at it 'from without', I am suspending, for a time, the whole complex of its assumptions, thus doing something other than what is prescribed in it at first glance.⁵⁸

This first step (the ideological interpretation) is followed by a next step (the sociological interpretation): the attempt to relate ideas to something that is posited outside of it, to consider ideas in terms of their function in the social structure. In so doing, Mannheim attributes an important pedagogical function to his sociology of ideas, in line with Weber. In his classic lecture *Science as a Vocation*, Weber famously argued that political sociology has an educational role in tracing a person's practical convictions to a certain *Weltanschauung*:

⁵⁷ Mannheim (1960 [1936], p. 3).

⁵⁸ Mannheim (1971, p. 119).

In terms of its meaning, such and such a practical stand can be derived with inner consistency, and hence integrity, from this or that ultimate *weltanschauliche* position [...] Figuratively speaking, you serve this god and you offend the other god when you decide to adhere to this position [...] Thus, if we are competent in our pursuit (which must be presupposed here) we can force the individual, or at least we can help him, to give himself an account of the ultimate meaning of his own conduct [...] Again, I am tempted to say of a teacher who succeeds in this: he stands in the service of 'moral' forces; he fulfils the duty of bringing about self-clarification and a sense of responsibility.⁵⁹

Mannheim continues in that pedagogical tradition, only then expanded beyond the individual focus of Weber, to society as such. In the Netherlands, the Mannheim-inspired sociologist Pieter Thoenes has made the case for such a pluralistic approach in his 1962 book *De Elite in de Verzorgingsstaat* (The Élite in the Welfare State). He pleaded for a social science that excavates, 'a social science that drills deeper', an appeal reminiscent of Nietzsche's evocation of 'minds that drill, dig, gnaw, and moisten' in *The Gay Science*.⁶⁰ Thoenes proposed a sociology with an explicit normative and political character, aimed at raising consciousness, and enlivening the democratic debate:

This type of sociology is characterized by an explicit political character. It subjects existing society to a clearly professional but therefore no less value based analysis that has direct, but also explicitly articulated consequences. Sociology here is not a policy instrument, a technical apparatus for an elite maintaining order, but rather an instrument in raising political consciousness. In first instance, this can be a consciousness imparted to a specific elite, colleagues for example, but the stream has a different direction, from there it runs to the political party and the political discussion and thus enlivens the conversation that is useful and essential to democracy.⁶¹

This study inscribes itself in that Mannheimian tradition.

⁵⁹ Gerth and Wright Mills (1946, pp. 151-152).

⁶⁰ Nietzsche (2001 [1882], p. 221).

⁶¹ '[E]en dergelijk type sociologie wordt gekenmerkt door een uitgesproken politiek gehalte. Zij onderwerpt de bestaande samenleving aan een wel degelijk deskundige, maar daarom niet minder waardegebonden analyse, die voor het politieke beleid directe, maar dan ook openlijk uitgesproken consequenties heeft. De sociologie is hier niet beleidsinstrument als technisch apparaat voor een ordehandhavende elite, maar een instrument tot politieke bewustmaking. In eerste instantie kan dat een bewustmaking zijn, die zich richt tot een bepaalde elite, van vakgenoten b.v., maar de stroom is hier anders gericht, van daar loopt zij door naar de politieke partij en de politieke discussie en zo verlevendigt zij het voor de democratie zinvolle en essentiële gesprek.' (Thoenes, 1962, p. 221)

Doing political ideology research in the Netherlands

Let us now sketch the consequences of these inspirations for the analysis of the swing to the right. Overall, the guidelines I have adopted from intellectual history and political ideology research lead to the following choice of focus:

- 1 *Trajectory rather than impact.* The basic motivation underlying the analysis in the following chapters is that of mapping the trajectory of a set of political ideas over time and place. The focus is not necessarily on the impact of ideas, their popularity among the broader public, and their eventual reflection in institutions and policies. A series of studies have done so fruitfully.⁶² Instead, I am primarily interested in the provenance of a set of political ideas, the process of adaptation and conceptual change and the organization of ideas into a larger ideational complex.
- 2 *Tying core ideas to a larger ideology.* Michael Freeden has introduced a distinction between ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ ideologies. A thin ideology, or micro-ideology, has a restricted scope and does not embrace the full range of questions that macro-ideologies do. A ‘thin’ ideology tends to intersect with a ‘thick’ ideology and incorporate elements from its broader repertoire.⁶³ The insightful and well-crafted studies of the Dutch political debates preceding the Fortuyn revolt tend to focus on these smaller units, such as (neo-)culturalism, authoritarianism, nativism, nationalism and populism.⁶⁴ The aim of this book is to compliment the existing literature by showing how these elements have been drawn from a larger ideological framework, providing us with a richer idiom from which to consider the changes in Dutch politics.
- 3 *Neither persons nor parties.* Departing from Mannheim’s assumption that it is not isolated individuals doing the thinking, I focus on the collective nature of political thought rather than the personal development of individual characters. Existing political biographies naturally have a more individualist focus.⁶⁵ The common tendency to seek the explanation for political ideas in personal biography has obscured the similarities in the ideas of New Right figures such as Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, Bart Jan Spruyt, Paul Cliteur, Hendrik Jan Schoo, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders. On the other hand, the stress on the collective nature of ideological thought does not mean the equation of ideology with party ideologies, as is common in Dutch political science. The point of departure in this study is that the political ideologies under scrutiny here do not neatly correspond or restrict themselves to a single political party. As Bart Jan Spruyt has rightly observed, the

⁶² See in particular: Schinkel (2007); Uitermark (2012).

⁶³ Freeden (2003).

⁶⁴ Duyvendak (2011); Lucassen and Lucassen (2011); Prins (2002); Schinkel (2007); Uitermark (2012); Van Reekum (2014).

⁶⁵ Fennema (2016); Hirsi Ali (2006a); Pels (2003); Van Weezel and Ornstein (1999).

conservative undercurrent in Dutch politics is divided among the different parties.⁶⁶ The same is true of neoliberalism: to varying degrees, the traditional mainstream parties all harbour a free market wing and a more 'social' or corporatist wing. The complex dynamic of Dutch politics depends to a significant degree on the interplay of these subcurrents within the different parties.

- 4 *Contextualism rather than idealism.* The assumption that political ideas are relational interventions in a particular socio-historical context implies there is no such thing as an ideological ideal type, wholly independent of context. The Dutch New Right will necessarily be something qualitatively different from the American New Right. A Dutch manifestation of a current of thought such as neoliberalism, conservatism or neoconservatism will necessarily imply something qualitatively different from its Anglo-American counterparts. Any transplanted body of ideas will have to contend with Dutch political reality and cohabit with the sediments and leftovers of existing traditions. This raises pernicious questions: to what degree can the different form assumed by a Dutch neoconservatism, for example, be attributed to its Dutchness and at what point does it become something qualitatively different from neoconservatism? This perennial problem of the categorization of political thought will not be fully resolved in this study. Finally, seeing that political thought is contextual, means that we have to dive quite deep in the Dutch context to understand what is really going on.
- 5 *Perspectivism rather than neutral (or naïve) description.* Any ideological framework necessarily implies a specific perspective on reality, limiting our vision of that reality. In the following chapters, the ambition is to do more than neutrally describe ideas. The aim is to proceed and to perform ideology critique in the Mannheimian sense, looking at ideas 'from without' in order to show how they frame our perspective on reality. The patience of the reader will at times be tested, as we 'step in' and 'out' of particular ideological discourses. While ideology does not necessarily imply a distortion of reality, it certainly does not preclude it. The distortion and masking of societal realities can serve political interests. When pointing that out in the text, of course, it does not imply that the analysis falls back on a more orthodox conception of ideology as mere false consciousness. That brings us to the position of the author: following the framework we have outlined, this book cannot be written from a 'neutral' or 'objective' position. Depending on the chapter, an alternative (ideological) paradigm is introduced to highlight the ideological nature of a certain paradigm. In that way, the book uses the agonistic pluralism of Hans Daalder and Piet Thoenes to analyse the consensual pluralism of Arend Lijphart and Jacques Van Doorn. It uses the paradigm of the Anglo-American New Right to make sense of the Dutch conservative countercurrent. Similarly, the work of Olivier Roy and Gilles Kepel is used as an interpretative lens to analyse the

⁶⁶ Spruyt (2006).

writing of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Bernard Lewis. In a broader sense, this study is written from a progressive, agonistic pluralist point of view.⁶⁷

- 6 *Operative rather than fundamental ideology.* Martin Seliger distinguished between the 'fundamental' and 'operative' levels of ideology.⁶⁸ At the fundamental level, political ideologies come close to resembling political theory or political philosophy. The fundamental level refers to the work of sophisticated political thinkers, such as Friedrich Hayek or Leo Strauss. In contrast, at an operative level, ideologies take the form of broad and heterogeneous political movements engaged in the competitive pursuit of power. In this latter instance, ideology takes on a far more eclectic form of sloganeering, political rhetoric, manifestoes and policy proposals. Because both aspects are generally present at the same time (to varying degrees), ideologies lack the coherent shape and internal consistency of political philosophy. Ideology is often contradictory, fluid and hybrid in nature; it is always only more or less coherent. The Dutch figures whose texts we will be analysing belong mainly to the operative level; taken as a whole, their ideas are often contradictory and do not form a coherent system of thought. While the analysis does connect their ideas to the fundamental level of ideology – the major political thinkers who tend to be located abroad – the predominant focus will be on the operative level.

Let me finally say something about the selection of texts and time frames. The first part of the study centres on a broad historical analysis of a depoliticizing tendency in Dutch political thinking. The material for this analysis consists of a series of key academic texts on Dutch politics. The study then proceeds to offer an ideological interpretation of the rightward shift in Dutch politics, and turns to an analysis of the Dutch New Right. It relies on a broad corpus of political texts written by leading Dutch New Right figures, with the main focus on the period from the end of the 1980s till the year 2006, when Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) is founded and Ayaan Hirsi Ali publishes the Dutch version of her autobiography *Infidel*.⁶⁹ Of course, after this cut-off point there have been significant political developments. But my main interest is the origin of ideas, and the majority of the New Right repertoire has been articulated and circulated at this point in time. The analysis aims to situate these texts, both in relation to a broader ideological paradigm – that of the Anglo-American New Right – and in relation to the Dutch political reality these actors were seeking to intervene in. The final chapter covers a more extensive timeframe and looks at the conservative online counterculture through a series of blogposts and newspaper interviews, while situating these in a larger intellectual tradition.

⁶⁷ Agonistic pluralism is school of thought that emphasises the essential function of conflict in modern democracy, as opposed to consensual pluralist thought. Figures such as (the young) Hans Daalder, Piet Thoenes, Elmer Schattschneider, William Connolly and Chantal Mouffe can be counted as part of this critical tradition. See: Connolly (2008).

⁶⁸ Seliger (1976).

⁶⁹ Hirsi Ali (2006a).

Contesting the Dutch belief in the ‘end of ideology’

At this point, the reader might interject that it seems rather curious to want to study ideology in a country that is often seen as having moved beyond ideology. Indeed, a prominent hurdle facing political ideology research in the Netherlands is the weak salience of political ideology in the Dutch context. According to the leading Dutch historian Piet de Rooy, the Netherlands has been suffering from an acute case of ‘ideological hypothermia’ ever since the late 1970s.⁷⁰ Francis Fukuyama voiced a similar sentiment upon visiting the Netherlands in 1992, when he declared that the Dutch ‘in my opinion, have reached the end of history already for quite some time’, by which he meant the final resolution of ideological conflict.⁷¹ The sociologist Willem Schinkel, in his dazzling deconstruction of Dutch integration politics, posits the end of ideology and omnipresent depoliticization as the underlying cause of the Dutch fixation on the integration of immigrants.⁷² Again others have put forward historical reasons for the relative underdevelopment of ideological thought in the Netherlands. In his extensive quantitative research on Dutch ideology, Cees Middendorp highlights the ‘unique political culture’ of the Netherlands as a ‘special case’ in Western Europe. The classic ideological controversy between progressive and conservative thought systems did not manifest itself as strongly, due to the historical underdevelopment of both Dutch conservative forces and Dutch socialism.⁷³ As a consequence, James Kennedy noted, the Netherlands developed a curiously ‘one-sided progressive political spectrum’, giving rise to Dutch consensus culture.⁷⁴

This Dutch particularity has made the thesis of ‘the end of ideology’ and its reduction of ideology to political extremism particularly appealing in the Netherlands. It has had profound consequences for the way ideology is generally discussed in the Netherlands. When the word is used in Dutch public debate, it generally has a pejorative charge, referring to those forms of thought that are considered to be out of date or beyond the pale. Calling things ‘ideological’ is a common way of disqualifying ideas, trying to eject them from the realm of reasonable debate. The same counts for the various -isms denoting ideological currents such as conservatism, neoconservatism and neoliberalism. When these words are used in the Dutch context, it is often intended as a form of admonition rather than analysis. At times, the denunciation of ideology takes on the appearance of an attempt at exorcising an evil spirit from the Dutch body politic.

Neoliberalism, for instance, has been debated by prominent Dutch intellectuals and politicians in almost singularly denunciatory terms as ‘market fundamentalism’ or even as a ‘totalitarian faith’.⁷⁵ Striking about this debate is the focus on the ‘ideological’ nature of neoliberalism, by which the critics mean that it is a rigid, fundamentalist belief

⁷⁰ De Rooy (2005, p. 275).

⁷¹ Vuijsje (2008 [1997], p. xvii). Published in English as: Vuijsje (2000).

⁷² Schinkel (2007).

⁷³ Middendorp (1991, p. 66).

⁷⁴ Kennedy (1995, p. 18).

⁷⁵ De Swaan (2010); Van Rossem (2011); Wöltgens (1996).

system that ‘literally makes one blind to the hard facts’ and ultimately leads to extremism and totalitarianism.⁷⁶ In other words, the Dutch critics of neoliberalism seem to depart from the pejorative conception of ideology as a ‘schematic, inflexible way of seeing the world’, leading to extremism. Using this prism of extremism, totalitarianism and fundamentalism makes it difficult to understand how neoliberalism could have been influential at all, lacking the ability to compromise and flexibly adapt to the task at hand. It is no coincidence that leading academic studies of neoliberalism have stressed the adaptability, tactical nature and dynamism of neoliberal thought.⁷⁷

Another prominent illustration of the pejorative perspective on ideology is the book *Overmoed en Onbehagen* (Overconfidence and Uneasiness) of former Christian Democrat (CDA) minister Bert de Vries. He accused his party in the wake of the Fortuyn revolt of adopting a ‘neoconservative’ course, sparking a confused debate on the meaning of the word neoconservatism. De Vries used the term ‘neoconservatism’ in a polemical fashion, as a warning to his party. For De Vries, the crux of the problem was that not ‘objective circumstances but subjective ideological preferences’ informed the politics of his party.⁷⁸ It raises the question whether it isn’t the very *raison d’être* of political parties to pursue ‘subjective ideological preferences’. Moreover, to describe one’s own politics as objective and reasonable and another’s as subjective and ideological, is seen by many as the ideological gesture *par excellence*.⁷⁹ Not for nothing, a similar appeal to ‘objective circumstances’ is to be found in the Marxist tradition.

The same ‘end of ideology’ perspective can be found in studies of populism in mainstream Dutch political science.⁸⁰ In line with the equation of ideology with extremism, a common assumption of such studies is that populism is the only ideological actor in the game, the only party with ‘with transformative aspirations’ and ‘anti-establishment attitudes’. Mainstream parties, in contrast, are depicted as non-ideological, and ‘committed to the status quo’.⁸¹ As we will see, this ‘end of ideology’ perspective does not fit the Dutch case very well, where it has been the mainstream right that pioneered an anti-establishment discourse.

The belief in ‘the end of ideology’ and the feasibility of an ‘objective’ politics has long been a powerful sentiment in Dutch politics. Hans Daalder, the founding father of Dutch political science, argued that the Dutch political system offers obvious incentives for politicians, journalists and academics to present ideas as non-ideological, as instances of pragmatism, objectivity or realism. Daalder called this ‘depoliticization-out-of-political-interest’.⁸² In a country of political minorities, framing one’s ideas as

⁷⁶ As cited on the back cover of: Achterhuis (2010).

⁷⁷ Burgin (2012); Crouch (2011); Mirowski and Plehwe (2009); Peck (2010); Stedman Jones (2012).

⁷⁸ De Vries (2005, p. 7).

⁷⁹ Eagleton (1991, p. 4); Heywood (1992, p. 12).

⁸⁰ See Anton Jäger’s insightful intellectual history of the pluralist origins of the term populism, and the implicit normative framework inherited by the field of populism studies. See: Jäger (2017). For one of the most influential pluralist publications on populism, see: Bell (1962).

⁸¹ Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn (2016, pp. 7-8). Similar pluralist preconceptions can be found in the approach of Mudde (2007).

⁸² Daalder (1995, p. 36).

non-ideological allows one to build coalitions and construct consensus with other parties, while appeasing one's own base with the compromises reached. In the Dutch policy field, which traditionally fulfils the paradoxically *political* role of an apolitical arbiter overarching the different political currents, the appearance of ideological neutrality is a precondition for being taken seriously.

In line with Mannheim's contention that every individual is predetermined by social context in a twofold sense, by a pre-made situation and by preformed patterns of thought and conduct, Daalder argued that the Dutch tendency to depoliticize and disavow ideology stemmed from both the practical rationality imposed by the Dutch political system and from the patterns of thought and conduct handed down historically by Dutch elites. In other words, for both practical and ideational reasons, it is not considered politically convenient to consider ideas as political ideologies in the Netherlands. This is in obvious contrast with the majoritarian systems in the US and the UK and their powerful, explicitly ideological think tanks and intellectual journals. Drawing on Daalder's groundbreaking analyses, this study takes issue with the Dutch belief in the end of ideology. It departs from the idea that ideology is ever present yet often disavowed in the Netherlands, and it frames the rise of the Dutch New Right as a return of ideological contestation and politicization.

What tends to facilitate political ideology research is of course a more general acknowledgement of the existence of a range of ideological currents. It is helpful, for example, that terms such as the New Right, conservatism, neoconservatism and neoliberalism have achieved broader scholarly recognition in the international context, and that widely acclaimed intellectual histories of these currents have been published, both from the perspective of adherents and critics.⁸³ In the Netherlands however, due to the controversial and polemical nature of basic ideological concepts, scholarly resources on Dutch political ideologies are far more limited. Fortunately, a consequence of the relative underdevelopment of ideological thought is that the Netherlands traditionally depends to a large degree on the import of political ideas from abroad. The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga famously defined Dutch intellectual life in terms of its ability to process the stream of ideas of surrounding countries.⁸⁴ Dutch intellectuals have long relied on the import of political and social thought from countries with more ideologically pronounced intellectual climates, translating them to suit Dutch needs. In this process, ideas often lose their original reference points. As we will see, a political idea taken from US neoconservatism is likely to be presented as 'realism' in the Dutch context.

Similarly, the ideas of the Dutch New Right have largely been imported from the New Right in the US and the UK. By following the process of translation, it is possible to reconnect the words and the things, to retrace Dutch political ideas to the international ideological currents from which they originally stem. Using the concept of

⁸³ On neoliberalism, see: Burgin (2012); Mirowski and Plehwe (2009); Peck (2010); Stedman Jones (2012); Walpen (2004). On neoconservatism, see: Drolet (2011); Fukuyama (2006); Kristol (1995); Steinfels (2013 [1979]); Vaisse (2011).

⁸⁴ Huizinga (1982, p. 293).

'political transfer' as developed by the Dutch historian Henk te Velde, this study conceives of the Dutch New Right as the result of a process of translation from the Anglo-American to the Dutch context.⁸⁵ The central thesis of this study, the idea that the Dutch swing to the Right can be understood as a belated and complex counterpart of the New Right backlash in the US and the UK, is grounded on an analysis of Dutch texts in conjunction with intellectual histories of the New Right in the US and the UK.

Structure of the book

The book is subdivided in three sections, each comprising two chapters. In line with Mannheim's thesis that political thought is inherently context-bound, the first section is dedicated to a critical exploration of Dutch political thought. The first chapter seeks to tackle an enigma: the rather exceptional aversion to ideology and political theorizing in the Netherlands. Why is there so much confusion surrounding basic terms in the Dutch public debate? And why does political theory play such a marginal role in the Netherlands? The chapter uses the work of Karl Mannheim, Perry Anderson and Hans Daalder to put forward a socio-historical explanation for 'the peculiarities of the Dutch'. Paradoxically, the Dutch distaste for political ideology and political theory can be explained by the historical dominance of a particular political ideology: that of organicism. A hostility to abstract thought, to theory and ideology has been identified by Karl Mannheim as a central element of this body of ideas that first originated as part of the conservative reaction to the French Revolution. The chapter describes the emergence of organicist thought in the Dutch political tradition and examines its connection with a powerful depoliticizing strain in Dutch political thinking. It explores the way in which pluralist social science came to incorporate traces of the old organicist paradigm. As a result, depoliticizing tendencies are present in Dutch academia, even if they remain generally implicit. Building on the pioneering work of Daalder and Lijphart, Dutch political history is conceived of in terms of waves of depoliticization and repoliticization, with the Fortuyn revolt as the latest wave of politicization.

While the argument of the first chapter is based on an analysis of works that were, by and large, published in the 1960s and the 1970s, the second chapter aims to offer a concrete illustration of the contemporary relevance of that argument. The second chapter uses a concrete example, the influential study *Diploma Democracy*, to show how a pluralist reading of the shift to the right in Dutch politics has helped to produce a depoliticized understanding of that transformation. In *Diploma Democracy*, the Fortuyn revolt has been presented as the result of longstanding, gradual changes in opinion, caused by large-scale anonymous and spontaneous social processes. Politically, *Diploma Democracy* is an expression of the accommodation strategy: the attempt by Dutch elites, in an echo of the 1960s, to seek to defang right-wing populism by embracing rather than contesting it. The study can be read as a scientific exponent of the historicist political language that James Kennedy identified as 'the rhetoric of

⁸⁵ Te Velde (2005).

circumstances beyond one's control'. Scientifically, the principal limitation of the pluralist approach, I argue, is the reflective or mimetic understanding of politics that is unhelpful in explaining rapid change. Instead, a more constructivist reading is proposed, which attributes a greater role to political ideas. Ideological innovation, I argue, is one of the underexplored keys when it comes to understanding the shift to the right in Dutch politics.

The second section lays out the main thesis of the book: the interpretation of the Dutch swing to the right as a belated and complex pendant of the New Right backlash in the US and the UK. The transfer of political ideas from the Anglo-American context facilitated political innovation and inspired the Dutch conservative backlash in the 1990s against existing elites and institutions. The third chapter introduces the New Right as a heterogeneous, fusionist project combining free market ideas and cultural conservatism. The Dutch New Right is analysed as the product of a rather messy process of translation of neoliberal and neoconservative ideas. It consists of an eclectic coalition of Christian conservatives, conservative liberals, conservative social democrats and provocative nihilists. In conclusion, the analysis takes issue with a still prevalent image of the nineties, as the supposed era of the end of ideologies. While this is true to a degree for the leftist spectrum, on the other side of the isle, the nineties have been a period of politicization and ideological renewal.

The fourth chapter deals with the complexity of the Dutch New Right. The crucial difference between the Dutch New Right and its Anglo-American counterparts is that Dutch conservatives have come to embrace progressive values such as women's rights and gay rights. The belated occurrence of the New Right backlash in the Netherlands meant that progressive sexual morality was seen as ingrained to such a degree that a conservative countercurrent could no longer hope to overturn it. The 'social issues' that became the subject of the culture wars in the US – women's emancipation, gay rights, abortion, drugs, euthanasia – were not up for discussion in the Netherlands. Instead, Dutch conservatives reinvented themselves as defenders of the progressive accomplishments of Dutch culture against the perceived threat of Muslim immigrants. This chapter qualifies the argument of the previous chapter. It describes the New Right current as a 'complex backlash' against the legacy of the 1960s. In other words, it is a countercurrent that selectively incorporates elements of the tendency that it opposes, while contesting it on a broader set of terrains. The chapter introduces a situational perspective on conservatism that allows us to make sense of these contradictory aspects of the Dutch conservative backlash.

The final section zooms in on two specific cases that are highly relevant to the more general thesis. The fifth chapter is dedicated to Islam critic Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and develops a relational analysis of her autobiographical writing. Due to the fact that Hirsi Ali's views on Islam are often seen as her personal opinions, comparatively little attention has been given to her intellectual development. Hirsi Ali became part of the Islamic fundamentalist movement in her teenage years, and joined an influential circle of neoconservative intellectuals after her arrival in the Netherlands and her study in Leiden. This chapter situates her writing in relation to these two formative intellectual influences. It traces the development of Hirsi Ali's perspective on Islam, which consists

of a paradoxical combination of ideas drawn from Islamic fundamentalism on the one hand and Western Orientalism and neoconservatism on the other. And it shows how these adopted views are – in important respects – in open contradiction with her personal life story, as told in her biography, *Infidel*. The chapter combines both immanent critique and the Mannheimian critique from without. In the latter case, the work of Olivier Roy on Islamic fundamentalism is used as an interpretive lens to create an alternative interpretation of her life story.

The sixth and last chapter looks at Dutch nihilism and the internet. The Fortuyn revolt coincided with the ascendancy of the internet as a major factor in shaping public opinion. After the assassination of Fortuyn and Van Gogh, the nihilist weblog *GeenStijl* developed into one of the most popular and influential websites in the Netherlands. In terms of its style and rhetoric, *GeenStijl* can be seen as an early pendant of what is known internationally as the alt-right, even though *GeenStijl* has kept more distance to the extreme right than its famous American counterpart. Using the work of Raymond Williams, the chapter considers the relation between technology and ideological form, and proceeds to trace the intellectual origins of the discourse of *GeenStijl*. The website has a nihilist orientation, clearly Nietzschean in inspiration. *GeenStijl* presents the nihilist breaking of norms and the disregard for etiquette as a progressive movement towards greater transparency. *GeenStijl's* ironic and nihilist discourse can be traced back to the Dutch literary field, in particular the work of the leading Dutch post-war writers W.F. Hermans and Gerard Reve.

The conclusion sums up the argument and expands on two central themes of this study. On the one hand, it elaborates on the contradictory nature of the conservative backlash against the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s as both a revolt and an echo. On the other hand, it addresses the common intellectual underestimation of the right, while underlining that it is exactly the widely shared belief in the power of ideas that forms the most striking feature of the Dutch New Right.

With this outline of the study in mind, let us now turn to the analysis.

Chapter 1

The peculiarities of the Dutch

Naturally all the intellectual movements transplanted here underwent the influence of the petty environment. All that was broad-minded, free and audacious had died in the souls of men. The towering figures of the seventeenth century, who could imagine them in the same country in the first half of the nineteenth century? The greatest felt it and suffered: to be Dutch and unstinted in character meant predestination to a life of tragic conflicts.

Henriette Roland Holst¹

A history that should pursue all the subtle threads from end to end might be eminently valuable, but not as a tribute to peace and conciliation. Few discoveries are more irritating than those which expose the pedigree of ideas. Sharp definitions and unsparing analysis would displace the veil beneath which society dissembles its divisions, would make political disputes too violent for compromise and political alliances too precarious for use, and would embitter politics with all the passion of social and religious strife.

John Dalberg Acton²

'Vision is like the elephant obstructing one's view'. The famous motto of the right-wing liberal Prime Minister Mark Rutte underlines the Dutch distaste for political ideas. 'If vision implies a blueprint for the future, then everything that is liberal in me resists that', Rutte stated in a prominent lecture in 2013. 'A country, a society does not fit in a mould,' he went on to say.³ What the Prime Minister seems to mean by vision is an ideal image of man and society, ordinarily contained in a political theory or ideology. Politicians tend to offer such visions as an expression of their aspirations. The task of ideology research is to analyse such visions and to situate them in a broader political or philosophical tradition. How does Rutte's vision relate to the tradition of Dutch

¹ 'Natuurlijk ondergingen alle hier overgeplante intellektuele bewegingen den invloed van het bekrompen milieu. Al het ruime, eigene, vrije, gedurfde was in de zielen gestorven: de groote mannen der zeventiende eeuw, wie kan ze zich denken in het Nederland van de eerste helft der negentiende? De besten voelden het en leden: er lag voorbeschikking in tot een leven van tragische konflikten, Nederlander en onbekrompen van inborst te zijn.' (Roland Holst, 1977 [1902], pp. 45-46)

² Acton (2007 [1922], p. 62)

³ Korteweg (2013); Speech Rutte (2013a, September 2).

liberalism? How does he use key concepts such as freedom, identity or equality? What distinguishes his vision from that of his political opponents? Which political controversies does he foreground as central to Dutch politics? Those are the questions a scholar would normally ask. The sceptical attitude of the Prime Minister complicates such an endeavour.

This aversion to vision is surprising, considering that many leading scholars see vision as a precondition for politics. In his classic *Politics and Vision*, the American political theorist Sheldon Wolin equates political theory with vision, or what he calls 'the imaginative reordering of political life'.⁴ Vision is shown by Wolin to be an essential ingredient for politics from the ancient Greeks on. The intellectual historian Quentin Skinner entertains a comparable perspective on the indispensable nature of vision for modern politics in his celebrated triptych *Visions of Politics*.⁵ Similarly, the late Dutch historian E.H. Kossmann portrays vision as a necessary precondition for the intelligibility of political life. The visions provided by intellectuals make possible the grouping of 'widely diverging interests, passions, emotions and religious views' into coherent political camps, allowing them to be articulated around a doctrine or a party, a prerequisite for a functioning modern democracy. Only by contrasting these visions, does the political landscape become intelligible to us.⁶

Some would argue that a politics without vision ceases to be politics altogether; it becomes administration.⁷ But the disavowal by the Prime Minister does not necessarily mean there is no vision guiding his politics. Paradoxically, the aversion to vision has long been considered a central theme in a dominant vision guiding Dutch politics: a political ideology called organicism. This traditional doctrine that conceives of society as a harmonious organism is known to have important depoliticizing and anti-intellectual effects, since it stresses harmony and opposes theorizing and abstract ideas. If our perspective on Dutch politics has been significantly shaped by this organicist vision, it would mean that political ideology is more difficult to discern in the Netherlands. Any study of Dutch political ideas will have to take this phenomenon into account, obscuring ideas from view.

Karl Mannheim's sociology of ideas sought to comprehend political thought as inherently bound by context and history. Departing from that perspective, any study of political ideas in the Netherlands will have to begin by considering the particularity of its political context. Quentin Skinner similarly insisted on the context-dependency of thought. He built on Austin's notion of speech-acts – the spoken word as a performative gesture, a way of doing things – to argue that political thought is 'inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention on a particular occasion, addressed to the solution of a particular problem, and is thus specific to its context in a way that it can

⁴ Wolin (1960, p. 17).

⁵ Skinner (2002).

⁶ Kossmann (1987, p. 35).

⁷ See the literature on the post-political: Crouch (2004); Mair (2013); Mouffe (2005); Rancière (1999); Swyngedouw and Wilson (2014).

only be naïve to try to transcend'.⁸ Of course, Skinner's argument referred to the great canon of thinkers that he proposed to analyse in their given historical contexts. But the same reasoning applies to political ideology research and the Dutch political tradition, which has often been identified as a highly distinctive and puzzling context.⁹

In the post-war emergence of Dutch political science, a strong tendency towards depoliticization and an antipathy towards theory and ideology were identified as pivotal elements of Dutch political culture, and a particularity of the Dutch political – and intellectual – tradition. The argument developed in this chapter, based on a review of leading political thinkers such as Hans Daalder and Arend Lijphart, is that the Dutch study of politics emerged both as a critique and an extension of that political culture. This Dutch particularity has contributed to the reality that neither the development nor the study of political thought attained the importance that it accrued in surrounding countries. What Daalder called 'the highly apolitical atmosphere in the Netherlands' can then be explained both as a reflection of the dimmed political contrasts that the Dutch political model necessarily creates, and – crucially – as a result of the lingering presence of a depoliticizing vision of politics entertained by Dutch political, academic and journalistic elites.¹⁰

Many prominent scholars have pointed to such a depoliticizing tendency in Dutch political thinking. Arend Lijphart saw depoliticization as crucial to the political culture of Dutch elites. The leading Dutch sociologist Joop Goudsblom noted that Dutch academics were part and parcel of that political culture.¹¹ James Kennedy refers to an 'ideological structure' in the Netherlands, shaping the perspective of Dutch elites in an organicist and historicist direction and leading to 'reifications of reality'.¹² Dutch historians identified a depoliticizing tendency, a 'Whig interpretation' in Dutch political history stressing gradualism, moderation and continuity.¹³ To compensate for this lingering depoliticizing strain in Dutch political thought, it becomes necessary to repoliticize Dutch politics to a certain degree, pursuing the sociological reflexivity Pierre Bourdieu called for, by 'objectifying the objectifying subject':

One cannot avoid having to objectify the objectifying subject. It is by turning to study the historical conditions of his own production, rather than by some form or other of transcendental reflection, that the scientific subject can gain a theoretical control over his own structures and inclinations as well as over the determinants whose product they are, and can thereby gain the concrete means of reinforcing his capacity for objectification.¹⁴

⁸ Skinner (2002, p. 88).

⁹ Daalder (1995); Middendorp (1991).

¹⁰ Daalder (1995, p. 29).

¹¹ Goudsblom (1967, p. 70).

¹² Kennedy (1997, p. 362).

¹³ Stuurman (1983, p. 312).

¹⁴ Bourdieu (1990, p. xii).

This chapter aims to do that by looking at the historical conditions shaping the Dutch perspective on politics. It is the role of researchers of political ideas to theorize, structure and organize political stances and ideas into more or less coherent currents or political ideologies. At the same time, the researcher can become the target of the accusation, to give arguments too much political coherence, to lend them too sharp a contrast and too stark an ideological slant. Any form of abstraction necessarily implies a reduction of complexity. As Kossmann argues: ‘Evidently, we understand neither history since the middle ages nor current affairs in a satisfactory way, if we cannot distinguish two main groups that contest one another on principal and practical matters.’ And ‘our need to understand political opinions in terms of a binary opposition, is a need for simplification, generalization, for bundling heterogeneous affairs.’¹⁵ While Kossmann considers that to be an essential public task of intellectuals in a democracy, a scholarly study needs to tread more carefully. This first chapter preemptively turns that argument around. Given that there is a propensity in the Netherlands to conceive of developments in Dutch society in a more depoliticized fashion, a more political and conflict-oriented perspective, even if it necessarily schematizes political reality, has important contributions to make.

The chapter is divided in four sections. First, it explores the relative obscurity of political ideology in the Dutch context, broadly outlining the challenge it poses for scholarly study. Second, I will introduce a historical-sociological explanation for the aversion to ideology and theory in the Dutch political tradition, as expressed in the ideology of organicism seen as a distinctive element of the Dutch political tradition. Finally, I will attempt to show how some of the organicist themes have percolated into the post-war theorizing of Dutch politics. I will conclude by considering the consequences of the preceding analysis for this particular study.

1.1 The Dutch fog

In countries with more adversarial political systems, parties openly fly their banners and boldly declare their intentions. It is perhaps no coincidence that some of the countries best known for their intellectual and political theory traditions, the US, the UK, France, Germany and Italy are political systems in which political contrasts have often been heavily accentuated. In the more consensual political culture of the Netherlands, politicians generally aim to present their views in a pragmatic language. Political visions are seen as unhelpful, unpractical or even dangerous abstractions. Ideology is often considered a pejorative term, not in the least in the intellectual field.

The Prime Minister’s aversion to vision is neither exceptional nor coincidental. His predecessor Frits Bolkestein, the former European Commissioner and leader of the right-wing liberal party (VVD) – considered to be one of the most intellectually accomplished Dutch politicians – wrote his most extensive book to warn against intellectuals and the power of ideas. In *De Intellectuele Verleiding* (The Intellectual

¹⁵ Kossmann (1987, pp. 34-35).

Temptation), Bolkestein argues that intellectuals lack the proper experience to make qualified judgements on politics. Worse even, if inexperienced intellectuals connect with the equally naïve youth, events like May '68 happen. 'Political ideas can be rather useless, or even dangerous,' the author observes, 'especially when they are wide in scope.'¹⁶ Bolkestein calls for 'the appropriate use of reason', with measured amounts of classicism and pragmatism, and 'the exclusion of ideology' to the utmost degree.¹⁷ In a similar vein, the leading political theorist and historian Frank Ankersmit has developed an elaborate theoretical defence of intellectual vagueness and obscurity – in opposition to the rationalist clarity and lucidity of the Enlightenment – as a precondition for a stable democracy. In *Aesthetic Politics*, Ankersmit cites Carl Schmitt's critique of Romantic thought as lacking clear principles, and then turn it on its head, by championing that lack of intellectual clarity as the essence of democracy:

Ideas are here like clouds: for a little while they keep their contours only to lose them a little later, or they let them melt into those of other clouds, or even evaporate into nothing. And all this lack of intellectual solidity and precision seems to serve no other purpose in practice than to avoid all conflict.¹⁸

For Ankersmit, this intellectual fogginess is the very key to democracy: 'it is exactly in this chaos devoid of principles that the unparalleled creative political power of democracy is to be found.'¹⁹ The other side of this anti-rationalist argument – also present in the writing of Bolkestein and Ankersmit – is the notion that the propensity of the theorist and/or ideologue to systematize ideas into a clear and coherent vision, ultimately leads to dictatorship and totalitarianism. The most familiar and commonly accepted argument in that line of thought – shared by many authors on the Dutch left and right alike – is the critique of utopian visions as inherently totalitarian, as argued by the influential Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis.²⁰ Mark Rutte's distaste for vision as a blueprint is most likely inspired by the work of Achterhuis. But there is a more general version of that same argument too. The conservative public administration scholar Paul Frissen states that 'visions of society as a whole, as coherent, and consistent, as an order in short, where everything and everyone fall into place and belongs', are totalitarian.²¹ That would seem to imply that the great sociological system-builders, from Durkheim to Parsons, are in fact, totalitarian thinkers. The

¹⁶ Bolkestein (2011, p. 19).

¹⁷ Bolkestein (2011, p. 22).

¹⁸ Ankersmit (1996, p. 129). Remarkably enough, Ankersmit claims that the Nazi-jurist Carl Schmitt, a radical Catholic conservative associated with the German *Konservative Revolution* current, has an unequalled 'attachment to the principles and ideals of the Enlightenment'. Ankersmit seems to confuse the opposition between Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment thought on the one hand, and metaphysical and immanent thought on the other. Whereas Schmitt is indeed a deeply metaphysical thinker, he definitely belongs to the counter-Enlightenment tradition.

¹⁹ Ankersmit (1996, p. 129).

²⁰ Achterhuis (1998). For a critique of Achterhuis' reductionist account of utopian thought, see: Oudenampsen (2016a).

²¹ Frissen (2007, p. 99).

leading sociologist and social democrat intellectual Cees Schuyt concurred that positively formulated aims were dangerous: 'Every attempt to positively formulate the design of a just society runs the risk of becoming an ideology, leading to the ossification of the design, and the enforcement of an achieved status quo.'²² A different version of that same sentiment, advocated by a leading progressive sociologist, is the horseshoe model put forward by Dick Pels, in which 'realism, pragmatism and practicable propositions' are defined as rationality, while radical thought from both the left and the right is equated with emotion and intuition, with the irrational underbelly.²³ Following this logic, the major intellectual movements from the left to the right, from the Marxist tradition to the civil rights movement and feminism, from free market thought to radical conservatism, are mere emotional outpourings. In contrast to Germany, where radical critique is seen as a condition for progress, or France with its legacy of radical intellectuals, Dutch political thought is marked by a historical aversion to conceptualize or critique society in a more systemic fashion. The Dutch intellectual is typically distrustful of the power of ideas.

Three ideological turning points

This suspicion appears to go hand in hand with a tendency to refrain from ideological analysis in Dutch political life. When one takes a cursory glance at some of the most important political shifts of the last decades, one finds that in contrast to surrounding countries, political transformations are generally not expressed or analysed in ideological terms in the Netherlands.

Take for example the rise of free market thought or neoliberalism, a political and intellectual movement that famously attained dominance under the leadership of Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s. Internationally, there is an extensive academic literature on the ascendance of neoliberalism, in the midst of a fierce battle of ideas with defenders of the old Keynesian paradigm.²⁴ The Dutch counterpart to Reagan and Thatcher was the three-term cabinet of Christian Democrat Ruud Lubbers (1982-1994), depicted in 1984 by *Time Magazine* as 'Ruud Shock'.²⁵ In contrast to the US and the UK however, there was no battle of ideas, no polarizing break with the previous political order. Perhaps 'Ruud Smog' would have been a more appropriate nickname: Lubbers' opaque and smooth verbosity gave him the reputation of a living smoke machine. He presented the neoliberal shift he presided over under the technocratic and depoliticizing slogan of 'no-nonsense' politics.²⁶ In historical accounts, the period of the 1980s is presented as a time of 'a new pacification', the onset of a long period of

²² Cited in: Van Doorn (1977, p. 16).

²³ Pels (2003, p. 26). The horseshoe model (a legacy of American pluralist thought) raises interesting questions about Pels' own work. After all, Dick Pels' life's work revolves around the study of intellectual figures at the 'irrational' end of the horseshoe, such as Jacques de Kadt and Hendrik de Man. Taking the ideas of these thinkers seriously, as Dick Pels admirably does, seems to contradict his own framework.

²⁴ Audier (2012); Burgin (2012); Crouch (2011); Peck (2010).

²⁵ *Time Magazine* (1984).

²⁶ Daalder (1995, pp. 98-99).

'ideological hypothermia'.²⁷ The apolitical character generally conferred upon the politics of that time is curious, considering the views of some of its leading protagonists. In a famous article in 1987, Frans Rutten, the powerful head of the Ministry of Economic Affairs under Lubbers, defended the reforms of the eighties as part of a long-term radical vision called *De Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* (The New Objectivity). The core of this agenda was to curtail government to its primary tasks (justice, education, roads, defence), while 'quasi-public goods' (social-security, health care, education) should be turned into markets through voucher systems. Rutten explicitly linked this vision to Milton Friedman, widely seen as one of the founding fathers of neoliberalism.²⁸

A second, closely connected case in point is the rise of the social-liberalism of the Third Way in the 1990s. Social democrat leader Wim Kok came to half-heartedly embrace free market thought as Finance Minister of the third Lubbers cabinet (1989-1994).²⁹ While Tony Blair and Anthony Giddens loudly proclaimed the social democratic embrace of the market to be a new ideology, Wim Kok kept his distance and presented his course as a form of pragmatism.³⁰ At the twenty-first congress of the Socialist International in Paris, Wim Kok advised his 'international comrades to not fly the Third Way flag too exuberantly. It is about renewal, not terminology'.³¹ It prompted the political theorist and social democrat intellectual Jos de Beus to comment on the remarkable divergence between the Dutch and the international reality: 'Strange really: almost all prominent statesmen and commentators abroad associate Kok's leadership with the Third Way, but in the kitchen of Kok himself, the Third Way seems to be a discussion for discussion's sake, which the PvdA can freely opt out of.'³² Kok's successor Wouter Bos would later conclude that 'this radically different approach was above all pragmatic. Ideology belonged to the old left'.³³

A final example concerns the immigration debate. Internationally, the rise of the New Right was accompanied by a new conservative discourse on race, nation and cultural identity.³⁴ An appeal to cultural difference increasingly replaced older doctrines of racial and biological difference that characterized the extreme right. In the UK, Enoch Powell attacked the notion of Britain as a 'multiracial, multicultural society' and Margaret Thatcher claimed that Britain was swamped by 'an alien culture'.³⁵ In the US, debates surrounding the 'underclass' and the 'culture of poverty' highlighted the cultural deficiencies of the American black population as the primary cause for its destitution. A similar culture-focused right-wing position was articulated in the Dutch

²⁷ De Rooy (2002, p. 262).

²⁸ Rutten (1993). Friedman famously wrote a paper on the topic in 1951 in which he made his affiliation to neoliberalism explicit. See: Friedman (1951).

²⁹ Rutten (1995, p. 37).

³⁰ Oudenampsen (2016b).

³¹ Zwaap (1999).

³² De Beus (2000, p. 13).

³³ Speech Bos (2010, January 25).

³⁴ See: Ansell (1997); Barker (1981); Smith (1994).

³⁵ As quoted in: Seidel (1986).

debate on race and immigration in the 1990s, when Frits Bolkestein sparked controversy by arguing that the values of Islam and the West are incompatible. Although this was clearly an ontological statement – defining a cultural essence of Islam and the West – rather than an empirical one, the principal exponents of this new conservative position presented themselves as sober realists. One of the most accomplished studies of the 1990s immigration debate, Baukje Prins' *Voorbij de Onschuld* (Beyond Innocence), describes this discourse as 'the new realism'.³⁶ Prins subtly and thoroughly criticizes the purported realist content of this new politics. But it is the realism that has sunk in over time, instead of a more explicit analysis of the ideological character of this new discourse, as has occurred in the US and the UK. In fact, one of the most critical and innovative analyses of the Dutch integration debate – by sociologist Willem Schinkel – analysed it as an epiphenomenon of the end of ideology.³⁷

As these three brief examples serve to highlight, developments that have been analysed internationally as significant ideological turning points – the neoliberal turn, the rise of the Third Way, the development of a new conservative discourse on race and immigration – are generally not described in ideological language in the Netherlands at all. Echoing Hans Daalder, whose work we will be discussing in a moment, it seems that 'many essentially political matters aren't presented as such in Dutch society'.³⁸ Rather, they are described in terms such as 'objectivity', 'pragmatism' and 'realism'. Even if we appreciate the fact that Dutch politics, due to the nature of its coalition system, is more prone to consensual and pragmatic forms of change, the stark contrast with the more ideologically inflected nature of international debates remains remarkable.

Following Mannheim's reasoning, analysing political ideas as a form of ideology requires a clearly distinguishable framework of ideas in contrast with another paradigm. The discrepancy between the two allows one to suspend the whole complex of assumptions of a given body of ideas and look at its larger ideological framework, so to say, from the outside.³⁹ Could it be that due to the political culture of consensus in the Netherlands, such a contrastive effect is more difficult to achieve? As Kennedy has argued, there appear to be no enduring, contrasting visions in the Dutch debate but rather commonly shared, consensual views succeeding one another sequentially. What seems to be continuously at stake in the Dutch debate, is to have one's ideas accepted by other parties as part of the consensus, as objectivity, realism and pragmatism. Even those on the flanks of the left and the right are quick to state that they themselves are the hard-headed realists and pragmatists. It's their opponents who are chasing a chimera. The leftist Dutch Socialist Party, confronted with the accusation of utopianism, presented itself as the party of real pragmatists, anti-utopians who

³⁶ Prins (2000). A synthesis of this study has been published in English as: Prins (2002).

³⁷ Schinkel (2007). See also: Schinkel (2012, 2017); Schrover and Schinkel (2014).

³⁸ Daalder (1995, p. 15).

³⁹ Mannheim (1971, p. 119).

opposed their sober realism to the ideology of the free market.⁴⁰ Ideology, *c'est les autres*.

The relative obscurity of ideological thought

As a result of this common aversion to ideology and political vision in the Netherlands, explicit ideological thought often retains a more covert character. In the foreword of his PhD, the influential VVD-intellectual Paul Cliteur described his conservative views as a 'forbidden faith' and compared conservatism with a 'cute girl, with which all would like to have a date, but not in public'.⁴¹ Patrick van Schie, the director of the think tank of the right-wing liberal party (VVD), argued that for a historian such as himself,

the way [ideological] principles translate themselves into policy is difficult to trace, because it occurs – consciously or not – in the 'interior' of a politician and/or behind the closed doors of the party conference room or, if the government is concerned, the meeting of the cabinet. Furthermore, in the public debate, the most intelligent course of action for a politician who needs to convince members of other parties of his or her views to reach a majority, might be to not make the ideological character of the proposal explicit.⁴²

Van Schie suggested that the Dutch post-war period was characterized by a more public and explicit ideological language, while policymaking remained largely pragmatic. In the present, he suggested it might very well be the other way around. Perhaps the narratives of the past were like the 'hydraulic organ' whose magnificent display of colour drew attention, while serving as cover for more practical realities. And perhaps the politicians of today 'remain silent about their ideology', while 'quietly crafting laws that are pervaded by their vision of man and society'.⁴³

This relative obscurity of political ideology is compounded by the lack of a proper infrastructure for the production and circulation of normative political ideas. There is no Dutch equivalent to the American Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, or the British Institute of Economic Affairs, neither is there a Dutch Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung or an explicit Third Way think tank. With the exception of the short-lived adventure of the Edmund Burke Foundation (more on that later), the Netherlands lacks the powerful, (semi-)independent and openly ideological think tanks that we find in the UK or the US, and that make the identification of ideological currents easier to accomplish. The Dutch party think tanks tend to have a modest size, eclectic stance,

⁴⁰ See: Van Raak (2012).

⁴¹ Cliteur (1989, p. ix).

⁴² 'De werkelijke relatie tussen beginselen en beleid valt vaak niet meer te traceren, omdat die zich – al dan niet bewust – voltrekt in de 'binnenkamer' van een politicus en/of achter de gesloten deuren van de fractiekamer dan wel – voor zover het bewindslieden betreft – van de Trêveszaal. In het openbare debat kan een politicus er bovendien, juist om met behulp van andersdenkenden een meerderheid voor de eigen inzichten te winnen, wel eens het verstandigst aan doen het ideologisch gehalte van zijn voorstel niet te laten opblinken.' (Van Schie and De Beaufort, 2008, p. 139)

⁴³ Van Schie and De Beaufort (2008, p. 138).

limited public exposure and little impact on the political process. More perplexingly, some of them even deny their ideological character. The publications of the Telders Foundation, the principal think tank responsible for the ideological sustenance and renewal of Dutch liberalism, are prefaced by the declaration that it was founded to research societal questions, 'without being bound to a certain ideology, dogmatism, or religion.'⁴⁴

The really powerful players in the Netherlands are the bureaucratic think tanks and advisory councils such as the SCP (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau – Institute for Social Research), WRR (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid – Scientific Council for Government Policy) and the CPB (Centraal Plan Bureau – Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis). The academic contributors to the reports of these think tanks are asked to present their ideas in a politically 'neutral' fashion, resulting in a strong depoliticizing effect on Dutch politics, and continuously recurring discussions about the neutrality of these institutions. As Zuidhof observed in his comparative research on American and Dutch think tanks, the Dutch approach is basically to 'attempt to depoliticize the debate' and to employ a variety of rhetorical strategies to remove openly ideological arguments from the discussion.⁴⁵ Peter Mair suggested that there is 'a prevailing language of politics, which obliges certain issues to be translated before they can even enter the debate, and which often acts to freeze out other alternative perspectives more or less completely'.⁴⁶ In the Netherlands, that language seems to be technocratic, objective and apolitical in appearance. When normative ideas enter the stage of Dutch political life, they are generally already filtered and translated into the language of outwardly neutral technocratic policy.

If anything, the Dutch press contributes to this apolitical atmosphere. Unlike most Western countries, where newspapers tend to have more or less explicit political profile and sometimes even align themselves with political candidates, Dutch journalists generally conceive themselves as politically neutral. With the exception of the right-wing daily *Telegraaf* and the right-wing weekly *Elsevier*, who are seen as the odd ones out, the Dutch quality newspapers – *NRC Handelsblad*, *Trouw*, *de Volkskrant* – lack a clear political profile and occupy the same vaguely centrist space. The conservative journalist H.J. Schoo, the late sub-editor of the national daily *de Volkskrant*, called this centrism the 'official state doctrine'. After the political changes in the 1960s, the Dutch press had abandoned its old ideological moorings while collectively moving to the centre:

The a priori of the differing ideologies and their demarcated visions of man and society may have disappeared, but they haven't been systematically replaced by informed (meaning the opposite of naive) empiricist curiosity. Instead, we often see subservience to what has been called the 'official state doctrine', a complex of vaguely articulated, often subconscious notions and sentiments concerning man and society. That official state doctrine, very Dutch-centred, meaning provincial, is

⁴⁴ Groenveld and Kinneging (1985).

⁴⁵ Zuidhof (2012, p. 213).

⁴⁶ Mair (1997, p. 949).

our secular religion; the posture is critical and universalistic, the content essentially pro-government and national.⁴⁷

In such a depoliticized context, the role of political ideology is difficult to ascertain due to its generally implicit nature. As a consequence, any attempt to study political thought in the Netherlands is confronted with a grave problem at the outset, since the basic concepts are often confused and contested.

Confusion of terms

In the 1980s and 1990s, the three political currents that traditionally dominated Dutch politics started to diminish in significance. The Christian Democrats (CDA) lost their powerful position in the centre of Dutch politics and civil society. Social democrats (PvdA) broke with socialist ideology and embraced the social-liberalism that later became known as the Third Way. Right-wing liberals (VVD) slowly started their turn to conservatism. The old categories lost their relevance. In an essay published in 1982, the historian Kossmann complained that Dutch intellectuals had dedicated themselves so sparingly to political theory that there was, at present, only obsolete conceptual material to work with. When the old terms were cast aside, the researcher faced a void: there was no new vocabulary to replace the old concepts with.⁴⁸

Our attempt to study the intellectual backgrounds of the Dutch swing to the right in parallel with the international New Right runs into this basic problem. There is no commonly recognized Dutch equivalent of the three currents seen as the foundational pillars of the New Right. Of its composite parts, neither conservatism, neoliberalism nor neoconservatism are clearly recognized entities in the Netherlands. Even conservatism, a foundational philosophy for most political systems, has a controversial status. The existing studies on Dutch conservatism typically start by arguing the case for its existence or by accounting for the – lamented – absence of a Dutch conservative tradition.⁴⁹ With regard to Dutch neoliberalism and neoconservatism, our troubles multiply. While the words ‘neoliberalism’ and ‘neoconservatism’ often appear in the writing of prominent Dutch social scientists, the terms are generally employed without much further qualification.⁵⁰ There exist almost no extensive studies on what these currents of thought would concretely mean in the Dutch context, and the terms themselves are often contested and conflated.

⁴⁷ ‘De apriori’s van de ideologieën en hun gesloten mens- en wereldbeelden mogen dan verdwenen zijn, zij zijn niet stelselmatig vervangen door geïnformeerde (dus niet: naïeve) empirische nieuwsgierigheid. In plaats daarvan zien we te dikwijls een onderschikking aan wat wel de “officiële staatsleer” is genoemd, een complex van slecht gearticuleerde, doorgaans onbewust blijvende noties en sentimentaliteiten over mens en wereld. Die officiële staatsleer, zeer neerlandocentrisch, dus provinciaal, is onze seculiere religie; de pose is kritisch en universalistisch, de inhoud wezenlijk gouvernementeel en nationaal.’ (Schoo, 2009, p. 21)

⁴⁸ Kossmann (1987, p. 42).

⁴⁹ Spruyt (2003); Von der Dunk (1976, 1978).

⁵⁰ See for example the references to neoliberalism in Visser and Hemerijck (1997); or the discussion of Fortuyn’s neoliberalism in De Lange (2007); or the reference to Dutch neoconservatism in Vossen (2011).

Ruud Koole, professor of political theory at Leiden University and former chairman of the social democrat party, wrote of the ‘extreme anti-statist thought of the neoconservatives’ and ‘the neoconservative views of Hayek and Mises’.⁵¹ The problem here is that neoconservatism is commonly distinguished by its positive view of the state, in contrast with neoliberalism and Burkean conservatism.⁵² Hayek and Mises are widely considered to be founders of the Austrian School, an especially anti-statist strand in the larger neoliberal movement.⁵³ Similarly, Bert de Vries, former Christian Democrat Minister of Social Affairs under Lubbers III (1989-1994), courted controversy by publishing a book in which he argued the Christian Democrat Party (CDA) had become a neoconservative party. Confusingly, he identified neoconservatism with the embrace of neoliberalism and the rejection of the corporatist welfare state, which is not a core element of neoconservatism per se.⁵⁴

To complicate matters further, prominent advocates of the same free market ideas that are commonly identified by scholars with neoliberalism have contested the validity of the term in the Netherlands. In a letter on the opinion pages of the Dutch newspaper of note, *NRC Handelsblad*, the aforementioned political theorist and VVD-intellectual Frank Ankersmit publicly cancelled his membership, out of disagreement with the ‘neoliberal path’ followed by his party.⁵⁵ In a polemical reply, his party colleague Frits Bolkestein argued that the very concept does not make sense to him: ‘I know what liberalism is, but not what neoliberalism is. Indeed: I know of no liberal who does.’ The true liberal, Bolkestein argued, is a realist.⁵⁶

Ankersmit could have told Bolkestein that the very founder of their party and a prominent inspiration for Bolkestein, P.J. Oud, explicitly identified the VVD’s programme with neoliberalism in a party conference speech in 1952.⁵⁷ Or that Friedrich Hayek, Bolkestein’s principal philosophical inspiration, has described the movement he founded by using the term neoliberalism. He could have pointed to a speech Bolkestein gave in 2001 to the Institute of Economic Affairs, widely known as Britain’s oldest and leading neoliberal think tank, created on the personal advice of Hayek. In that speech, Bolkestein lauded the think tank for having ‘equipped people such as myself with the intellectual tools to fight, and win, the great political debates of the 1980s and 1990s’.⁵⁸ He could have pointed to the international literature that describes Bolkestein as one of the standard-bearers of the European neoliberal movement.⁵⁹ Instead, Ankersmit referred to a Dutch Wikipedia page for a (unsatisfactory) definition of neoliberalism, where ‘Bolkestein is presented as the most

⁵¹ Koole (1993, p. 79).

⁵² Steinfels (2013 [1979]); Vaïsse (2011).

⁵³ See: Audier (2012); Burgin (2012); Crouch (2011); Peck (2010).

⁵⁴ De Vries (2005).

⁵⁵ Ankersmit (2009a).

⁵⁶ Bolkestein (2009a).

⁵⁷ See: Oudenampsen (2016c).

⁵⁸ Speech Bolkestein (2001, November 19).

⁵⁹ Dardot and Laval (2014).

important Dutch neoliberal'.⁶⁰ Now, that Bolkestein is the most prominent Dutch neoliberal is not necessarily an unfair assessment by the anonymous Wikipedia editor, but the incident illustrates the lack of scholarly resources on political ideologies in the Netherlands and the controversial, contested nature of basic concepts.

A similar phenomenon, this time in opposite form – a claim to a political label, contested by critics – occurred when the conservative Edmund Burke foundation was established in 2003. Founding members Bart Jan Spruyt and Michiel Visser published the *Conservatief Manifest* (Conservative Manifesto) that called for the end of multiculturalism, the undoing of the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s, the defence of the superiority of Western civilization, and a cutback in government spending, so that the Dutch would become more 'tough and responsible' and could offer 'better resistance to enemies'.⁶¹ The manifesto's strident tone and radical content was inspired on the more combative US conservative movement. In response, some of the most prominent political thinkers in the Netherlands – Jacques van Doorn, Willem Witteveen and Hans Achterhuis – took to the opinion pages to argue that the foundation's claim to the political label of conservatism was misplaced, since conservatism stood for moderation and scepticism.⁶²

Debates on political ideologies in the Netherlands somehow never seem to progress beyond this polemical stage. Of course in any political context, it is normal to have some degree of controversy over the definition of basic political terms, and there are likely to be differing interpretations of what a given political concept or tradition *really* entails. The philosopher W.B. Gallie famously referred to this phenomenon as 'essentially contested concepts', whereby the arena of political struggle extends to the very language and definitions we use.⁶³ It is certainly not necessary for everyone to agree on the definition of concepts before the debate starts. However, one would expect at least the acknowledgement of certain established interpretations of concepts and currents, which allows for informed discussion, grounded ultimately on some more elaborate academic studies on the subject. The remarkable situation in the Netherlands is the obvious absence of established interpretations, and more broadly, the apparent lack of interest in ordering and theorizing political stances and aims in the first place. Perhaps it is because the stability of Dutch democracy is described by prominent Dutch scholars such as Frank Ankersmit as dependent on intellectual fogginess and chaos devoid of principles. There seems to be some kind of circular logic at work here, since the controversial and polemical status of certain political ideologies is often mentioned as a reason not to pursue any type of scholarly work on the subject.

⁶⁰ Ankersmit (2009b). Not long after, the leading Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis included the exchange and the Wikipedia definition of neoliberalism in his book on the subject, using it as a basis for his own analysis (Achterhuis, 2010, p. 33). See also the discussion on the existence of neoliberalism in the journal of the social democrat party think tank: Hurenkamp (2014).

⁶¹ Spruyt and Visser (2003).

⁶² Achterhuis (2003); Valkenberg (2001); Van Doorn (2003); Witteveen (2005b). The same controversy soon manifested itself among Christian Democrats, who distanced themselves from both the Edmund Burke Foundation and the term conservatism. See: Jansen (2004).

⁶³ Gallie (1956).

In this context of conceptual obfuscation, the Weberian task of the scholar to attribute meaning to a given practical stand, inducing which God is ultimately being served or offended, turns out to be a complex affair.

1.2 The historical origins of the aversion to theory

The fog surrounding political ideas in the Netherlands, blurring our vision, has deep roots in Dutch politics and history. A common argument, put forward by Mannheim among others, is that ideologies have gained an identifiable form in the context of intensive political conflicts, which give rise to a ‘polarizing tendency’ in political thought. In such historical situations, there are no necessary compromises that interfere with the consistent development of a political philosophy.⁶⁴ The dramatic events of the French Revolution – what Mannheim calls its ‘magic’ – gave birth to notions of left and right, progressive and conservative thought.⁶⁵ In conditions of political polarization, the argument goes, there is a need for the political order to be thought anew, either to progressively change society from the ground up, or to usher in a top-down conservative restoration. In Mannheim’s exploration of German conservatism, the two poles of intellectual development are taken up by France and Germany. France ‘played the role of radical reconstructor of all the enlightened and rationalistic elements in consciousness’, and Germany, which experienced the most complete and radical counter-revolution, ‘turned conservative, organic, historical thought into a weapon’ to counter the threat posed by the former.⁶⁶

The other side of the coin is that in countries that did not experience the polarizing conflict between revolution and counter-revolution, there was no urgency to rethink the political order, no need to thoroughly and consistently develop a political philosophy. The difference between the more theoretical continental European tradition of social science and the more empirical Anglo-Saxon tradition is often traced back to this historical reality. In the US, this point has been made most clearly by the historian Daniel Boorstin, in his 1953 classic *The Genius of American Politics*:

The marvellous success and vitality of our institutions is equalled by the amazing poverty and inarticulateness of our theorizing about politics. No nation has ever believed more firmly that its political life was based on a perfect theory. And yet no nation has ever been less interested in political philosophy or produced less in the way of theory.⁶⁷

For Boorstin, there are no regrets. In his eyes, the search for a theory that promises an ideal society is typically continental European; it has led merely to dogmatism,

⁶⁴ Mannheim (1960 [1936], p. 269).

⁶⁵ Mannheim (1960 [1936], p. 140). See for similar conflict-centred explanations of ideology: Bobbio (1996); Kossmann (1987).

⁶⁶ Mannheim (1960 [1936], p. 138).

⁶⁷ Boorstin (1953, p. 8).

unbound intolerance and tyranny. Americans, he observed, are haunted by the fear that capricious changes in theory might imperil their institutions. This is what Boorstin calls 'our kind of conservatism': 'institutions are not and should not be the grand creations of men toward large ends and outspoken values; rather they are organisms which grow out of the soil in which they have sprung.'⁶⁸

In Britain, similar arguments were made in the post-war period concerning the connection between conflict and theory. Mannheim's argument has been passionately discussed in a seminal historical debate in the 1960s, which became known as the 'Anderson-Nairn thesis'.⁶⁹ In Perry Anderson's tour-de-force essay *Components of the National Culture*, he argued that the absence of a nineteenth-century political or social revolution in Great Britain had prevented the emergence of a theoretical social science tradition in the UK. After a kaleidoscopic revision of British social science, Anderson sought to explain the British particularity of never having produced a classical sociology. There was no 'synthetic' thought that aimed to conceptualize society as a totality, no British Durkheim, Pareto or Weber. The explanation offered is that the nineteenth-century British industrial bourgeoisie never confronted the landed aristocracy or contested its control over the political order. Instead, the two orders fused in a harmonious fashion. As a consequence, a radical ideology such as that of the French Enlightenment did not take shape and the rather aristocratic combination of traditionalism and empiricism remained the dominant mentality till late in the twentieth century:

The British bourgeoisie from the outset renounced its intellectual birthright. It refused ever to put society as a whole in question. A deep, instinctive aversion to the very category of the totality marks its entire trajectory. It never had to recast society as a whole, in a concrete historical practice. It consequently never had to rethink society as a whole, in abstract theoretical reflection. Empirical, piece-meal intellectual disciplines corresponded to humble, circumscribed social action. Nature could be approached with audacity and speculation: society was treated as if it were an immutable second nature.⁷⁰

Anderson then describes how the arrival of a generation of intellectual exiles from the European continent, most notably Popper and Wittgenstein, brought social theory to the UK and proceeded to theorize empiricism, which had been a largely anti-theoretical mentality:

British empiricism and conservatism was on the whole an instinctive, ad hoc affair. It shunned theory even in its rejection of theory. It was a style, not a method. The expatriate impact on this cultural syndrome was paradoxical. In effect, the *émigrés* for the first time systematized the refusal of system. They codified the slovenly

⁶⁸ Boorstin (1953, p. 6).

⁶⁹ Anderson (1964); Nairn (1964); Thompson (1965).

⁷⁰ Anderson (1968, p. 17).

empiricism of the past, and thereby hardened and narrowed it. They also, ultimately, rendered it more vulnerable.⁷¹

As a polemical response to the arguments put forward by Anderson and Nairn, the historian E.P. Thompson wrote a now famous text, *The Peculiarities of the English*. While accepting the force and originality of the arguments of both authors, he contended that there was, in their analysis, an ‘undisclosed model of Other Countries’, whose schematic nature served to make the case for British exceptionalism, while failing to do justice to the historical complexity of either. The discussion focussed on comparative social science and the use of theoretical models in political history. Thompson warned that a model should never ossify into a rigid dogma, but retain a provisional character, unlike the computer that only answers the ‘questions fed into it which its circuits are already constructed to answer’, where problems and contradictions ‘appear to produce only smoke and angry whirring’.⁷² With that appreciation of the provisional in mind, let us return to the Dutch context.

A country of small gestures

The reason we have briefly dwelled on this sociological-historical explanation of British intellectual culture, is that a very similar story is often told of the Netherlands: the country’s political culture is deeply marked by the absence of revolutionary upheaval and political instability. In a recent historical study aptly titled *Land van Kleine Gebaren* (Country of Small Gestures), Dutch political life is compared to cabaret rather than high drama.⁷³ In contrast to the UK, it is not the predominance but the relative lack of a landed aristocracy that precluded a polarizing confrontation between conservative and progressive forces. The principal modern caesura in Dutch politics was the Dutch counterpart to the French Revolution, the Patriot Revolution of the 1780’s and the resulting Batavian Republic of 1795, culminating in French occupation. In contrast to France, the *ancien régime* in the Dutch republic consisted of a patrician class, which was moderately liberal and rationalistic in its outlook. The lack of an established feudal-aristocratic tradition prevented conservatism from taking root, while it also precluded the need for a sustained progressive challenge to conservatism.⁷⁴

As the historian Simon Schama concluded in his study of the Dutch Patriots: ‘the possibility of a *Novus Ordo* in the Netherlands was ruled out by 200 years of republican freedom.’⁷⁵ In contrast to the French Revolution, the Batavian Republic was largely erased from Dutch historical memory, written off as a footnote to French foreign policy. It left little imprint on Dutch political and intellectual life. Efforts to rethink Dutch society were largely overshadowed by the overbearing presence of the French model. As a result, Schama concluded, ‘the primitive Dutch virtues to which those promoting a

⁷¹ Anderson (1968, p. 19).

⁷² Thompson (1965, p. 359).

⁷³ Aerts, De Liagre Böhl, De Rooy and Te Velde (1999).

⁷⁴ Von der Dunk (1976, 1978).

⁷⁵ Schama (2005, p.14).

“Patriot” or “Batavian” spirit appealed, consisted more of an ethos than an ideology⁷⁶. This preference for ethics above a more elaborate and systematic body of thought is an observation we will repeatedly encounter later on.

The springtide of the peoples, or 1848, that other epochal watershed of European politics, turned out as a mere shadow of its foreign counterparts. There was no real power behind the Dutch monarchy, no consolidated Junker-class as there was in Germany to buttress a conservative reaction, giving shape to a conservative philosophy. The rising Dutch liberal bourgeoisie hardly needed to campaign to ascertain its claims. A retarded modernization and industrialization also precluded a revolutionary threat from below from the still nascent and underdeveloped labour movement. Dutch liberalism was neither impelled forward nor backward. The result was the intellectual dearth of the nineteenth-century political developments, here expressively lamented by the early twentieth-century Dutch poet and Marxist intellectual Henriette Roland Holst:

Historical development had gifted the emancipation struggle of the 16th-century burghers the double beauty and glory that shine their light on us from the depth of ages. As a struggle for independence and freedom of conscience it is enshrined in our memory, and all the sublime heroism and intense emotions sparked by both these motives enrich and adorn it. But historical development is a frugal goddess: as rich a gift it had lavished upon the forefathers, as poor did it conceive their sons. Nowhere else did the struggle for power of the liberal bourgeoisie assume such a paltry form, nowhere else did its countenance show itself to be so cold, lacking all revolutionary enthusiasm, nowhere else was its body so nakedly exposed by the torn garments of a shabby intellectual life.⁷⁷

Both the lack of political upheaval and the absence of a theoretical intellectual culture are seen as pre-eminent Dutch particularities. Political ideas are like a scarce resource on Dutch soil, a country traditionally dependent on the import of ideas from abroad. The early twentieth-century Dutch historian Johan Huizinga famously described Dutch intellectual life as consisting of the reception of foreign ideas from surrounding countries, and testing these to see if they were suitable to the Dutch climate, marked by what Huizinga called ‘intellectual placidity’ with ‘a deep-seated element of scepticism’. Instead of having an intellectual tradition of its own, the Netherlands is described by Huizinga as a receiver and mediator of foreign cultures:

⁷⁶ Schama (2005, p. 651).

⁷⁷ ‘Aan den emancipatiestrijd der 16^{de}-eeuwse burgerij had den historische ontwikkeling de dubbele schoonheid en roem geschonken waarmee hij uit de diepte der eeuwen ons tegenflonkert. Als strijd voor onafhankelijkheid, strijd voor vrijheid van geweten staat hij in ons bewustzijn, en al het verheven heroïsme en het innig gemoedsleven dier beide motieven, verrijken en sieren hem. Maar de historische ontwikkeling is een karige godin: zoo rijke gave zij over de voorvaders had uitgestort zoo arm bedacht zij de zonen. Nergens is zo armzalig als hier de strijd om macht der liberale bourgeoisie geweest; nergens toonde zich haar gelaat zoo koud door het ontbreken van allen revolutionairen geestdrift, nergens haar lichaam zoo naakt door de scheuren van een armzalig geestelijk leven.’ (Roland Holst, 1977 [1902], pp. 75-76)

We have opened all the windows of our house, and let the sea breeze and land wind blow freely. The touch of ages has made us acquainted with the French, English and German spirit. If there is one accomplishment that allows the Netherlands to elevate itself above other countries, it is the fact that no other people has so evenly managed to process the stream of three differing cultural spheres, and so precisely managed to understand the spirit of each, as we have been able to do.⁷⁸

In the 1960s, W.F. Hermans, one of the foremost Dutch writers, sought a sociological explanation for this phenomenon. On the one hand, Dutch intellectual life was exceptional in Western Europe, due to the extraordinary dominance of religious thought in the Netherlands. On the other hand, the rapid decline of Dutch empire had diminished the importance of the Netherlands, 'a small neutral country, where intellectuals didn't occupy themselves with politics (and why would they?).'⁷⁹ While other European countries had suffered similar setbacks, the reason for Dutch intellectual anxiety was the fact that the world no longer cared about what the Dutch had to say, since they never dealt with crises 'that exceeded a fire in an ashtray'. Dutch writers and intellectuals preferred not to develop a voice of their own, and chose instead to copy foreign examples. Hermans called it 'a national trait par excellence', 'predicated on the ingrained standards of the born importer and exporter'.⁸⁰

Similarly, the German sociologist Ernest Zahn, in his classic outsider perspective on Dutch society, noted a dearth of interest in philosophical and theoretical problems in the Netherlands, especially in the political and social sciences. 'The fundamental themes of man and society traditionally weren't conceived as abstract, theoretical and intellectual questions.' Religious belief and ethical principles served as the currency of Dutch politics instead. Zahn described the country as 'an old, solid democracy that can afford to neglect political theory'.⁸¹ In terms of political thought, the Netherlands never developed a convincing body of ideas that can clearly be identified as a Dutch liberal, conservative, or socialist doctrine.

Dutch organicism

Perhaps one of the single most instructive revisions of Dutch political thought – the standard work – is the book *De Ideologische Driehoek* (The Ideological Triangle), written by Jos de Beus, Jacques van Doorn and Arthur Lehning, some of the country's leading social scientists and party intellectuals at the time.⁸² It describes the Dutch political

⁷⁸ 'Wij hebben al de vensters van ons huis openstaan, en laten er de zeewind en de landwind vrij door blazen. Aanrakingen van eeuwen her hebben ons met de Franse, Engelse en Duitse geest vertrouwd gemaakt. Als er een ding is, waarop Nederland zich boven andere landen zou mogen verheffen, dan is het feit, dat geen ander volk zo gelijkmatig de stroom van drie verschillende cultuurkringen weet te verwerken, en zo nauwkeurig de geest van alledrie weet te verstaan, als het ons gegeven is.' (Huizinga, 1982, p. 293)

⁷⁹ Hermans (1963, p. 59).

⁸⁰ Hermans (1963, pp. 15-16).

⁸¹ Zahn (1989, p. 22).

⁸² De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989). Jos de Beus (1952-2013) was chair in political theory at the university of Amsterdam and a prominent social democrat (PvdA) intellectual. Jacques van Doorn (1925-2008) is considered one of the founders of Dutch sociology and was one of the principal intellectuals of

tradition as the unbreakable triangle of three political currents – Christian democracy, liberalism and socialism. Even though all of these political movements have made extensive efforts to legitimize their positions by developing their respective doctrines, the contrasts are considerably less sharp than elsewhere. The Dutch currents, the authors argue, distinguish themselves from their equivalents abroad by the pragmatic, accommodating and anti-theoretical character of their intellectual culture. ‘Not theory, but ethically inspired visions have always been most prevalent in Dutch politics. “Principles” had a positive ring, “ideologies” a negative one, even in social democratic circles where trust in “scientific politics” had always been strongest.’⁸³ What united the different tendencies was a ‘common ideology’ that the authors call ‘organicism’, which has obvious similarities to the empiricist ‘rejection of theory’ and ‘refusal of system’ observed by Anderson in the UK:

With organic or organicist – also organologic – thinking there is a composite of notions closer to the Counter-Enlightenment than to the Enlightenment. Abstract principles, rational reasoning and universally valid values are mistrusted and even rejected; instead there is an appeal to concrete, historically developed reality. Life above doctrine. Priority is given to intuition, not construction, to experience above schooling, and tradition above dogmatism. Society is not malleable, but develops as a gradually evolving organism. It develops in that growth a body of institutions that exist in a state of balanced harmony and are vulnerable to one-sided or brusque interventions. The state is such an institution, in continuous evolution reflecting societal developments, not the embodiment of a universal principle but of unique historical situations. This short description is lacking, since organicist thought, partly due to the refusal of theory and doctrine, does not have clear contours.⁸⁴

Through a revision of the writings of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century political leaders such as Thorbecke, Quack, Treub, Groen van Prinsterer, Kuyper, Colijn, Troelstra and Van der Goes, the authors show that all Dutch political parties partook in this organicist philosophy to a remarkable extent. The particularity of the Dutch political tradition, they argue, resides in this organicist intellectual framework, which

the right-wing liberals (VVD). Percy Lehning (1944) is an emeritus professor of politics and political philosophy, a widely acclaimed expert on Rawls.

⁸³ De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989, p. 43).

⁸⁴ ‘Bij organisch of organicistisch – ook wel organologisch – denken is er sprake van een samenstel van noties die dichter staan bij de Tegenverlichting dan bij de Verlichting. Abstracte beginselen, rationele redeneringen en universeel geldende waarden worden gewantrouwd of zelfs afgewezen; in plaats daarvan beroept men zich op de concrete historisch gegroeide werkelijkheid. Het leven gaat boven de leer. Voorrang wordt gegeven aan intuïtie, niet aan constructie, aan ervaring boven schoolse kennis en aan traditie boven leerstelligheid. De maatschappij is niet “maakbaar” maar ontwikkelt zich als een organisme dat geleidelijk groeit. Zij ontwikkelt bij die groei een samenstel van instituties die onderling in harmonisch evenwicht verkeren en kwetsbaar zijn indien er eenzijdig of brusk wordt ingegrepen. De staat is een dergelijke institutie, steeds in verandering zoals ook de maatschappij verandert, niet als belichaming van een universeel beginsel maar van unieke historische situaties.’ (De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning, 1989, pp. 46-47)

has served as a decisive element of cohesion for the different political tendencies. In Michael Freeden's terms, organicism is a 'thin' ideology, connecting the three 'thick' ideological currents in an overarching framework. In the above description of organicism, we also find the historicist style of thought, as discussed by James Kennedy. It is expressed in the conception of the state in 'continuous evolution reflecting societal developments, not the embodiment of a universal principle but of unique historical situations'.

Organicism and historicism, of course, are not unique to the Netherlands, but are seen as principal elements of conservative thought more generally.⁸⁵ Mannheim describes the concept of the social organism as a conservative instrument to 'stem the spreading tide of the French revolution', by 'pointing out the impossibility of transferring political institutions from one nation to another', thus countering the 'liberal-bourgeois belief in the universal applicability of all political and social innovations'.⁸⁶ In fact, the description of organicism by Van Doorn above, closely follows the characteristics of conservatism as famously delineated by Mannheim: being before thinking; irrationality (intuition) before deduction; uniqueness before universality; the social organism instead of rational order; the social whole as more than sum of the parts; and a dynamic conception of Reason as continuously in flux. Historicist thought, Mannheim argues, developed in a closely related manner as a conservative argument against the revolutionary breach with the past.⁸⁷

What seems to be more particular to the Netherlands, is that Dutch organicism is not wholly conservative in character, it is a curious half-breed, described as mildly progressive and forward-looking.⁸⁸ The atypical conservatism of the Dutch Christian parties was deeply marked by the fact that they developed as emancipatory tendencies in opposition to an established semi-liberal elite. While the Christian parties were conservative in cultural, philosophical and religious terms, they espoused some clearly progressive ambitions on the political and socio-economic terrain: curtailing inequality, extending the franchise, dealing with the 'social question' and expanding social service provision, even if that was pursued as much as possible by delegating control to civil society (dominated by Christian institutions). The liberal current, in contrast, was progressive in cultural terms but more conservative in socio-economic terms.⁸⁹ The socialist current, finally, took on a more passive, subordinate and accommodating role than in surrounding countries. It was excluded from the national halls of power until 1939, the latest in any western democracy.

The paradoxical result could be described as a hegemonic doctrine of centrist conservatism, due to which all parties came to incorporate organicist views. The person most often identified as the godfather of Dutch organicist thought is Abraham Kuyper, the powerful Dutch leader of the protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP), the first

⁸⁵ Mannheim (1960 [1936]); Kossmann (1987); Von der Dunk (1976, 1978).

⁸⁶ Mannheim (1960 [1936], p. 304).

⁸⁷ Mannheim (1960 [1936], p. 195).

⁸⁸ De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989, p. 47).

⁸⁹ Middendorp (1991); Von der Dunk (1976, 1978); Zahn (1989).

Dutch mass political party founded in 1879. Referring to Kuyper's publications in the late nineteenth century, Zahn goes as far as calling him a political equivalent to Weber, formulating an organicist philosophy of his own. According to Kuyper, society should be understood as a living organism, with individuals as its limbs, subject to 'the laws of organic life'. Instead of theory or social science, Kuyper's reasoning took on the form of a confession of belief: one 'chose' to view things this or that way. It laid the groundwork for a deeply relativistic pluralist vision, in which different parts of the social body all were free to profess their own 'beliefs' concerning societal issues. Since beliefs cannot be debated, political differences were not expressed in conflict and logical argument, but resolved through deliberation, proportionality and mutual toleration. Organicism, Zahn argues, became the principal ideological legitimization of the Dutch political system. And its spiritual and psychological imprint, Zahn concluded in 1984, still characterizes Dutch politics today.⁹⁰

To illustrate this latter point, we can turn to an essay by the Christian Democrat politician Piet Hein Donner, former Minister of Interior Affairs in the first Rutte cabinet (2010-2012). 'The Christian Democrat view', Donner explained, 'does not depart from a notion of man as autonomous, independent and self-satisfied, it takes man created and called upon as a unique individual, who can only be himself and exist in community with others.'⁹¹ Politics is not the accentuation of differences; first and foremost, it is about social harmony and cooperation:

[The] future is not the result of political struggle, the clash of interests, or self-interest and competition, but of cooperation, involvement, mutual care, responsible stewardship of what has been given, common ambition, and the realization by everyone that, if things are to be improved, we all need to start by taking action ourselves.⁹²

Donner's organicist vision is an all-encompassing community of singular individuals, each furnished with unique moral values of his or her own, all cooperating, responsible and involved with one another. Ideology, power and conflict cannot be thought within this paradigm.

Here, what Clifford Geertz once called 'Mannheim's paradox' comes into play. Geertz referred to Mannheim's idea that it is impossible to analyse society without a series of preconceptions that ultimately form an ideological limit of one's perception of that reality. In similar fashion, Kuhn argued that a paradigm acts at the same time as prerequisite to and a constraint upon perception. 'A paradigm not only enables us to

⁹⁰ Zahn (1989, p. 151).

⁹¹ Donner (2011, p. 116). The text is a spirited defence of the Christian Democrat participation in the first Rutte cabinet (2010-2012), which was dependent for support on an alliance with the right-wing populist Party for Freedom (PVV).

⁹² 'Want die toekomst is niet de uitkomst van sociale strijd, belangentegenstelling of eigenbelang en concurrentie, maar van samenwerking, betrokkenheid, onderlinge zorg, verantwoord beheer van wat ons is toevertrouwd, gemeenschappelijke ambitie en het besef bij ieder dat, als het beter moet, ieder in de eerste plaats zelf daar actie op moet nemen.' (Donner, 2011, p. 117)

see the world, it “impels” us to see it in a certain way.⁹³ The only way to escape from such a distorting and limiting effect, in Mannheim’s view, is to step outside of that specific ideology by adopting other perspectives and keep comparing and aggregating one’s impressions.⁹⁴

Organicism is not merely a description of Dutch political thought, it also a prescription, meaning that many authors themselves use an organicist lens in analysing Dutch society. One finds the recurring complaint in the literature on Dutch politics that instances of political and ideological conflict, large historical breaks, are smoothed out or erased from the narrative. The Dutch political system, as the political theorist Siep Stuurman observed in his trailblazing Gramscian interpretation of pillarization, has often been explained in terms of a ‘Whig interpretation of history’, stressing gradualism, moderation and continuity.⁹⁵ The historian De Wit has written of a similar tendency in Dutch eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historiography, in which the political moderates and the practice of pacification are championed as the driving force of Dutch history. He called this ‘the conciliatory school’.⁹⁶ Their argument is not devoid of contemporary relevance.

The ideological triangle as an organicist perspective on Dutch politics

The aforementioned classic overview of Dutch political thought, *De Ideologische Driehoek* is a good example of the effects of the organicist paradigm acting as a constraint upon perception. What we see happening in the study is that the folds of political history – phases of ideological conflict and politicization – have been ironed out. The organicist character of the study comes to the fore in its treatment of the first modern political conflict in the Netherlands: the Batavian Revolution of 1795-1798. It provided the first Dutch constitution and laid the foundation for the modern Dutch nation state. After the revolution followed French occupation and finally, restoration of the Dutch monarchy in 1815. As part of that political restoration, the Batavian period was written out of Dutch history. When attaining power in 1815, the Dutch king Willem I ordained an *oublie total du passé*, and Dutch historians have long complied. Recent scholarship aiming to restore the significance of the Batavian Revolution shows that there were clear political motives at work: the repudiation of the revolutionary Dutch liberalism of the late eighteenth century was made easier by rewriting history and presenting the entire revolutionary period as a French import product.⁹⁷

In *De Ideologische Driehoek*, a similar political gesture is made: the revolutionary period is described as ‘the French Time’, after which the authors approvingly observe

⁹³ Boucher (1985, p. 158).

⁹⁴ More specifically, the discussion concerning the ‘Mannheim paradox’ revolves around Mannheim’s conviction that intellectuals can transcend their own situational context and look at ideologies from an outside position, while at the same time maintaining the position that political thought is inherently context-bound. See: Seliger (1977, pp. 133-141).

⁹⁵ Stuurman (1983, p. 312).

⁹⁶ De Wit (1965); see also the discussion by Daalder (1990, pp. 64-80).

⁹⁷ Grijzenhout, Van Sas and Velema (2013, p. 12); Rutjes (2013).

that 'the term itself places this period outside of national history'.⁹⁸ This move is replicated in subsequent periods when historical breaks or conflicts occur. The immediate aftermath of the Second World War was a time of significant socio-economic polarization, especially between social democrats and liberals.⁹⁹ There was intense ideological debate concerning the construction of the Dutch welfare state, in which both parties accused each other of leading the country on a path to totalitarianism.¹⁰⁰ In the book, there is no mention of this important conflict, the authors write of 'the post-war consensus'.¹⁰¹ In the 1980s, another significant conflict arises over the shift from Keynesian demand-side policies to a neoliberal supply-side model. *De Ideologische Driehoek*, published in 1989 (Reagan and Thatcher are still in power) posits the end of ideology. To be fair, the book rightly describes the development of a 'neoliberal state doctrine' in the right-wing liberal party (VVD) in the 1980s, which is described negatively as an overambitious departure from 'the organically grown Dutch intervention state'.¹⁰² But at the same time the authors observe the erasure of ideology from the Dutch political sphere, a process that is described as destiny:

In a complex society such as ours, in which at a thousand different points, government, bureaucracy and society have become interwoven with one another in what can be called an intervention state, politics can no longer be a grand and compelling adventure.¹⁰³

Here we are presented with the organicist vision of society as a complex organism of harmoniously balanced institutions vulnerable to one-sided or brusque interventions as cited before, now applied to Dutch society. Another clear expression of organicist ideology is the notion that the Dutch intervention state is not the product of a rationally thought out plan, or the application of human will on society. No, it is 'organically grown'. Professionalism and technocracy, the book proceeds to suggest, have turned the politician from a supplier of societal visions, into a licensed distributor of policy options:

The term policy is in this process key. It has nothing of what characterised politics before: utopia's, ideals, visions, societal images, doctrines, traditions; neither does policy give much space to that other aspect of democratic politics: political imagination, independent judgement, personal conviction, government by discus-

⁹⁸ De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989, p. 13).

⁹⁹ Daalder points out how 'in the 1960's and afterwards an oversimplified and therefore false image developed of the period 1945-1960. This period would have been one of mere conformism, indolence and repression of dissenting opinions'. Instead, Daalder highlighted the fundamental disagreements in that period. See: Daalder (1990, p. 216). See also: Maas (1984).

¹⁰⁰ Mellink (2017); Oudenampsen (2016c).

¹⁰¹ De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989, p. 57).

¹⁰² De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989, p. 110).

¹⁰³ De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989, p. 59).

sion. Policy is cool, rationalist, as far as possible grounded in quantitative analysis, specialist, scientific, or pretending to be scientific. Policy means technocracy. This does not imply disapproval. Politics is not autonomous, but reflects the nature and development of the societal order. [...] This is reality. Politics will have to accord with reality to not render itself powerless.¹⁰⁴

In and of itself this is a deeply utopian vision of the end of ideology, prefiguring the narrative sketched by Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History*. It is an organicist version of Marx' utopian vision of a communist society where conflict has disappeared. Important here, too, is the assumption that politics is not autonomous, but a reflection of 'the nature and development of the societal order', in accordance with the organicism definition cited above, which describes the state as an institution 'in continuous evolution reflecting societal developments'. Politics cannot shape reality and society, it can only align itself with it. Here we also recognize the historicist ideas mentioned in the introduction, seen by the American-Dutch James Kennedy as key to the accommodating response of Dutch elites to the events of the 1960s. It was the historicist belief that 'politics will have to accord with reality', that informed the decision to move along with the protest movements of the 1960s and not mobilize a conservative countertendency. These core organicist motifs can still be encountered in many different corners of the Dutch intellectual landscape.¹⁰⁵

We can now better understand Bolkestein's argument against intellectuals and abstract ideas, Paul Frissen's critique of systematizing thought, Dick Pels' aversion to radical ideas, Cees Schuyt's reservations concerning positively formulated designs or Frank Ankersmit's celebration of intellectual fogginess and his opposition to Enlightenment thought. These are all contemporary Dutch reiterations of some of the major conservative, historicist and organicist motifs as outlined by Karl Mannheim.¹⁰⁶ We can conceive of them as the Dutch counterpart to Boorstin's celebratory interpretation of American moderate conservatism and the country's distaste for theory. Or we can understand them in Perry Anderson's words, as a Dutch variant of the British elite's deep, instinctive aversion to abstract, synthesizing thought where

¹⁰⁴ De Beus, Van Doorn and Lehning (1989, p. 60).

¹⁰⁵ Even the country's most critical minds seem to have difficulty escaping the organicist mindset. The leading sociologist Willem Schinkel has without doubt written the most extensive Dutch critique of organicist thought, *Denken in een Tijd van Sociale Hypochondrie* (Thinking in a Time of Social Hypochondria). However, Schinkel's criticism of the Dutch body politic as a hypochondriac, and his fascinating corporal metaphors of Dutch society as a bulimic or overweight body, are themselves deeply organicist. Schinkel's book reads as a symptom of its own diagnosis: Dutch society as an organic whole, suffers from a self-perception as an organic whole. See: Schinkel (2007, 2012, 2017).

¹⁰⁶ Ankersmit's work is probably the principal intellectual expression of contemporary Dutch historicist ideology, which in his case, is coterminous with conservative liberalism. See especially his work *Aesthetic Politics* (Ankersmit, 1996). A contemporary exponent of organicist conservatism is the work of Paul Frissen, who not coincidentally heads an education programme for top public officials at Tilburg University. See: Frissen (2007).

'empirical, piece-meal intellectual disciplines corresponded to humble, circumscribed social action'.¹⁰⁷

'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle,' Marx stated in the opening lines of the *Communist Manifesto*. 'All hitherto existing Dutch history has been the history of harmonious and gradual development,' the Dutch organicists reply in unison. As Jacques van Doorn, the author of the introduction of *De Ideologische Driehoek*, has postulated in apodictic manner: 'Everything in the Netherlands has developed in gradual and moderate fashion.'¹⁰⁸

The 1960s and the return of political and social theory

The final question, before we turn to the next section, is why developments in the Anglo-Saxon countries and the Netherlands took such a different turn. In the UK and the US, the arrival of *émigré* intellectuals from continental Europe contributed to the emergence of prominent theoretical traditions in the post-war period, of differing political tendencies; figures such as Leo Strauss, Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ernst Cassirer, Karl Popper, Ludwig Mises, Isaiah Berlin, Hanna Arendt, Karl Mannheim, Karl Polanyi and Ralph Miliband. The great friction and political battles of the 1960s, which spawned the powerful political and intellectual movements of the New Left and the New Right, appears to have functioned as a Mannheimian 'polarizing tendency' in political thought, furthering the development of these intellectual currents. Both the UK and the US have since become known as preeminent producers (and consumers) of political ideas.

In the Netherlands, there was an opposite development towards the abandonment of theory. Theoretical influences from Germany were present – most notably the *Amsterdamse School* founded by Norbert Elias, the sociology tradition in Groningen inspired by the *Frankfurter Schule*, and a more theoretical strand in Dutch historical research – but ultimately failed to take hold. Den Uyl, the leader and foremost intellectual figure of post-war social democracy, who himself was very much formed by German intellectual culture (Mannheim in particular), observed in 1956

a heartfelt aversion to everything that suggests ideology in the sense of a rhetorical superstructure. Especially in the Netherlands, where German philosophy, literature and science, pre-eminently ideologically oriented, has also exerted such a strong influence on the socialist movement, there is after the war a liberated shift to Anglo-Saxon empiricism. Experiment is preferred above theory, at least above theory that aims to be more than analysis and hints at ideology.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Anderson (1968, p. 13).

¹⁰⁸ Van Doorn (1977, p. 3). In this essay, Van Doorn outs himself as a centrist (organicist) conservative, an ideology that he defines in terms of its stress on historical continuity.

¹⁰⁹ '[D]e hartgrondige afkeer van alles wat naar ideologie zweemt in de zin van een fraseologische bovenbouw. In het bijzonder in de Nederland, waar Duitse wijsbegeerte, literatuur en wetenschap bij uitstek ideologisch gericht, ook op de socialistische beweging zo'n grote invloed heeft uitgeoefend, is er na de oorlog een bevrijd aanknopen bij Angelsaksisch empirisme. Men verkiest het experiment boven de

The same combination of the relative absence of political conflict and theoretical underdevelopment can be identified in the Dutch 1960s. As noted before, Dutch elites, informed by their organicist and historicist beliefs, consciously chose to not mobilize a conservative response, thus precluding the articulation of a truly conservative doctrine. At the other end, the fact that the ‘cultural revolution’ was seen as the inevitable march of history by Dutch elites, meant that the baby boomers did not really have to argue their point in any elaborate or structured fashion. Appeals to their youth and the changing times were effective enough. As the baby boomer and social democrat intellectual Bart Tromp argued in his book *Het Falen der Nieuwlichters* (The Failure of the Renewers), the lack of resistance resulted in intellectual superficiality on the side of the protest generation:

The big problem of the renewal as it has occurred in recent years, seems to me that it faced too little resistance. Victories were generally achieved without much struggle and the result often restricted itself to a change in style and language. The intellectual profundity needed to comprehend the ambivalences of modernization, was never achieved nor was its absence felt. That’s why the ideological apparatus of renewal in the 1960s and 1970s increasingly became the instrument of a new conformism in the 1980s. As a result, the renewal not only failed, it turned into its opposite; especially when the renewers responded to their critics, who complained that the emperor wore no clothes, by trying to silence them with ideological Styrofoam.¹¹⁰

The critics who complained about the superficiality of the Dutch New Left were silenced with ‘ideological Styrofoam’, Tromp’s funny metaphor for intellectual vacuity. Similar, somewhat bitter portrayals of the intellectual underdevelopment of the protest generation were voiced by Dutch intellectuals of the older generation. In a long essay published in 1968 in literary journal *De Gids*, the prominent Marxist historian Annie Romein-Verschoor sharply condemned the romantic anti-intellectualism of the youth revolt of the 1960s. ‘Why does the contemporary youth harbour the baseless notion that intellect and engagement are each other’s polar opposites and that the intellect is “old” and engagement “youthful”?’¹¹¹ In a prickly aside, Romein-Verschoor compared the romantic glorification of technology and modernization by 1960s poet Simon

theorie, in elk geval boven de theorie die meer wil zijn dan analyse en naar ideologie zweemt.’ (Den Uyl, 1978, p. 40)

¹¹⁰ ‘Het grote probleem van de vernieuwing zoals die zich in Nederland in de afgelopen jaren voltrok, lijkt mij te zijn dat ze op te weinig tegenstand stuitte. De overwinningen werden veelal zonder slag of stoot behaald, maar daardoor beperkten ze zich te vaak tot veranderingen in stijl, in taal. De intellectuele diepgang, alleen al nodig om zicht te krijgen op het janushoofd van veel nieuwlichterij, werd niet bereikt en ook niet gemist. Daardoor begint het hele ideologische apparaat van de vernieuwing in de jaren zestig en zeventig in de jaren tachtig in toenemende mate instrument te worden van een nieuw conformisme. De vernieuwing faalt zo niet alleen: ze slaat om in haar tegendeel, zeker waar de nieuwlichters van toen critici die over de ontbrekende kleding van de keizer beginnen, al bij voorbaat met ideologisch piepschuim monddood proberen te maken.’ (Tromp, 1981, p. 36)

¹¹¹ Romein-Verschoor (1975, p. 64).

Vinkenoog with the futurist Marinetti and Mussolini's slogan *vivere pericolosamente*. More fascinating even, is that from the other end of the political spectrum, the conservative historian E.H. Kossmann lamented the fact that the protest generation had failed to make their project intellectually explicit. As if pleading for his enemy to openly show himself, Kossmann requested a political theory from the Dutch *soxiant* *huitards*. A clear vision from the progressive opponent was needed to assist Dutch conservatives in synthesizing their inchoate and 'extremely divergent resentments and ideals into a coherent project'.¹¹² As we will see in later chapters, the first was certainly no precondition for the latter.

So far, in this chapter I have tried to find an explanation for the strong aversion to ideology and theory in Dutch political culture. Using the work of Mannheim and Anderson, the chapter introduced a historical theory that connects the lack of conflict and revolutionary upheaval in Dutch political history with the relative underdevelopment of theoretical and ideological thought. Subsequently, I have identified a broadly shared meta-ideology overarching the different political currents: that of organicism (and its appendage: historicism). And I have tried to show how this organicist (and historicist) paradigm can act as a lens that highlights continuity and harmony in Dutch history and serves to further marginalize conflict and ideology, giving the impression that the Dutch have indeed achieved the end of ideology. The next section aims to demonstrate how this depoliticizing tendency has been central to the development of Dutch political science.

1.3 Depoliticization and the Dutch study of politics

As in the UK, where the empiricist refusal of system was systematized and transformed after the Second World War, in the post-war period a reworking of Dutch organicism took place, as the Dutch political science discipline started to take shape, both in opposition to, and in extension of organicist thought. Dutch social science developed at a relatively late stage in history. Its foundations were laid after the Second World War, following in the footsteps of American pluralist thought. In that process, the Dutch study of politics came to incorporate some of the central themes of the organicist paradigm: the reflective tenet of politics as a passive expression of societal development and the aversion to conflict and ideology. In 1964, the same year that Anderson and Nairn initiated the debate on British elites and intellectual life, Hans Daalder gave his inaugural lecture as chair in the science of politics at Leiden University, titled *Leiding en Lijdelijkheid in de Nederlandse Politiek* (Power and Passivity in Dutch Politics). The lecture grew out to become a foundational text and Daalder a founding father of Dutch political science. The text can also be read as a close parallel to the historical-sociological explanation aimed at by Anderson and Nairn. It looks like a typical case of parallel but separate trajectories of the development of political ideas,

¹¹² Kossmann (1987, p. 44).

since Daalder appears to have been unaware of the work being done by his British counterparts.

In his lecture, Daalder explored the major obstacles for the study of politics in the Netherlands. He wondered what could explain the 'Dutch tepidity towards political life' and the country's peculiar 'highly apolitical atmosphere'.¹¹³ Of course, Daalder was writing in a time when a prominent international debate was taking place on the slackening of political passions and the waning of ideology more generally. The pluralist Daniel Bell had famously published *The End of Ideology* in 1960, in which he identified modernization and the increasing complexity of state intervention as the underlying trends. Daalder similarly noted that in large parts of the western world 'the complex negotiation and the concrete goal dominate, where once revolutionary, eschatological hope and counter-revolutionary fear and repression prevailed'.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, Daalder contended that the apolitical atmosphere he observed in the Netherlands had particular Dutch roots.

There was certainly no lack of subject matter to lend itself for political conflict in the Netherlands. For Daalder, the crucial factor needing explanation was the fact that 'many essentially political matters aren't presented as such in Dutch society'.¹¹⁵ He located the key to this phenomenon in the behaviour of Dutch elites that had long pursued 'a more or less conscious policy of depoliticizing key political issues'. As a result, politics in the Netherlands was perceived by the larger population to be a largely technocratic and tedious affair, the private domain of the various political and administrative elites. It contributed to a 'large distance between those that make policy and those that are subject to it'.¹¹⁶ The lack of clear political contrasts and meaningful choice for the electorate led to widespread political disenchantment and passivity, which could, in times of crisis, foster the appeal of extremism. In his inaugural lecture, Daalder developed a wide-ranging historical-sociological explanation of the Dutch predilection for depoliticization, in which he distinguished five different elements. Since the text is not available in English, I will briefly reproduce his argument here.¹¹⁷

First, history had endowed the Netherlands with a particular elite political culture, which Daalder called 'regent mentality' after the regent class of the Dutch Republic. Dutch public office had grown from a peculiar marriage of the pluralistic regent traditions dating back to the Dutch Republic of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and the incomplete adoption of Napoleonic centralization under French rule. The 'regent mentality' was the fruit of this marriage. With this term, Daalder referred to the belief of Dutch elites that political authority was not based on popular sovereignty, it was seen as self-evident and self-legitimizing. Dutch elites did not necessarily see

¹¹³ Daalder (1974a, p. 10).

¹¹⁴ Daalder (1974a, p. 10)

¹¹⁵ Daalder (1974a, p. 12)

¹¹⁶ Daalder (1974a, p. 13)

¹¹⁷ Parts of the argument are present in his chapter in a volume edited by Robert Dahl, see: Daalder (1966). Daalder has been criticized for his stress on historical continuity and his lack of attention for material factors, such as industrialization. For a materialist critique of Daalder's historical account of Dutch political culture, see: Stuurman (1983, pp. 307-336).

themselves as representatives of the people, nor did they engage in political controversies and conflicts on the people's behalf. This 'regent mentality' was reinforced in the twentieth century by the fact that the first mass political party was the Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP). In line with Christian anti-revolutionary ideology, justification of political power was sought in conservative notions of natural inequality, the rule of the wise or the natural order. The result, Daalder observed while pointing to the contrast with the more self-asserted and competitive British political elite, is an establishment that 'doesn't see or show itself as such'. The Dutch elite does not 'engage with conviction in the public political struggle, but isolates itself in private, while consciously conforming itself'. In so doing, Daalder contended, 'it robs us of public politics', presenting not only the electorate, but also the Dutch political scientist with a rather nebulous image.¹¹⁸

Second, the 'regent mentality' had been able to maintain its hold on Dutch society due to the fact that the impact of the differing Dutch emancipation movements, liberals, Protestants, Catholics and socialists, had been partial and fragmented. Here the argument closely resembles Perry Anderson's, only with more actors involved. Each political movement brought a democratizing impulse, as synthesized in a famous line by Van Vollenhoven, mentioning respectively the founding fathers of the liberal, Catholic, Protestant and socialist Dutch currents:

'First Thorbecke learned the merchant to look up from his account book and pipe rack, and understand his political rights and duties, then Schaeapman and Kuyper learned the petty bourgeois and farmer to look up from counter, chisel, cows; Domela Nieuwenhuis and Troelstra have released the spirit of the worker from his machine.'¹¹⁹

However, due to the fact that none of these movements were able to confront the political establishment on their own, they fused with the existing elite rather than opposing it as a whole. The result, Daalder argued, was a particular form of political ambiguity. Outwardly, the emancipatory parties were focused on testimonial politics, professing the ethical principles of their current and socializing their base. Inwardly, the elites of the oppositional currents refrained from effective political organization and mobilization to realize these principles. They accepted the overarching framework in which they were accommodated, resulting in a conciliatory attitude towards government and the eager acceptance of positions and resources granted to them. This,

¹¹⁸ Daalder (1974a, p. 18).

¹¹⁹ This harmonious vision of a shared movement towards emancipation has been justifiably criticized. The liberal and Christian currents weren't merely movements of emancipation, they also acted as conservative bulwarks in opposition to emancipation. Here Von der Dunk's remark mentioned earlier, concerning the mixed character of Dutch liberalism and Christian conservatism needs to be considered. 'Eerst heeft Thorbecke den koopman geleerd, op te kijken van zijn kantoorboek en zijn pijpenrek, en zijn staatkundige rechten en plichten te verstaan; toen hebben Schaeapman en Kuyper den burgerman en den boer leeren opkijken van toonbank, beitel, koeien; Domela Nieuwenhuis en Troelstra hebben den geest van den fabrieker losgemaakt van zijn machine.' (Daalder, 1974a, p. 22)

Daalder concluded, largely to the benefit of the colourless 'quasi-neutralistic currents' in either movement.

Third, the diffused character of the political and policy-making process reinforced political obscurity. In any coalition of a sufficiently broad basis, there was space for each party to claim certain political measures and to distance itself from other, unpopular decisions, attributing them to coalition partners. Parties could switch between their testimonial role in parliament and their administrative role in government. The results of elections left ample room for interpretation, and could even be ignored to some extent, allowing the coalition game to continue unhampered. A similar situation occurred at the policy-level, due to the complex interaction with a range of different advisory councils, civil society organizations and corporatist bodies, in which anonymous bureaucrats and specialists were often more at home than politicians themselves. In such a context of complex multi-party negotiations, the leaders of organizations necessarily have a large degree of autonomy with respect to their base. The elaborate play with responsibilities that developed in this space, obscured the outsider's vision. According to Daalder, this clashed with the norm stipulated by John Stuart Mill: 'It should be apparent to all the world, who did everything, and through whose default anything was left undone.'¹²⁰ The relative stability of the Dutch political system was thus bought at the expense of a passive or frustrated electorate, who are denied insight in the political choices that are made and have few possibilities to enforce meaningful change. Daalder concluded by citing Montesquieu's *De L'Esprit des Lois* to the effect that if the electorate is deprived of possibilities to oust an unpopular government, 'the people upon seeing it once corrupted would no longer expect any good from its laws; and of course they would either become desperate or fall into a state of indolence.'¹²¹

Fourth, in this context there are clear political benefits in depoliticizing key issues, which Daalder called 'depoliticization-out-of-political-interest'. While the Dutch political field was structured along two major axes, the religious-secular cleavage and the socio-economic left-right cleavage, political action along these axes soon revolved around distribution rather than competition. In this process of depoliticization, the state was neutralized, an organ deciding over a 'correct' balance of interests, according to commonly agreed norms, in which every subgroup is 'done justice', and each is tolerated and guaranteed their own space.¹²² Daalder elaborates mainly on the socio-economic issue. The politically dominant Christian parties had made the appeasement of social conflict the key point of their programme. Due to the fact that the base of the Christian parties was heterogeneous in its class makeup, socio-economic polarization represented a political threat. To counteract such a development, opposing socio-economic interests – trade unions and employers associations – were organized together politically in the same Christian denomination. Complicated compromises

¹²⁰ Daalder (1974a, p. 24).

¹²¹ Daalder (1974a, p. 25). Here I have integrated Daalder's third and fifth point – the diffuse responsibilities in respectively politics and policy – into one.

¹²² Daalder (1974a, p. 27).

were made behind closed doors, often expressed in technocratic language, to gloss over conflicts of interests. In this process, Daalder highlights the role of a 'centrist mythology' that serves to deny conflict, and that allows decrees and accords to be clothed in the appearance of scientific neutrality.¹²³ As a paradoxical result of the dominance of Christian parties, scientific technocracy became the lingua franca of Dutch politics. For citizens and political scientists alike, this made Dutch politics a difficult process to understand. 'Centrism, centralization, and depoliticized expertise create a complex and obscure political space in which even experts are often lost,' and where constituents feel ill represented.¹²⁴ When the political effort of mobilization and struggle is eclipsed, passivity of the public is the natural result. As long as the economy does well, this leads to a situation Daalder describes with reference to the Dutch writer Simon Carmiggelt: 'being satisfied in a dissatisfied manner.'¹²⁵ In less fortunate times, Daalder warned, passivity can lead to extremism: 'recalcitrant extremism can paradoxically be the unexpected flipside of a centrist satisfaction.'¹²⁶ Daalder's analysis seems to have lost little relevance when considering political developments at the turn of the millennium.

Finally, Daalder argued that the press and the universities had an important role in reproducing the regent mentality. There was seldom an attempt to break through the depoliticized façade of Dutch politics, since both institutions considered themselves to be a functional part of that system.¹²⁷ In a response to the lecture, the leading sociologist Joop Goudsblom observed that Dutch universities functioned as the site where Dutch political elites were trained and the attitudes conducive to the politics of accommodation were reproduced. Even 'the modern university graduates' Goudsblom wrote in the 1960s, 'have generally tended without questioning to adopt this paternalistic attitude, known in Dutch as *regentenmentaliteit*, or "regent mentality".'¹²⁸ I will explore the contemporary relevance of Goudsblom's point in the next chapter.

The study of politics as the unmasking of political power

There are interesting parallels between Daalder's lecture and Daniel Bell's end of ideology thesis. Both observed the substitution of ideological competition with technocratic deliberation surrounding the 'correct' distribution of resources. Both noted the marginalization of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary tendencies that had made their mark on the political landscape of the 1930s. But Daalder saw the end of ideology in Dutch politics as a form of mystification rather than political reality. It was an unnatural – and undesirable – effect of the depoliticizing tendency of both the Dutch political system and the political philosophy of Dutch elites: the 'regent mentality'. The task of the scholar, Daalder argued, was to question depoliticization.

¹²³ Daalder (1974a, p. 28).

¹²⁴ Daalder (1974a).

¹²⁵ Daalder (1974a).

¹²⁶ Daalder (1974a).

¹²⁷ Daalder (1974a, p. 36).

¹²⁸ Goudsblom (1967, p. 70); Lijphart (1968, p. 133).

Daalder ended his lecture by outlining a research agenda and defining a spirited mission statement for the study of Dutch politics. In the eyes of Daalder, the task of the political scholar is one of unmasking:

The science of politics can only contribute to a real insight into Dutch political realities, if it does not hesitate in desecrating many sacred cows. The masking of political power and political ambitions is in all political systems a means of governing. All scientific research into such phenomena runs the risk of thwarting established interests. If the need arises, political science will need to enter into conflict with these interests, or else it risks becoming an accessory. As the result of research and reflection it offers, not so much normative guidelines as more openness and a better understanding of relationships.¹²⁹

While there is much to admire in this critical motto that Daalder would continue to invoke over his long and fruitful career, the concluding Weberian appeal to a non-normative science of politics is perhaps somewhat misleading. After all, the power and thrust of the argument in Daalder's lecture derives from a thoroughly normative appeal to an open and competitive conception of democracy as expressed in the liberal philosophy of Stuart Mill and Montesquieu. In an early critical essay that formed the basis for his inaugural lecture, Daalder is even more explicit:

Pressure politics and political struggle aren't just the essence but even the justification for the existence of political parties. This seems a truism, but it is necessary to repeat it, seeing that an entire mythology has developed that obscures this. A mythology that speaks of the perversion of Politics by politics, that posits an objective 'common interest' against 'narrow' party interests and speaks of the 'proportional' distribution of burdens, according to an 'objective criterion'. Oftentimes such a myth serves as a cover for actions of self-confident political and economic interest groups. But it is even more the result of an anti-political tradition, whose roots can be traced back to constitutional law, in as much as it abstracts from parties; to the aforementioned bureaucratic and sometimes clearly technocratic *regentenmentaliteit*, in which one rules for 'the' people; and to the entire Dutch party system, which constantly necessitates compromises that give off a pretence of objectivity, on the one hand because all those who are 'compromised'

¹²⁹ 'Tot een wezenlijk inzicht in de politieke realiteiten in Nedeland kan de wetenschap der politiek slechts dan bijdragen, indien zij niet aarzelt zich in te laten met onderzoek naar de binnenzijde van vele heilige huisjes. Versluiting van politieke macht en politieke strevingen is in elk politiek stelsel een der middelen van regeren. Elk wetenschappelijk onderzoek van dergelijke verschijnselen loopt daarom het risico in strijd te geraken met gevestigde belangen. De politieke wetenschap zal het conflict daarmee zo nodig moeten aandurven, wil zij niet in feite tot medeplichtige daarvan worden. Als resultaat van onderzoek en doordenking biedt zij niet zozeer normatieve richtlijnen, als wel meer openheid en beter begrip van samenhangen.' (Daalder, 1974a, p. 36)

will defend the decision as such, on the other hand, because some parties also have *internal* interests in not sketching essential oppositions too clearly.¹³⁰

At the time of writing this essay, Daalder worked at the University of Amsterdam as an assistant for Professor Barents, who prevented him from publishing the text. 'Icebags on the head!' and 'do not presuppose popular sovereignty!' were Barents' injunctions to his hotheaded assistant.¹³¹ Daalder's argument is founded on an implicit comparison of the consensual Dutch political system to the competitive Westminster model. A comparison that is normative in character. Daalder's perspective closely resembles that of the American political scientist Schattschneider, who had published *The Semi-Sovereign People* in 1960. In this now classic work, Schattschneider defended the essential role of conflict in modern democracy, as a precondition for popular participation.¹³² And he critiqued the pluralist school in American political science for its elitist conception of politics (Schattschneider will be discussed more extensively in the next chapter).

More important for our purposes here, however, is that the lecture that Daalder had written as a trenchant critique of the Dutch political system, was soon turned into its very opposite by his close colleague and collaborator Arend Lijphart. In a curious twist of fate, the lecture became the key inspiration for a political theory that would serve as a legitimization of the political mentality Daalder originally set out to censure: Lijphart's famous model of consociational democracy. While always retaining a critical distance to Lijphart's work, Daalder proved surprisingly supportive of this effort. He personally brought over Lijphart from the US and introduced him in the Netherlands, and effectively worked with him in establishing Lijphart's theory on the international academic scene, dominated by the American pluralist tradition. In so doing, political science seemed to take on the accessory role Daalder had warned about in his credo.

Arend Lijphart and the legitimating formula

After finishing his PhD in political science on Dutch decolonization in 1963 at Yale University, the bulwark of the American east-coast elite, the American-Dutch scholar

¹³⁰ 'Politieke pressie en politieke strijd zijn niet alleen de essentie, maar zelfs de rechtvaardiging van de politieke partijen. Dit schijnt een truïsme, maar het is het nodig het te herhalen, aangezien er een gehele mythologie gegroeid is die dit verdoezeld. Een mythologie die spreekt van de perversering van de Politiek door de politiek, die tegenover de "enge" partijbelangen een objectief "algemeen belang" postuleert, en spreekt over "evenredige" verdeling van de lasten, volgens een "objectieve maatstaf". Verschillende malen dient een dergelijke mythe tot schild voor acties van zelfbewuste politieke en economische belangengroepen. Maar meer nog is zij het resultaat van een antipolitieke traditie, waarvan men de wortels moet zoeken in het staatsrecht, voor zover dat van partijen abstraheert, in de eerdergenoemde ambtelijke en soms duidelijke technocratische regentenmentaliteit waarin men voor "het" volk regeert, en in de gehele aard van het Nederlandse partijstelsel dat constant tot compromissen dwingt waarop een schijn van objectiviteit afstraalt, enerzijds omdat alle "gecompromitteerden" het voorstel als zodanig zullen verdedigen, anderzijds omdat sommige politieke partijen ook *intern* belang hebben bij een niet te scherpe tekening van de wezenlijke tegenstellingen.' (Daalder, 1990, pp. 91-92, italics in original)

¹³¹ Daalder (1990, p. 81).

¹³² Schattschneider (1960).

Arend Lijphart went on to write the single most famous text on Dutch politics. In 1968, Arend Lijphart published *The Politics of Accommodation*.¹³³ It became the textbook description of the Dutch political system, identified as a 'consociational democracy'. The notion of consociationalism, a seminal topic of discussion in comparative politics, refers to a particular brand of politics that had developed in societies that were deeply divided in ethnic or religious terms. More specifically, the term refers to an elite political culture of overarching compromise and non-competitive acceptance of ideological differences to ensure political stability. Lijphart proposed it as an alternative model to the more competitive and majoritarian Westminster model of parliamentary democracy in the US and the UK. Lijphart depicted the Netherlands as the primary example of this alternative political model, next to countries such as Belgium, Austria and Switzerland.

Lijphart's study draws heavily on the analysis by Daalder, only with opposite appreciation. Daalder saw the dominance of depoliticization and the wilful practice of obscuring political contrasts and responsibilities as a shortcoming of Dutch democracy; Lijphart defended these practices as necessary for containing societal cleavages and praised them as key to the strength of Dutch democracy. Daalder deplored the large distance between the leaders and the led; Lijphart saw the freedom of Dutch elites to act independently from their base as vital to the success of overarching elite cooperation. Daalder lamented the political apathy of the Dutch electorate as a breeding ground for extremism; Lijphart lauded political passivity, or deference, as a cornerstone of democratic stability. And finally, while Daalder aimed to unmask the centrist mythology governing Dutch politics, Lijphart's work can itself be read on an ideological level as an expression of that mythology, its codification in pluralist theory and its extension to the terrain of political science.

Lijphart's basic argument is that Dutch elites developed a particular political culture in the early twentieth century, a specific set of 'rules of the game', to deal with the fragmented nature of the country's political landscape. Not coincidentally, this elite political culture contained elements of Kuyper's organicism, in particular the stress on harmony and the pragmatic toleration of differing political and religious beliefs rather than ideological contestation. For Lijphart, 'the pragmatic acceptance of ideological differences which cannot and should not be changed,' was central to Dutch political culture. 'The fundamental convictions of other blocs must be tolerated, if not respected. Disagreements must not be allowed to turn into either mutual contempt or proselytizing zeal.'¹³⁴ The major innovation is that Lijphart introduced an eschatological element: without the political culture of depoliticization, Dutch society would erupt into a semi-Hobbesian civil war. Due to the fact that the country was divided from 1917 to 1967 into four minority socio-religious groups – Protestants, Catholics, socialists and liberals – the elites of these groups gave rise to an overarching politics of accommodation to keep the country stable and governable. This political reality was

¹³³ Lijphart (1968).

¹³⁴ Lijphart (1968, p. 124).

neatly captured in the eloquent and powerful metaphor of pillarization: the four separate pillars united in a stable structure by a common roof: the culture of elite accommodation. Under the consociationalist system, the subcultures each build their own public infrastructure, often facilitated by the state: schools, universities, newspapers, radio and later television channels, political parties, trade unions and employer federations, housing corporations, culture and sports facilities, even neighbourhood life could be segregated in terms of denomination. Lijphart's study describes the emergence of this system in the beginning of the twentieth century, and its decline in the 1960s, with secularization and the rise of the 'neo-democrat' protest movements.

On a more theoretical level, Lijphart's study was intended as an amendment to American pluralist theory, which held that the homogeneity of the electorate and cross-cutting cleavages (groups and individuals having multiple and overlapping affiliations with differing class, ethnic and religious identities) were a precondition for democratic moderation and political stability. These cross-cutting cleavages were deemed absent from the Netherlands, leading the intellectual godfather of pluralism, Robert Dahl, to drily remark to Daalder: 'You know, your country theoretically cannot exist.'¹³⁵ Lijphart even cited Robert Dahl, to the effect that civil war was deemed a real possibility in such instances. In contrast, Lijphart argued that the Dutch case showed that deeply divided societies could still be governed in a democratically stable fashion, if elites were aware of the grave dangers of political disintegration and prudently took action to dampen and pacify conflict while maintaining a 'healthy element of authoritarianism'.¹³⁶ Lijphart famously called this the self-denying prophecy.

Depoliticization was one of the most important 'rules of the game'. Echoing the ambiguity Daalder wrote of, Lijphart observed that ideological discourse served to socialize the base of the different pillars and obtain voter adherence, while at the intralite level, politics was decreed to be technical, pragmatic and collegial. The compromises arrived at by different coalition governments had to be described in a depoliticizing language that appeased all parties. Potentially destabilizing ideological conflict had to be curtailed to keep the system manageable. One way of doing that was the rule of proportionality: making decisions in a proportional manner, dividing resources equally. Another way of depoliticizing matters was to deliberately clothe decisions in a technocratic language, so that ordinary voters could not understand them. As Lijphart observed, Dutch elites engaged in 'complicated economic arguments and the juggling of economic facts and figures incomprehensible to most people'.¹³⁷ 'The art is to present political matters which tend to evoke emotions and can lead to discord in society, as if they are not political matters at all, but issues that can be dealt with according to objective, established principles of economic doctrine, of accounting

¹³⁵ Daalder (1974b, p. 606).

¹³⁶ Lijphart (1968, p. 179).

¹³⁷ Lijphart (1968, p. 129).

(distribution), or law.¹³⁸ In other words, the depoliticizing technocratic rationality criticized by Daalder as ‘centrist mythology’ became a centrepiece of Lijphart’s theory. The most dangerous political controversies for the stability of the Dutch political system are those that cannot be resolved through rules of proportionality. In that case, Dutch elites resort to a conscious policy of putting things on ice, not addressing them. Lijphart called this the ‘icebox policy’, ‘allowing a vexatious issue to be temporarily frozen.’¹³⁹

Over the years, critics have argued that Lijphart’s model paints an overly schematic picture at best, and a rather deceptive one at worst.¹⁴⁰ One of the most significant criticisms is that Lijphart’s argument is inherently tautological: the political system that divided Dutch society in pillars was supposedly created to further political stability. While at the same time, the extent of pillarization was used by Lijphart as an indication of how intensely divided Dutch society was, and why pillarization was needed for stability in the first place. There is little doubt that Dutch elites actively fomented socio-religious fragmentation, by creating the very educational institutions that divided people. The attitudes of elites were, more often than not, a driver of fragmentation rather than a response to it.¹⁴¹ A second key objection is that crosscutting cleavages were in fact prominent features of the Dutch political context. After all, the Christian subcultures brought together people of different class affiliations, and functioned as a bulwark against class polarization. Lijphart’s premise of the ever-present threat of social disintegration – or even civil war – has since been refuted as unfounded.¹⁴² A third objection is that Lijphart sketches a harmonized model of four political currents proportionally dividing resources, while it is more reasonable to describe Dutch pillarization in terms of the dominance of the Christian bloc that managed to exclude social democrats from power until the onset of the Second World War. Alternative and more plausible explanations have described the genesis of the Dutch political system as a control mechanism.¹⁴³ A result of, on the one hand, a successful attempt by Catholic and Protestant forces to stave off an emerging labour movement and contain the forces of modernization, and on the other a contest between Christian and liberal currents over control of the Dutch state apparatus, leading to the political compromise of pillarization and proportionality.¹⁴⁴

Despite the model’s shortcomings, Lijphart’s theory of accommodation has continued to exert a pronounced influence over Dutch political science, sociology and public administration, as a foundational text.¹⁴⁵ Its description of Dutch political culture at the elite level has become, rather ironically, a self-fulfilling prophecy, as

¹³⁸ The Dutch translation of *The politics of accommodation* is a little bit more extensive on ‘the rules of the game’, at times I have used that version. See: Lijphart (1976, p. 135).

¹³⁹ Lijphart (1968, p. 125).

¹⁴⁰ Middendorp (1991); Scholten (1987); Stuurman (1983); Van Schendelen, (1984).

¹⁴¹ Daalder, (1984).

¹⁴² Scholten (1980).

¹⁴³ Andeweg and Irwin (2002, p. 34).

¹⁴⁴ Scholten (1987); Stuurman (1983).

¹⁴⁵ Andeweg and Irwin (2002).

Lijphart's work became a central reference point in the political socialization of Dutch elites at universities. *The Politics of Accommodation* became a manual on how to do Dutch politics. As we will see in the next chapter, the basic black-or-white argument – accommodate or disintegrate – still resonates powerfully in Dutch political life today. This lasting authority can perhaps partly be explained by the important ideological function that Lijphart's theory served in underpinning the Dutch political system. In his 1964 inaugural lecture, Daalder referred to Gaetano Mosca's elite theory and his notion of the need for a 'political formula' legitimizing the exercise of power. Authority, in more egalitarian-democratic times, needs 'an ideological justification'.¹⁴⁶ Daalder went on to trace a short history of Dutch conservative-liberal theories legitimizing authority. I would suggest that Lijphart's theory of the politics of accommodation can be read on such an ideological level, as a post-war extension of that conservative-liberal tradition. The fear of instability, social disintegration and civil war was much overstated, but the theory can be analysed in terms of an origin myth or a semi-Hobbesian social contract theory that served to legitimize the relatively closed and hierarchical Dutch political system, while giving a positive twist to the passivity of the electorate.

If organicism was the governing ideology of pillarization, Lijphart's theory became its modernized successor. Not for nothing, Lijphart's 'rules of the game' contained important overlaps with organicist thought as articulated by Kuyper: the stress on harmony, the toleration of the views of political opponents, the negative appraisal of competition, and the mimetic understanding of political power, in which politics and media mainly reflect pre-existing identities, instead of (also) contributing to the forming of those identities. If we compare Lijphart's *The Politics of Accommodation* to *The Ideological Triangle*, it becomes clear that the latter is a restatement of Lijphart's metaphor in terms of political thought: a historical description of the pillars, united by the roof of a shared ideology of organicism.¹⁴⁷ Lijphart's theory was both a descriptive model used to analyse how the Dutch political system worked, and a prescriptive, normative theory that proclaimed how the Dutch system was supposed to work. Democratic stability was best served by the curtailment of democratic participation and by depoliticizing the most important political issues. Like its organicist predecessor, Lijphart's pluralism stresses stability, gradualism, and deliberation. It tends to ignore or erase from the picture: power relations, conflict and ideology. It is a 'Whig interpretation' of Dutch politics.

The 1960s and the breakdown of the politics of accommodation

The political turmoil of the 1960s threw Dutch political culture into disarray. Lijphart's landmark study appeared just at a time when the Dutch system of pillarization started to fall apart. In the 1960s and 1970s, the pillars rapidly disintegrated due to a process of secularization and modernization, going hand in hand with open contestation by new

¹⁴⁶ Daalder (1974a, p. 15).

¹⁴⁷ What this harmonious model omits or rather obscures, are the anti-systemic tendencies within the political mainstream, for instance the polarization strategy, pursued by the social democrats to varying degrees of intensity in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. See: Maas (1984); Mellink (2011).

social movements. In an afterword to his book, Lijphart wrote of a breakdown of the politics of accommodation. He saw it as part of a transformation from consociational democracy (fragmented electorate, cooperative/closed elites) to a cartel democracy (homogeneous electorate, cooperative/closed elites). The dissatisfaction caused by cartel democracy gave rise to a 'neo-democratic ideology' that challenged the closed character of Dutch politics. Lijphart saw this democratizing impulse as a worrying source of instability, 'undermining the homogeneous political culture of cartel democracy.'¹⁴⁸ The irony is that Lijphart's theory formed a major inspiration for the 'neo-democrats' criticizing the system. One of the most significant 'neo-democrat' voices was the leading journalist and essayist Henk Hofland who wrote a powerful and unsparing takedown of the Dutch political elite in 1972, titled *Tegels Liften* (Lifting Tiles). He based himself on the work of Lijphart and used it to frontally attack the Dutch authorities that he famously accused of having 'colonized' the Dutch citizen. In so doing, Hofland gave the wheel of Dutch political theorizing yet another twist, reverting back to Daalder's original critical intent. What was written as an instruction manual for Dutch elites on how to maintain political order, now became an instrument for the decolonization efforts to come:

Reading Lijphart's book made me extremely content, since it confirmed the sentiment many of us walked around with, lacking scientific understanding. How do the elites manage to persuade the common people to move in the direction they desire, wilfully complying with peace and order?¹⁴⁹

Hofland gave voice to a strong sentiment in the 1970s that the Dutch political system was not, in fact, very democratic. The problem was not so much malevolent despotism, but 'the sentiment held by many an administrator, authority, politician, director and magistrate, that they had the monopoly to "scheme and concoct"'. The problem was that Dutch elites, once in private, had a different set of political values and priorities, than they let on towards their base. It was not a typical kind of authoritarianism, but rather 'the continuous taking of "calm, considerate decisions" hidden under the magic of secrecy and a suitable ideology for the occasion'.¹⁵⁰

In 1974, ten years after his inaugural lecture on 'the regent mentality', Daalder returned to the topic, this time with opposite conclusions. The politics of accommodation, he observed, had given way to a period of politicization with a different set of rules of the game. The strategy of depoliticization identified by Lijphart as central to Dutch politics, had been exchanged for a progressive insistence on 'unmasking the ideology of the establishment'. Meanwhile, in Dutch parliamentary politics, the traditional toleration of opponents and the reduction of politics to that of finding a 'correct' technocratic balance of interests, had given way to open contestation. It formed part of the 'polarization strategy' of the social democrats and

¹⁴⁸ Lijphart (1968, p. 234).

¹⁴⁹ Hofland (1972, pp. 93-94).

¹⁵⁰ Hofland (1972, p. 79).

the newly formed, smaller progressive parties, in order to break the traditional dominance of the Christian centre. In the words of Daalder: 'polarization to form an exclusive majority'. A series of attempts were made at forming a progressive political bloc that could attain an electoral majority.

Over the years, Daalder's personal enthusiasm for democratization and politicization had subsided, not in the least due to his negative personal experiences with the Dutch student movement and the push for democratization at Leiden University. Yet it was his 1964 lecture and the writings of Lijphart and Hofland that became an important reference point in the attempts to transform and democratize Dutch politics. Youth movements emerged that challenged the 'regent mentality', which soon became an established expression. Also the progressive majoritarian strategy was partly inspired on Daalder's critique of Dutch political culture. In particular the progressive Shadow Cabinet of 1971-1972, copied from the UK, formed a clear attempt at introducing elements of the more open and competitive Westminster model in Dutch politics. While a clear progressive majority was never reached, the polarization strategy resulted in the leftist Den Uyl cabinet (1972-1977), generally seen as the high tide of the progressive wave in the Netherlands.

This period of politicization proved to be an interlude. As we have seen in the introduction, the progressive wave was accommodated into a new 'prudent-progressive' paradigm. The protest generation soon distanced themselves from their radicalism, and became a functional part of the institutions they had sought to drastically transform. From 1977 on, scholars identified a return to the political patterns of old, leading Lijphart to conclude that while the pillars had gone, the roof of elite accommodation remained.¹⁵¹ 'It is as if some of the old rules of the game that Lijphart once identified for Dutch politics, have returned, if only in another guise,' Daalder observed in 1984.¹⁵² With one big difference: the political ambiguity of the pillarized parties (ideological towards the base, pragmatic at the top) changed into a more monistic technocratic political culture. Daalder described the appetite for politicizing issues in the 1970s – 'for some, politicization has become a goal in itself – with reference to Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, and his dream of the 'Political Kingdom': 'a means to save humanity by entering into one hundred percent political activity.'¹⁵³ In contrast, the no-nonsense technocratic atmosphere that enveloped Dutch politics in the 1980s and 1990s can best be described as the dream of the 'Post-political Kingdom', a society where politics had ostensibly been reduced to administration.

¹⁵¹ Lijphart (1989, pp. 139-154). There is no dominant image or theory of Dutch political reality that has emerged after depillarization. It is difficult to come up with a metaphor as alluring as that of pillarization. Perhaps one can argue that instead of the multiple pillars and the roof, the Dutch political system now consists of a single pillar, following the description of the depoliticized Dutch political system of the nineties as a cartel or a one party state. See: De Rooy (2002, p. 278).

¹⁵² Daalder, (1984).

¹⁵³ Daalder (1974a, p. 39).

1.4 The return of consensus critique

That dream did not last long. In the 1990s, a new wave of politicization emerged. This time, the signs had been reversed: the challenge to the prevailing consensus came from a conservative undercurrent while the political establishment was now portrayed as the 'leftist elite'. The 1960s critiques of Dutch political culture were now taken up by the right. When the right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn started his career as a right-wing commentator in the early 1990s, he began by highlighting the problems of Dutch consensus democracy. 'A long tradition of building consensus, has made us into true specialists in subduing conflict and conceiving of pragmatic solutions,' Fortuyn argued in his pamphlet *Zonder Ambtenaren* (Without Bureaucrats). 'Handling conflict by exploring our differences in perspectives and experiences is not one of our strengths. A major tradition of debate concerning societal, philosophical and religious questions is lacking.' For Fortuyn, adopting his characteristic tone of motivational speaker, the clash of ideas was a prerequisite for modernization, and even a way to 'release emotional energy necessary to realize our creative potential'.¹⁵⁴

According to Fortuyn's analysis, inspired on the work of Daalder, Lijphart and Hofland, the pillars of old had disappeared, but the overarching roof of elite political culture had remained. Perhaps the composition of the governing elite had become more diverse, but Fortuyn noted that Dutch elites still behaved in accordance with Daalder's regent mentality. They kept on running the country in a rather closed fashion, without much democratic participation. Only now they had become an insulated political caste, lacking a pillar or social base legitimating their decisions:

Most of our institutions, together with the organs of formal democracy, are faced with a problem of legitimacy. The traditional rank and file have long since disappeared or have been significantly reduced, but the bureaucracies run by professionals keep on governing, without the legitimacy provided by the pillars of old.¹⁵⁵

Paraphrasing Hofland, Fortuyn pleaded for the 'political decolonization of the Dutch citizen'. The accomplishments of the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s had led to an emancipated, independent and self-assertive citizenry, who no longer needed the welfare state nor the attentions of paternalistic Dutch elites. Fortuyn now equated emancipation with the curtailment of the state and the embrace of the market. The inevitable rise of the free market, the processes of European unification and economic globalization meant that Dutch bureaucratic institutions needed to be radically curtailed and reformed. The political culture of consensus formed an obstacle to market reform that needed to be cleared:

¹⁵⁴ Fortuyn (1991, p. 7).

¹⁵⁵ 'De meeste van onze instituties kampen, evenals de organen van de formele democratie, met een legitimatieprobleem. De achterbannen van weleer zijn reeds lang verdwenen of sterk uitgedund, maar de bureaucratieën, gerund door professionals, besturen door, zonder daartoe te zijn gelegitimeerd door de zuilen van weleer.' (Fortuyn, 1991, p. 9)

Too often it [consensus society] rewards conformism and discourages dissidence; too often it promotes convention and hinders renewal; too often it takes care of the insiders and hinders the outsiders. Too frequently it contributes to the atrophy of the community while undermining its vitality; too frequently it standardizes where diversity is needed; too frequently it sticks to procedures where flexibility could offer a solution.¹⁵⁶

Fortuyn initially focused his consensus critique on the economy, but he would soon develop a similar position when it came to immigration and multiculturalism. Open and sharp debate on immigration and Islam was needed to deal with the problems of integration and to defend Dutch values.

We find a similar, paradoxical mobilization of the critiques of the 1960s in the work of the conservative social democrat Herman Vuijsje. His bestselling critique of Dutch political correctness, the book *Correct*, was inspired on the work of Hans Daalder. For Vuijsje, the main problem with Dutch political culture was its passive and accommodating character, its *lijdelijkheid* (passivity), a reference to the title of Daalder's 1964 lecture. Vuijsje proposed that the major failure of the baby-boomer generation consisted of having drawn the wrong conclusions from the Second World War. The real lesson of the war was not to guard against the revival of racism and fascism, since these phenomena never amounted to much in the Netherlands, in the eyes of Vuijsje.¹⁵⁷ The problem was political passivity and accommodation. By being passive in the face of immigration, segregation and criminality, the baby boomers had repeated the mistakes of their parents. Rather than contesting the politics of accommodation wholesale, the baby boomers had become 'new regents' themselves. They had simply substituted the religious and sexual taboos of their parents for a series of new totems and taboos springing forth from the antiauthoritarian and antiracist ethos of the 1960s.¹⁵⁸

Vuijsje employed the intellectual version of the jujitsu move, in which the momentum of an opponent is used against him or her. The taboo-breaking ethos of the baby boomers was now mobilized against the progressive ideals of the baby-boom generation themselves.¹⁵⁹ Vuijsje's rhetorical strategy of presenting an impressive array

¹⁵⁶ 'Te dikwijls belooft zij conformisme en ontmoedigt het tegendraadse, bevordert zij het gangbare en remt vernieuwing, zorgt zij voor de gevestigden en hindert de buitenstaanders, draagt zij bij aan atrofïering van het maatschappelijke weefsel en ondermijnt de vitaliteit, uniformeert zij waar veelkleurigheid op haar plaats is en zweert zij bij procedures waar flexibiliteit een uitkomst kan bieden.' (Fortuyn, 1991, p. 9)

¹⁵⁷ In that sense, Vuijsje is a principal intellectual exponent of what Gloria Wekker has called 'white innocence', the Dutch way of dealing with the postcolonial legacy, in which Dutch culture is described as innocent and inherently non-racist. See: Wekker (2016).

¹⁵⁸ Vuijsje (2008 [1997], p. 80).

¹⁵⁹ Vuijsje's analysis is fast-paced, appealing and polemical, but his argument often lacks coherence. There is an open contradiction in his core thesis. On the one hand, he indicts the baby boomers for failing to break with the passivity and conformism of the old 'regent mentality'. On the other hand, he blames baby boomers for 'having annihilated the old elite' and for refusing to adhere to the old regent mentality and 'flexibly adapt themselves to the renewals experienced as historically inevitable'. In sum, the baby

of social problems as the singular result of totems and taboos dating back to the 1960s, became a leitmotif in the swing to the right in Dutch politics.¹⁶⁰ Vuijsje's line of reasoning would later be used by the conservative social democrat Paul Scheffer, who explicitly referred to Lijphart to condemn the traditional Dutch 'politics of accommodation' for its failure to integrate newcomers and for its relativist conception of Dutch national identity.¹⁶¹

Taking a step back, we can see how Vuijsje's argument is a form of ideology critique, employing the typical register of the pejorative conception of ideology as identified by Terry Eagleton: 'I view things as they really are; you squint at them through a tunnel vision imposed by some extraneous system of doctrine.'¹⁶² By presenting the newly emerging conservative paradigm as courageous realism and the old 'prudent progressive' paradigm as stifling conformism, the conservative undercurrent of the 1990s could present itself as a new wave of emancipation from the yoke of the 'regent mentality'. The swing to the right was thus portrayed as yet another historical episode in the endless, Sisyphean task of ridding the Netherlands from ideology.

1.5 Conclusion

At first impression, the Dutch context seems like the ground zero of political ideology. To use Gertrude Stein's famous expression: 'there is no there there'. The aim of this chapter has been to contest that vision, and to better understand how ideology works in the Netherlands, which turns out to be a fascinatingly complex and contradictory affair. Paradoxically, the Dutch aversion to ideology and theory can be traced back to the historical dominance of a particular political ideology: that of organicism. While organicism is generally seen as a core element of conservative thought, in the Dutch tradition it has a more politically ambiguous character, and can even be seen as mildly progressive and forward-looking. The organicist aversion to conflict, doctrine and theory has long been a powerful sentiment in Dutch politics. It has had an important depoliticizing effect on our perspective of Dutch politics. In accordance with the organicist vision, Dutch political history has more often been conceived in terms of harmonious compliance with historical development, rather than in terms of political and ideological competition. The argument of this chapter is that Dutch political science emerged in the post-war period both as a critique and an extension of that depoliticizing tendency. While Hans Daalder criticized the 'centrist mythology' for

boomers are simultaneously too radical and not radical enough; too much and not enough in thrall to Dutch regent mentality. See: Vuijsje (2008 [1997], p. xix).

¹⁶⁰ Taken as a whole, the political character of Vuijsje's argument differs markedly from that of Fortuyn. As a conservative social democrat, Vuijsje is no fan of the free market. In fact, in his book *Correct*, he (erroneously) portrays the neoliberal reforms of the 1980s as yet another unwanted outcome of the anti-authoritarian ideals of the 1960s. Despite these differences, Fortuyn and Vuijsje shared a common position due to their critique of the 'leftist elite' and their desire to contest the progressive consensus on cultural issues.

¹⁶¹ Cited in: Uitermark (2012, p. 66).

¹⁶² Eagleton (1991, p. 3).

clouding our view of the conflicting interests in Dutch politics, Arend Lijphart defended depoliticization as central to Dutch stability and build his famous theory of political accommodation around it. Lijphart's model certainly contains inaccuracies and even some distortions. But if we approach it as an elite theory (rather than a theory of pillarization), it is still of relevance today. It continues to be a central reference point, both for those seeking to defend the Dutch political establishment, and those seeking to challenge it.

Returning to James Kennedy's framework of Dutch paradigm shifts as outlined in the introduction, there are four points we can take away from this discussion for the analysis of the Dutch swing to the right. First, in his account of the transformation in the 1960s, James Kennedy made special mention of organicist and historicist thought as influential in the accommodating attitude of Dutch elites. He argued that those ideas fulfilled a functional role in Lijphart's politics of accommodation:

Historicism fulfilled an important ideological function in the politics of accommodation. For elites with very heterogeneous convictions, 'the hand of history' with its ostensibly unmistakable indications provided a basis on which a common consensus policy could be articulated. Even if not all agreed with the direction the hand was pointing towards; in the search for a common conviction, pragmatic concessions to the inevitable seemed a good way to make decisions.¹⁶³

Following Kennedy, a similar dynamic can explain the exceptional speed and breadth of the swing to the right in the Netherlands in the 2000s. As in the 1960s, it is the existing Dutch elites, their tendency to move with 'the spirit of the time' and their accommodating attitude that is an undervalued element in explaining the profundity of the changes in the Dutch political climate. The next chapter will expand on this issue.

Second, the tendency of Dutch elites to pacify conflict can serve as an explanation for the observation by Kennedy that in the Dutch context, differing political perspectives tend to succeed one another diachronically, rather than synchronically confronting each other head-on. In the US and the UK, the baby boomers were seen as a divided generation, spawning both the New Left and the New Right. In the Netherlands, in contrast, the image is that of a generalized progressive movement in the 1960s and 1970s, and a generalized conservative counter-reaction that materializes at a much later point, surfacing in the 1990s and finally hitting it off politically in the 2000s. This perhaps also explains the attraction of a generational narrative of political change in the Netherlands: generations become the embodiment of the aforementioned 'hand of history', and serve as a depoliticized indication of the path of the future. It could explain

¹⁶³ 'Ten slotte vervulde het historisme een belangrijke ideologische functie in de "pacificatiepolitiek". Voor elites met zeer uiteenlopende overtuigingen werd "de hand van de geschiedenis" met haar ogenschijnlijk onmiskenbare aanwijzingen een basis waarop consensusbeleid kon worden ontworpen. Weliswaar was niet iedereen het eens over de richting waarin de hand wees, maar al zoekend naar een gemeenschappelijke overtuiging leken pragmatische concessies aan het onvermijdelijke een goede manier om beleid vast te stellen.' (Kennedy, 1995, p. 18)

why the baby-boomer generation became such a central signifier for the conservative countermovement of the 2000s, to the point that the Fortuyn revolt was seen as a rebellion against that generation as such. This generational perspective is alluring, but it omits the fact that some of the most incisive critics of the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s were baby boomers themselves, with Fortuyn, Vuijsje and Spruyt as the most obvious examples. It also further obscures the fact that the changes in the 1960s and 1970s were led by the so-called *oorlogsgeneratie* (the silent generation) born before the Second World War, people like Den Uyl and Hofland, who had the required age to occupy positions of power to lead the change in the 1960s and 1970s.

Third, the political breakthrough in the 2000s of the conservative undercurrent can be interpreted, like the 1960s and 1970s, as another period of politicization. A time in which the dominant paradigm enters into crisis, resulting in a breakdown of consensus politics. In the 2000s, the rules of the conflict model as identified by Daalder in the 1970s entered back in operation, this time centred on the 'unmasking of the multicultural ideology of the establishment'. The climax of this new period of polarization has been the first Rutte cabinet (2010-2012), arguably the most right-wing government in Dutch post-war history. It can be seen as the conservative counterpart to the progressive government of Den Uyl in the 1970s. Its formation can fittingly be described as 'polarization as a means to form an exclusive majority'. The official promise of the first Rutte cabinet was a policy that those on the right 'could lick their fingers to'. This in flagrant contradiction with Lijphart's rules of proportionality and depoliticization. In terms of establishment critique, the revolt of the 2000s contains obvious parallels to the 1960s and 1970s. In both periods, we see a radical critique of consensus politics, a celebration of the breaking of taboos, a challenge to the entire political system, an appeal to referenda and political reforms, and a reliance on new communication technologies (first television, then the internet) to break open what is perceived as a closed regime.

Fourth, as a consequence of the Dutch consensus model, and the organicist and historicist traditions of political thought, political transformations are not generally expressed or analysed in ideological terms. Mannheim argued that a 'polarizing tendency' in political thought is a precondition for the development of clearly delineated political ideologies. The consensual character of Dutch politics and the toleration extended towards opponents appears to preclude such a development. Periods of politicization could be a relative exception to that rule, when there is a functional need for ideology to formulate a new paradigm and to identify and challenge the existing paradigm. In such a situation, ideology is needed to clearly delineate one's views from the old paradigm and to rally supporters to one's cause. At the same time, there is an obvious attraction in presenting the new ideological paradigm not in explicitly ideological terms but in a more neutral fashion as realism, pragmatism and objectivity, or simply as the wave of the future.

So far, the argument has revolved largely around the debates of the 1960s and 1970s. In the next chapter we will zoom in on a contemporary example of the relation between the politics of accommodation and Dutch academia, applied to the swing to the right in the Netherlands.

Chapter 2

The science of depoliticization¹

‘You can’t fight history.’

‘Ah, interesting. And who makes history?’

‘Movements. Trends. Elans. Processes. Not who, what.’

Anthony Burgess (1985)²

The application of the law of large numbers and long periods to politics or history signifies nothing less than the wilful obliteration of their very subject matter, and it is a hopeless enterprise to search for meaning in politics or significance in history when everything that is not everyday behaviour or automatic trends is ruled out as immaterial.

Hannah Arendt³

Before turning to the analysis of the swing to the right in Dutch politics proper, an addition to our outline of the depoliticizing tendency in Dutch political culture is in order. This chapter looks at the contemporary relevance of the depoliticization discussion by zooming in on a contemporary – and prominent – example of the interconnection between the Dutch study of politics and the country’s longstanding tradition of accommodation. The study *Diploma Democracy*, published in 2009 and written by public administration scholars Mark Bovens and Anchrít Wille, became the most widely acclaimed interpretation of the rightward shift in Dutch politics. The study’s impact and popularity, I argue, should be seen in the light of its political role in offering a depoliticized reading of the revolt, palatable to all parties. In so doing, *Diploma Democracy* illustrates the paradoxical *political* role of ostensibly depoliticized social science. Turning to intellectual history and ideological analysis, the approach taken by the authors of *Diploma Democracy* can be traced back to the behavioural and pluralist approaches in social science. Many Dutch researchers today continue in the vein of these paradigms established in the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter revisits some of the prominent debates concerning the ideological dimension of behaviouralism and pluralism. The critiques of these currents formulated in the past decades appear to

¹ A smaller Dutch version of this text has been published as: Oudenampsen (2012).

² Burgess (1978, p. 129).

³ Arendt (1958, p. 42).

have been forgotten in Dutch academia, or at the very least, are not sufficiently taken into account. In this chapter, I argue that this has resulted in an one-sided reading of the rightward shift in Dutch politics, in which the formative role of political ideas – in other words, the battle to achieve acceptance and dominance for a set of political ideas; the continuous struggle to frame the perception of societal problems and developments – is insufficiently recognized and studied.

In what follows, a close reading of *Diploma Democracy* will serve to illustrate that argument. The chapter is divided in three parts: it starts with a short explanation of the accommodation strategy and the entanglement of politics and social science in the Netherlands. The second section contains a close reading of the study *Diploma Democracy* and relates it to the accommodation strategy. The third and final section places the shortcomings of this study in a broader intellectual and ideological framework, looking at it, so to say, from the outside.

2.1 The accommodation strategy and the Thoenes-paradox

To properly introduce the argument being made here regarding the study *Diploma Democracy*, it is necessary to first say something with respect to the political background of the study. That context is formed by the accommodation strategy that emerged in response to the ascendancy of Pim Fortuyn. In the so called ‘voter revolt’ of 2002, the party of the right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn achieved a sweeping election victory, sending shockwaves through the Dutch political landscape whose reverberations are still felt today.

What does an accommodation strategy mean in this context? The analysis here relies on the useful distinction proposed by the Swedish scholar Anders Widfeldt between four, not mutually exclusive, strategies in dealing with the far right: general accommodation, specific accommodation, general marginalization, and specific marginalization.⁴ Here, ‘general’ refers to the ideas of the far right, and ‘specific’ to far right institutions, such as political parties. One can co-opt themes from the program of anti-immigrant parties, while keeping these parties marginalized in politics and media, as was the case with the Belgian *cordon sanitaire* targeting the Flemish far right party Vlaams Blok.⁵ Before Fortuyn, there had been a marginal far-right anti-immigration party, the Centrum Democrats (CD) led by Hans Janmaat. It was confronted with an ideological and institutional containment strategy (or *cordon sanitaire*) in both politics and media. In the terminology of Widfeldt, the CD faced both general and specific marginalization. The CD remained a fringe phenomenon due to the lacking charisma of its leader, its at times open association with the extreme right, and the party’s active marginalization by political and media elites. The party never attained more than 2.4 percent of the vote. Fortuyn engendered a rapid shift to both ideological and institutional accommodation.

⁴ Widfeldt (2004).

⁵ De Lange (2008).

Despite the CD's failure in gaining political respectability, the immigration issue remained a pressing theme for voters in the 1990s. Conservative figures such as Bolkestein and Vuijsje made it into a prominent topic of Dutch public debate, even though political parties remained wary to exploit the controversy. When Fortuyn emerged on the political scene in 2001 and made the opposition to immigration the foremost topic on the political agenda, initially the attempt was to marginalize him in the same way as the CD had been contained. Leading up to the 2002 municipal elections, which preceded the national elections by only two months, the established parties and prominent journalists tried to disqualify Pim Fortuyn by comparing him with far right leaders, such as Le Pen (FN), De Winter (VB), Haider (FPÖ) or even Mussolini. However, Fortuyn managed to effectively distance himself from the far right. The marginalization strategy spectacularly backfired when Fortuyn won the local elections in March 2002, leading to a rapid shift in strategy from marginalization to accommodation, here described by Dutch political scientists in one of the most convincing analyses of Fortuyn's rise to date:

After the electoral success of Fortuyn in the local elections of March 2002 – especially his triumph in Rotterdam, the second largest city in the Netherlands – the main parties used a different strategy in their attempt to block him: they followed his lead. The PvdA, CDA and VVD changed their draft versions of the election programmes of 2002 and copied Fortuyn's proposals. This bandwagon behaviour of the main parties further legitimized Fortuyn's programme. The change of strategy also implied that the established parties could no longer present their own campaign with their own items and issues. They now had to explain what their position was on the immigration question in comparison to the views of Fortuyn.⁶

The assassination of Pim Fortuyn on May 6, 2002, and the dramatic election victory of his now leaderless party that followed, proved to be the final straw for the marginalization strategy. The politicians and journalists that had associated Fortuyn with the far right were publicly blamed for creating the polarized climate that led to his assassination. They were accused of 'demonization', a watchword frequently employed by right-wing populist politicians and opinion makers in the years that followed, to invoke the haunting memory of the death of Fortuyn and ward off critique on their anti-immigration rhetoric. The LPF was politically accommodated and included in the new first Balkenende cabinet (2002-2003) led by the Christian Democrats, described by many as the only realistic option after the dramatic elections.⁷

The accommodating approach of Dutch elites in the 2000s came to resemble the attitude described by James Kennedy in the 1960s and 1970s. Important to note is that the idea of an accommodation strategy should not be taken in a too literal sense. It is best understood, not in terms of a carefully thought-out and skilfully executed master

⁶ Pellikaan, De Lange and Van der Meer (2007, p. 294).

⁷ Lucardie (2003).

plan, but rather as a series of off-the-cuff accommodating responses occurring over a longer period of time. The immigration reform of social democrat Job Cohen in the year 2000 – defended by Cohen with reference to the need to restore political balance – can be seen as such a pragmatic, accommodating response.⁸ The reform turned Dutch immigration policy into one of the strictest in Europe. Similarly, the first Balkenende cabinet that was formed after the assassination of Fortuyn and that included his party LPF, was seen by many as an accommodation of the populist surge. The main editor of the Christian Democrat journal argued that Christian Democrat party's 'agenda and analysis run partly parallel to Fortuyn's analysis'.⁹

After the early demise of Fortuyn's party in 2003, politicians such as Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders continued Fortuyn's legacy, and consequentially became the next target of the accommodation strategy. In the decade that followed the 'voter revolt' of 2002, the Dutch establishment in both politics and media proceeded to flexibly adapt to the right-wing surge, resulting in a surprisingly comprehensive rightward shift in the Dutch political climate. General editors of national quality newspapers such as *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* vowed to remove leftist columnists and moved the general political inclination of their papers to the right.¹⁰ In the same period, more explicitly right-wing programmes were introduced on Dutch television. All in all, it formed part of a more general attempt to restore what was seen as a lack of balance. Parties that had continued to defend multiculturalism, such as the social democrat party (PvdA), eventually changed their tune and adopted a tougher, disciplinary position in 2008. Party leader Wouter Bos defended the polarizing debate on the problems of immigrants in colourful fashion, while attempting to equate it with Marxist theory:

In the debate on integration I hear repeated calls for less polarization. Unbelievable. My position is: stop complaining about the tone of the debate! No emancipation without polarization. The emancipation of the worker, the woman and the homosexual has only succeeded through struggle, by confrontation. It is classically Marxist: thesis-antithesis-synthesis.¹¹

As noted before, a similar accommodation strategy had famously been pursued in the 1960s. In 2010, when the mainstream Dutch right-wing parties formed an alliance with Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV), allowing the Freedom Party to become the official

⁸ See: Uitermark (2012, p. 109).

⁹ Jansen (2004, p. 10).

¹⁰ The rightward shift in the Dutch media has been somewhat obscured by the fact that it coincided with the ascendancy of a right-wing discourse accusing the media of having a leftist bias (Van Jole, 2003). For retrospective public debates on the rightward shift of Dutch newspapers, see: Botje (2012); Remarque and Bolkenstein (2012).

¹¹ 'In het debat over integratie hoor ik voortdurend mensen roepen dat er minder gepolariseerd moet worden. Ongelooflijk. Mijn stelling is: ophouden met dat gezeur over de toon van het debat! Geen emancipatie zonder polarisatie. De emancipatie van de arbeider, de vrouw en de homoseksueel is alleen gelukt door strijd, door de confrontatie. Het is klassiek marxistisch: these-antithese-synthese.' Cited in: Peepkorn and Sommer (2008).

support party of the first Rutte cabinet, politicians explicitly legitimized their actions in these terms. The leading parliamentary journalist Max van Weezel interviewed the Christian Democrat politician Hans Hillen, who told him that the one and a half million people that had voted for Wilders could not be ignored:

In the turbulent 1960s, Catholic politicians such as Piet de Jong and Gerhard Veringa succeeded in channelling the leftist student protests. The motto of the time was to listen to the idealists, make concessions and give them jobs if need be. 'Elastic absorption', De Jong called that strategy. The Dutch administrative apparatus was kept intact, and that example is worth imitating, according to Hillen. In 2010, it was the right-wing populists that had to be 'co-opted' by the CDA. By creating an alliance with them.¹²

A more extensive ideological legitimization of the accommodation strategy was given by then Minister of the Interior Piet Hein Donner in the journal of the think tank of the Christian Democrat party. He defended the accommodation strategy by reference to the organicist view of political convictions as unique, private ethical beliefs that should not be contested. And he reiterated the organicist aversion to ideological conflict: 'The best way to oppose a populist party isn't by looking for confrontation, but by taking its voters seriously,' Donner wrote. Seeing that 'every human being is the bearer of moral value', 'populism should not be opposed by confrontation, dismissal and exclusion, but also by finding cooperation where possible, to thus convince voters attracted to populist currents that their concerns and anxieties can be done justice in a way that strokes with the interests and dignity of others.'¹³ The section that follows will look at *Diploma Democracy* in relation to the accommodation strategy. But before doing that, there is a need to shortly expand on the intimate and complicated relationship between politics and social science in the Netherlands.

The Thoenes-paradox

What role does social science play in Dutch politics? As we have seen in the previous chapter, a central element to Arend Lijphart's politics of accommodation is 'the art of presenting political matters as if they are not political at all, but questions that can be solved according to objective criteria', such as proportionality. Social science had an important role in establishing these criteria. The academic world, Lijphart stated, was a 'conspirator' in the politics of accommodation, by 'being discrete' and 'not asking

¹² 'Anderhalf miljoen gefrustreerde Nederlanders hadden op Wilders gestemd en het CDA kon die kiezers niet in de kou laten staan. In de woelige jaren zestig waren KVP-kopstukken als Piet de Jong en Gerhard Veringa erin geslaagd de linkse studentenopstand in goede banen te leiden. Luister naar de hemelbestormers, doe ze concessies, geef ze desnoods baantjes, was het devies. "Verend opvangen", noemde De Jong die strategie. Bestuurlijk Nederland was overeind gebeven en dat voorbeeld verdiende volgens Hillen navolging. Anno 2010 waren het de rechtse populistische partijen die door het CDA moesten worden "ingekapseld". Door met hen te pacteren.' (Van Weezel, 2012)

¹³ Donner (2011).

difficult questions'.¹⁴ Of course, that image of Dutch academia in the 1960s is a generalization, and present-day academia is a more heterogeneous world than it was back then. There is no need to follow Lijphart in his approving observation of Dutch social science as a conscious 'conspirator' with the powers that be. The argument I have pursued in the previous chapter is of a more modest nature. To a degree, the Dutch study of politics, whether practiced in the discipline of political science, sociology, or public administration, came to play a functional role in the politics of accommodation that it originally set out to study. In his 1962 book *De Elite in de Verzorgingsstaat* (The Élite in the Welfare State) the Dutch sociologist Pieter Thoenes developed an incisive analysis of the growing entanglement of politics and science in the Dutch context.¹⁵ Thoenes wrote of that mutual embrace in evocative fashion:

Politics and Science are in principle carefully separated worlds, but in the Welfare State lies the expanding in-between world of civil society where both embrace one another. When each returns to their supposed proper Dominion, Politics enters parliament casually, with a black velvet hat pressed under the arm, while the scholar in his Ivory Tower is unaware of the political lipstick colouring his cheeks.¹⁶

Technocracy came to fulfil a prominent role in other countries too, but the Dutch political system seemed to encourage this development to a further extent. As Hans Daalder observed, a contradictory result of the pillarized Dutch welfare state as it developed after the Second World War, is that it further encouraged the development of a technocratic social science that could fulfil the important political role of being a mediator standing above the parties. In the post-war period, the first social science departments were founded in the Netherlands. It coincided with the remarkably rapid ascendancy of American social science approaches. In short order, the American behaviouralist and pluralist paradigms became of central importance for Dutch social scientists. They made it possible for politics to be viewed in terms of clean-cut percentages of voter preferences, based on ascribed rational interests. The institutional infrastructure of Dutch social science was soon heavily geared to policy advice, with science functioning as the *lingua franca* of overarching elite accommodation. As Thoenes observed, in the Dutch welfare state, both sides had a distinct interest in denying the political nature of their mutual involvement. Social scientists received government funding and social standing due to their prominent role in policymaking. The Dutch government in its turn, stimulated the development of 'objective' social science, because as such, science was most valuable as a political tool. The aura of

¹⁴ Lijphart (1976, p. 130, p. 140).

¹⁵ Thoenes (1962, p. 203). Published in English as: Thoenes (1966).

¹⁶ 'Maar tussen de in principe zorgvuldig gescheiden gehouden Politiek en Wetenschap, ligt in de Verzorgingsstaat een groeiend tussenterrein, de maatschappij, waar die beide elkaar rendez-vous geven. Als daarna elk naar het veronderstelde eigen Rijk terugkeert, betreedt de Politiek de Tweede Kamer achteloos, een zwarte fluwelen baret onder haar arm geklemd, terwijl de geleerde terug in de Ivoiren toren zich niet realiseert welke politieke lipstick zijn wangen siert.' (Thoenes, 1962, p. 220)

scientificity allowed policy to be elevated above the political discussion. For Thoenes, this gave rise to a startling paradox:

The argument developed thus far appears to contain a strange paradox. It is said of the policy of the welfare state, that it is because of its connection with certain scientific disciplines, that it has a less and less political character. At the same time, those sciences are accused of having acquired a political content, or a political role, through the involvement with policy formulation. How can a policy become apolitical through its contact with a politicized science, or the other way around, how can science become political through its contact with an apolitical policy?¹⁷

Here we find Daalder's concept, 'depoliticization-out-of-political-interest', now applied to social science. More concretely, the Thoenes-paradox can be defined as follows: the more prominent the political role that social science fulfils in the Dutch context, the more depoliticized it needs to become, at least in appearance. In contrast, the more independent and autonomous social science is in relation to politics and policymaking, the more it is able to have a political or normative content. In the eyes of Thoenes, the particularly close entanglement of politics and social science in the Netherlands has its advantages, but it also poses problems for both fields. For social science, the problem was that the 'fiction of objectivity' could not be sustained epistemologically. The state-sponsored dominance of Anglo-American empiricist approaches prevented Dutch social science from developing more intellectual profundity and diversity. Of course, Thoenes was writing in a time that saw a departure from the more normative, theory-prone continental traditions of social science, as we have seen lamented by Den Uyl. On the other hand, by appealing to the notion of a 'one and indivisible' social science, a monolithic element was brought into Dutch politics that stifled the democratic debate. This 'aureole of invincibility' accorded to the scientific method, Thoenes argued, had always been the attraction of the use of the scientific argument in politics, ever since Marx. But it prevented social scientists from delivering more openly normative political commentary, which was also needed in a democracy. The study *Diploma Democracy*, as we will see, illustrates the contemporary relevance of the Thoenes-paradox.

¹⁷ 'In de opbouw van het gehele betoog tot dusver schijnt schijnbaar een merkwaardige paradox. Van het beleid in de Verzorgingsstaat wordt gezegd, dat het met name door haar relaties met bepaalde wetenschappen hier en daar nog maar zo weinig politiek karakter heeft, terwijl daarentegen die wetenschappen wordt aangewreven, dat ze met name door de relaties met dat beleid, een politieke inhoud hebben gekregen, of een politieke rol spelen. Hoe kan een beleid nu a-politiek worden door contact met een verpolitiekte wetenschap, of omgekeerd een wetenschap verpolitiseren door contact met een a-politiek beleid?' (Thoenes, 1962, p. 219) (The paradox can be partly resolved if we distinguish two different conceptions of politics: politics as an institutional space and the political as a broader social logic of dominion and contestation.)

2.2 A close reading of *Diploma Democracy*

In 2009, the Dutch Research Council (NWO) published an influential report titled *Diploma Democracy*. It was written by public administration scholars Mark Bovens and Anchrit Wille.¹⁸ Mark Bovens is a leading Dutch pluralist in the tradition of Lijphart, a position expressed in a 2008 analysis of the Fortuyn revolt, leading to the advice that ‘accommodation and depoliticization remain crucial to Dutch politics’.¹⁹ Earlier versions of the argument in *Diploma Democracy* had been published in 2006 and 2007. The prominent Flemish writer and intellectual David van Reybrouck had adopted these analyses in his pamphlet *Pleidooi voor Populisme* (Plea for Populism).²⁰ Van Reybrouck’s proposal for a more populist politics stirred debate but remained controversial. When *Diploma Democracy* was published in the spring of 2009, it was met with almost universal approval. The report landed on fertile soil: opinion polls at the time predicted massive gains for Geert Wilders’ Freedom Party (PVV) in the 2010 elections. And the polls proved right: the Freedom Party won 15.4 percent of the vote (from 5.9 percent in 2006) making the PVV the third largest party and the political heir of Fortuyn. The response to the *Diploma Democracy* report was immediate and enthusiastic: here was the key to nearly a decade of unrest. Leading journalists extensively wrote about the report’s analysis, politicians endorsed the conclusions, debating centres discussed the implications, and the academic journal *Beleid & Maatschappij* published a theme-issue on the study.²¹ *Het Jaarboek Parlementaire Geschiedenis* (The Yearbook of Parliamentary History) of 2011 was dedicated to this study and the chairman of the Dutch Parliament, Gerdi Verbeet, summed up Bovens and Wille’s recommendations for the parliamentary press at the presentation of the Yearbook.²² In 2011, a Dutch translation of the study appeared, which was very positively received.²³ Given such circumstances, it is hardly surprising that *Diploma Democracy* has been given a central role in the debate on the swing to the right. The consequence is that today for a broad section of Dutch public opinion, the notion of a ‘diploma democracy’ and the specific interpretation of the rightward shift that is connected with the term, became a key to understanding the contemporary political constellation.

The study can be analysed, in Mannheim’s terms, both ‘from within’ and ‘from without’. At an immanent level, the study contains inconsistencies; a series of shortcomings that cast doubt on its so confidently asserted conclusions. By that, I do not mean the existence of a ‘diploma democracy’ as such, in other words, the dominance of the higher educated in Dutch democracy. In that sense the study – despite of the more modest setup of the analysis – is a welcome and well-timed Dutch version of comparable international research from the 1970s, such as Bourdieu’s well-

¹⁸ Bovens and Wille (2009).

¹⁹ Hendriks and Bovens (2008, p. 61).

²⁰ Van Reybrouck (2008).

²¹ Engelen (2011).

²² Van Baalen, Goslinga, Van Kessel, Van Merriënboer, Ramakers and Turpijn (2011).

²³ Bovens and Wille (2011a).

known *Distinction*.²⁴ Rather, I want to scrutinize the objectifying and simplifying characterizations of the opinions of the lower educated and the autonomous causal effect attributed to these opinions, leading the authors to the statement that Geert Wilders' Freedom Party should be seen as a positive influence on Dutch democracy. Bovens and Wille argue for an accommodation strategy, proposing that other parties should adopt the agenda of the PVV in a more moderate form. Of course, this is a legitimate political opinion for academics to assert, and there are certainly valid arguments to be made for either accommodating or contesting the PVV. In this case, however, the political conclusion of pursuing a strategy of accommodation is presented as objective and inevitable; it logically follows from the way the study has been set up. And the design of the study has deep roots in a specific tradition of social scientific practice that prioritizes voter behaviour as an explanation of political developments and structurally underplays the effects of events and ideas. In this first section we will look at the study from within, the next section will place the study in a broader ideological framework and considers it 'from without'.

The gap

Bovens and Wille open the study quite dramatically with a quote from a tram driver who describes what the authors call a 'new inequality' in terms of us and them:

You could immediately tell if it was one of them or not, but it was difficult to give them all a name... They were everywhere... You could bet that as a simple tram driver, one of them would be facing you when you were tested, or that one of them would give you the course on how to deal with passengers. The local council was full of them, and it was they who became aldermen... They were in your office reorganizing your work schedule. They appeared on television to give their high opinions, and they filled the newspapers. They knew everything precisely, so they did not need to listen – only to each other.²⁵

The point of departure for Bovens and Wille is that we live in a diploma democracy. The term denotes 'a democracy in which citizens have more tangible political influence the higher their level of educational attainment, as measured by their formal qualifications'.²⁶ The authors describe a 'new societal pillarization' on the basis of education: 'In the past it was possible to sketch out someone's social life and political views on the basis of belief, now education is such a social marker.'²⁷ This new pillarization, the authors claim, 'makes the dominance of academics in politics more problematic than before. The higher and the lower educated do not always have the same concerns and interests. The higher educated are cosmopolitans, the lower

²⁴ Bourdieu (1984 [1979]).

²⁵ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 1).

²⁶ I will refer to the English and the Dutch version of the study, both are very similar but at some points one version is more extensive than the other, and vice versa. See: Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 3).

²⁷ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 10).

educated generally tend towards nationalism.’ That is not a question of having certain (enlightened) ideas or not, but of contrasting interests: ‘the higher educated experience the benefits of open borders, the lower educated suffer the costs.’²⁸

In terms of its theoretical framework, the study is an explicit defence of what Bovens calls a weak ‘mimetic’ or ‘descriptive’ conception of representation, the idea that politics (as much as possible) both functions and needs to function as a reflection of the opinions of the electorate.²⁹ Political representation according to this reflective vision is ‘one-way traffic from bottom to top, from society to the sphere of politics’.³⁰ This vision is contrasted with a more constructionist conception of representation – the names of Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill appear – in which there is two-way traffic. According to this latter vision, representation is a question of leadership: ‘Political representatives have an important task to educate citizens and to lead them. The political elite needs to take the initiative, it needs to define problems, determine political agendas and address the *demos*, the people, with proposals and solutions. And they have to acquire consent from citizens.’³¹ The crux here is that from the very start of the study, two things are intertwined, *Sein* and *Sollen*: an idea of how politics ought to function and an idea of how politics functions in reality. We will return to this later, but from this point on, the choice of the authors for a reflective framework makes it difficult for them to study reality as it is, instead of how it ought to be.

Central to the argument is the gap between the lower and the higher educated. That rift has emerged and still continues to expand, according to the authors, because ‘society does appear more and more to be evolving into a meritocracy’ in which the higher educated call the shots.³² The existence and prominence of that gap is convincingly shown with a wealth of data. The authors find a structurally larger influence of the higher educated in politics, who are many times more politically active than the lower educated, vote more often, and have a higher degree of political interest. Also, the government and parliament show an overrepresentation of the higher educated; the Dutch government of 2007 is presented as a high point: thirteen of the sixteen Ministers had completed a university education, six had a PhD title, four were professors. The impressive amount of tables and data the authors present, however, does not support the claim of the newness of this pillarization or its ‘more and more’ meritocratic character. The image, taken as a whole, is one of stability, both in terms of unequal participation and the education level of politicians. The authors already concluded that in terms of classic forms of participation such as voting, taking part in action groups, and attending demonstrations, there is no such thing as a widening gap.³³ In the Dutch edition of the report, the authors make do with the assertion that it is not simple to ‘establish along a given amount of years’, or that ‘differences

²⁸ Bovens and Wille (2011a)

²⁹ Bovens and Wille (2009, pp. 9-10).

³⁰ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 18).

³¹ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 19).

³² Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 12).

³³ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 25).

throughout time are hard to measure', because of the 'changing nature and little institutionalized character of these forms of political participation'.³⁴

In terms of overrepresentation, the authors argue that when it comes to the 'political and administrative elite, this country has to a certain degree always been a diploma democracy'.³⁵ Also the gap between the higher and lower educated in terms of political trust dates from before the 1980s and 1990s, and has 'in the past decennium barely increased'.³⁶ The most important change, according to the authors, is the changes in new civil society, that is no longer dominated by traditional mass organizations with intensive forms of contact between the lower educated members and a higher educated cadre, but by single issue pressure groups and internet activism, largely without involvement of the lower educated. That is the most relevant and interesting part of the argument.³⁷ But still, in the old mass organizations the higher educated were also in charge, as the authors admit themselves. The lack of evidence for a growing cleavage is exactly the reason why other researchers have criticized the study. In a critical review, political scientists argued that there actually has been a decrease in inequality:

The question is whether these differences have amplified over time, as argued by Bovens and Wille. This does not seem to be the case. When considering election turnout, membership of political parties, taking part in other political or societal organisations, political cynicism or feelings of political powerlessness, the differences between lower and higher educated are stable through time. In terms of political interest the differences between the low and the higher educated are shown to have significantly decreased. In none of the six attitudes or behaviours could we find prove for a widened education gap.³⁸

The unsatisfying response of Bovens and Wille is that 'the societal cleavage really does exist'.³⁹ The really relevant question of course is whether the gap is growing, and that depends on the selected period. In the 1980s a cleavage has emerged on social-cultural issues, and also with regard to political cynicism and distrust. But since the middle of the 1990s, those differences have stabilized, and that is important for the third stage of the study: the causal connection between the cleavage and the emergence of populism. We will return to that later. For now, the authors attempt to rid themselves of this problem, by concluding that 'nowadays, much more so than in the first half of the

³⁴ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 40; 2011a, p. 38).

³⁵ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 64).

³⁶ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 107).

³⁷ Some authors have suggested a connection between the modernization of party politics in the 1990s and the rise of populism. In that modernization, the traditional political involvement of party members and civil society was sidelined in a shift towards a 'plebiscite democracy'. In other words, a democracy focused on poll numbers and direct communication with the electorate through the media, instead of engagement through mass-based political parties. See: Blommaert (2007); Tromp (2000).

³⁸ Hakhverdian, Van der Brug and De Vries (2011).

³⁹ Bovens and Wille (2011b).

twentieth century, The Netherlands and most other Western democracies are ruled by the well-educated'.⁴⁰ In the Dutch edition, the authors speak in similar general terms of the rise of diploma democracy in the 'second half of the previous century'.⁴¹ That is hardly shocking. *Diploma Democracy* can be seen as a more limited Dutch version of a range of studies that have been done in the 1970s.⁴² It is the question whether the label 'new' is valid here, and whether differences in education can serve as an explanatory key to recent political developments.

The causal connection with populism

Subsequently, the authors explain why diploma democracy leads to disproportionate representation and why this has sparked the eruption of right-wing populism. The lower educated have different policy preferences than the higher educated. They are more pessimistic towards the European Union, more concerned with crime, migration and the integration of ethnic minorities, and they are more likely to welcome direct forms of democracy. As such, this need not be problematic if the higher educated politicians would consider it as part of their job to represent the preferences of the lower educated politically. But that is not the case. Politicians fail to represent these views, according to the authors, because they have a different understanding of political representation than the people they represent. Around 60 percent of politicians believe in representation from above: generating support and constructing consent for policies, while almost 80 percent of the population has a preference for representation from below, in the sense that politicians directly translate the preferences of the population into policy.⁴³

Striking is that these different perspectives on how democracy should function are not seen as the consequence of political differences and the degree of democratization. Rather, they have slowly evolved over time: 'understandings of political representation gradually evolve.'⁴⁴ A similar type of historicist language is used to explain the tendency towards democratization since the 1960s: 'These democratic innovations are part of a broader process of modernization that is the result of underlying demographic and social changes in our society.'⁴⁵ Apparently they are not the result of concrete efforts of political movements that pushed for democratization. Anyhow, the result is disproportionate representation: the preferences of the higher educated hold greater sway in Dutch politics. According to the authors, the emergence of populism is a counter reaction and a correction to this bias.

The case presented in defence of that argument is the Dutch referendum on the European Constitution, in which the overwhelming majority of the politicians took another position than the policy preferences of their electorate. This is the smoking

⁴⁰ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 58).

⁴¹ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 85).

⁴² Bourdieu (1984 [1979]); Campbell and Converse (1972).

⁴³ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 71).

⁴⁴ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 68).

⁴⁵ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 23).

gun: ‘the example of European unification illustrates how in a diploma democracy the “educated” opinions are included and the “non-educated” opinions are sometimes excluded from the participatory and political representative arenas.’⁴⁶ According to the authors, those voting in favour were ‘mostly higher educated and living in exclusive residential neighbourhoods and in the better neighbourhoods of the big cities, mostly supporters of the liberal party D66 and the progressive green party GroenLinks, the parties of choice for academics, but also PvdA, CDA or VVD’.⁴⁷ Those voting against ‘were generally lower educated and living in the countryside, in the neighbourhoods of the post-war era in the big cities, or the suburban Vinex-areas. At the parliamentary elections of 2003 they had voted for the SP or the LPF, or stayed home.’⁴⁸ The exit poll on which the authors base their argument, shows that 51 percent of the higher educated voted against the European Constitution, 72 percent of the people with secondary education and 82 percent of those with only primary education.⁴⁹ Bovens and Wille argue that his difference of 20 to 30 percent demonstrates the causal connection between diploma democracy and the populist revolt. The authors explicitly write of ‘the no of the lower educated’.⁵⁰ A remarkable conclusion if we consider that in a scenario in which all Dutch people would have been higher educated, the result according to that exit poll would still be a rejection of the constitution.

To be fair, the opinion polls are not unambiguous: an exit poll from Interview-NSS with 52 percent higher educated no-voters confirms the above, but the data from the more extensive Dutch national voter research (NKO) of the following year reports 47 percent higher educated voting against and 48 percent voting for the constitution.⁵¹ While the English edition of *Diploma Democracy* bases itself on the exit poll, the Dutch version of the report uses the NKO data.⁵² There are, however, good reasons to use the exit polls and to be more cautious with the NKO data, gathered a year later. As Wille and Bovens state elsewhere in their book themselves, the NKO data suffers from overreporting and social desirability bias.⁵³ Even when we restrict ourselves to the NKO

⁴⁶ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 90).

⁴⁷ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 120).

⁴⁸ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 120). Vinex is the name given to the new, mostly lower middle class, suburban neighbourhoods constructed in provincial towns from 1995 till 2005.

⁴⁹ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 83-84). These numbers are derived from the exit polls from the website of poller Maurice de Hond (www.peil.nl).

⁵⁰ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 121).

⁵¹ See: *Europese grondwet.nl* (2005).

⁵² Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 97).

⁵³ In the NKO survey from 2006, 47 percent of the higher educated respondents stated that they had voted against the constitution, and 62 percent of the lower educated. It is likely that this lower quantity of no-votes one year after the referendum, can be explained in terms of socially desirable responses. As Bovens and Wille state themselves, the NKO suffers from overreporting: ‘In the NKO, respondents are asked whether they have voted or not. These personal responses can deviate from what people have actually done. Non-voters could be ashamed and give socially desirable answers. The NKO is known to suffer from overreporting.’ (Bovens and Wille, 2011a, p. 144). For example, the voter turnout of the higher educated in the NKO data (83 percent) is 16 percent higher than in the Interview-NSS exit poll (67 percent). It is remarkable to say the least that the authors in the Dutch edition of the *Diploma Democracy* study use the NKO data instead of the exit polls. Even more inexplicable is that they explain the no-vote exclusively in terms of the ‘power of numbers’ of the lower and middle educated. See: Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 128).

data, it is difficult to deny that the portrayal of the no-voters by Bovens and Wille as lower educated, ‘nationalist’ SP and LPF voters or non-voters is a serious misrepresentation: even a majority of the ‘cosmopolitan’ and higher educated GroenLinks electorate casted their vote against the constitution:

Party voted for in 2003	Did not vote	Voted against	Voted for
D66	12	42	46
PvdA	27	46	27
GroenLinks	19	44	37
VVD	25	40	35
CDA	30	33	37
SP	19	65	16
LPF	36	54	10

Table 2.1 Voter behaviour European Constitution referendum in terms of 2003 election vote (in percentages; source: CBS, 2008)⁵⁴

Apparently, also the opinions of the higher educated are excluded from the political arena, and a different explanation needs to be found. Other clues discussed by the authors – for example the decline of political trust from 2001 till 2004 among both lower and higher educated – suggest a broader trend of political discontent that cannot be reduced to education.⁵⁵ As surveys show, many voters did not believe that the referendum would make any difference, or that their vote would really be taken into account politicians.⁵⁶ This sentiment seems to have inspired both abstention from voting and the rejection of the European Constitution. That is also what focus group research of that time suggests. To quote a typically unsubtle reaction to the European Constitution from a group of respondents: ‘it is being shoved through our throats.’⁵⁷ Wrestling with the discrepancy between politicians and electorate on European unification, the authors try to circumvent this conclusion:

One of the attributes of democratic societies is that governments in one way or another ought to be responsive to the ‘will of the people’. A problem for elected representatives in contemporary democracies is, however, that in many cases they have no direct way of knowing the positions of ‘their’ voters on political issues.⁵⁸

The reality that politics nowadays exists by the grace of almost permanent opinion polls is apparently unknown to the authors. We also read that on the more difficult issues, the higher and lower educated are not in agreement, because the lower educated do

⁵⁴ Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2008).

⁵⁵ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 106).

⁵⁶ Eurobarometer (2005).

⁵⁷ Plasschaert Quality in Research BV (2005, p. 11).

⁵⁸ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 71).

not understand complex issues very well.⁵⁹ We are told that when ‘politicians have no information on the stance of their voters on a given issue, than they will try and estimate the opinions of their voters by projecting their own perceptions on them’; and sometimes it can happen that politicians make a wrong assessment.⁶⁰ The result: an unintentional bias. This seems to be a form of mystification. At the time of the European referendum, it was commonly known amongst politicians that a sizable part of the electorate had a negative view of the European Constitution. The aforementioned focus group research, requested by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs two months before the referendum, concluded: ‘a majority of the respondents can be typified as sceptical or distrustful towards politics, both on the national as on the European level. This is of great importance for the attitude towards the European Constitution.’⁶¹ Interesting enough, Bovens and Wille note in that same paragraph that the majority of Dutch politicians consider the referendum on the European Constitution to be a painful mistake that should not be repeated in the future.⁶² It is abundantly clear that we are not dealing with politicians that really want to represent the views of their electorate, but fail to do so because of a lack of knowledge or due to faulty assessment. The logical conclusion is that the politicians in this case did not have the intention of representing their electorates. The authors seem to be hindered by their reflective presuppositions.

Further confusion arises when we read that this episode shows that the higher educated bias in politics is a serious problem, causing political instability and delaying the European integration process for years.⁶³ Yet interrupting and questioning the European integration process seems to be the very aim of the democratic majority that voted against the European Constitution. We also read that referenda are great because they force the euro-academics to think harder on how to attain a yes-vote.⁶⁴ Here the authors seem to retrace their steps towards a top-down idea of representation, with referenda as incentive to force politicians to continue to organize the consent of the population.

Characterizing the interests of the lower educated

The no-vote is portrayed by the authors as motivated by nationalism. Opinion research paints a far more complex picture. Remarkable for example, is that the most important reason given – by 32 percent of respondents – for opposing the constitution is a ‘lack of information’.⁶⁵ Even the explicit national element that can be found in the different polls, the concern for the loss of national sovereignty, or the fear of being subordinated to the dominance of larger EU-countries such as France or Germany, is inherently ambiguous. Concerns for the loss of Dutch identity are hard to disentangle from the fear of losing democratic voice or hard-won rights, the discussions of respondents

⁵⁹ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 100, pp. 128-129).

⁶⁰ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 100).

⁶¹ Plasschaert Quality in Research BV (2005, p. 11).

⁶² Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 99).

⁶³ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 83).

⁶⁴ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 102).

⁶⁵ TNS NIPO (2005).

show.⁶⁶ In short, the vote against the European Constitution cannot simply be reduced to the opposition cosmopolitanism/nationalism or the fear for Polish immigrants and other Eastern Europeans, to which Bovens and Wille repeatedly refer.⁶⁷ Bovens mentions in the Dutch newspaper of note, *NRC Handelsblad*, that ‘concerns of ordinary Dutch citizens on European unification, immigration, and globalization’ are sidelined by the elite as “xenophobic and racist”.⁶⁸ But the authors themselves are equally guilty of projection. Interpreting the NKO data, one could come up with an equally valid explanation for the higher occurrence of the lower educated no-vote: the lower educated have a significantly greater preference for more direct forms of democracy than politicians or the higher educated. This misrepresentation seems to apply also to the interests that Bovens and Wille attribute to the lower and higher educated:

The higher and lower educated do not always have the same concerns or interests. The higher educated are cosmopolitans, the lower educated inclined towards nationalism. [...] The higher educated experience above all the benefits of open borders, the lower educated suffer the costs.⁶⁹

For this conclusion, no basis is given, only some anecdotal evidence of controversies surrounding Polish boarding houses in popular neighbourhoods and the proverbial Polish plumbers. But what about the key Dutch logistics sector, with its 350,000 workers (the harbours, Schiphol airport, truckers etc.) literally the hands and feet of globalization? Or the tourism industry with its 400,000 workers? The jobs and fortunes of many lower educated workers are closely aligned with processes of globalization and with the European market. After all, the Dutch economy is a relatively open economy. The more relevant question here is whether people vote based on their economic and rationally conceived interests.

Similar things can be said about the other themes on which the lower educated distinguish themselves from the higher educated in the national voter research (NKO) data cited by Bovens and Wille: definitions of problems are open to interpretation and behind these concerns lie differing preferences and motivations; or undetermined concerns, without clear motivations or political preferences. People could vote against the European Constitution out of nationalism, or out of concern with democracy, or even without a clear reason. These ambiguous motivations are a frequent occurrence in standardized quantitative research, often resulting in errors of interpretation.

The largest divergence between the priorities of lower and higher educated, for example, is on the issue of norms and values (together with education, but the fact that higher educated respondents give more importance to education is hardly surprising). The lower educated find norms and values much less relevant than the higher

⁶⁶ Plasschaert Quality in Research BV (2005, p. 11).

⁶⁷ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 11, p. 113).

⁶⁸ Leijendekker (2009).

⁶⁹ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 11).

educated.⁷⁰ In contrast, the issue of crime is considered more salient by the lower educated. The problem with these types of nominalist oppositions is that according to research, the issue of crime is located by many of the lower educated demographic at the heart of the moral order: it is seen as an issue of norms and values.⁷¹ What is measured in opinion research are not only differences in political positions but also differences in definition. The varying political priorities of the higher and lower educated are only a part of a very incomplete puzzle, on which Bovens and Wille forcefully project their own framework.

Linear growth or turnaround?

In a broader sense the authors maintain that the dominance of the higher educated has masked a new cleavage in politics between the lower educated nationalists and the higher educated cosmopolitans. The emergence of this new cleavage is not the product of the positioning of parties or politicians, the result of political struggle or the development of public debate, it arises rather spontaneously among the electorate: 'This cleavage between cosmopolitans and nationalists has gradually grown and that growth has been coeval with the arrival of immigrants to the Netherlands and with the increasing Europeanization.'⁷² This new cleavage existed 'much earlier among the electorate than among political parties'. 'Already in the beginning of the 1990s many voters put asylum seekers and immigration on the top of the list of urgent social questions.'⁷³ The concerns with regard to these issues are said to have been unrepresented for a long time, with the consequence that they kept on growing; this situation has led to the eruption of right-wing populism. But if we read again the NKO study on which the authors base their argument, then there does not seem to be a linear growth of concern that erupts with Fortuyn and the 'voter revolt' of 2002:

In the election years 1994 and 1998 respondents were asked to place themselves and the parties on the issue of adaptation of ethnic minorities to Dutch culture. Also on this post-materialist issue in the period 1994-1998 the opinion of the moderate voter moves a little in a progressive direction.⁷⁴

In that same period, the study notes a 'decline in polarization under the electorate' on that same issue.⁷⁵ Just before the emergence of Fortuyn there was an (slightly) opposite trend than what is sketched by the authors: the unrest did not gradually evolve

⁷⁰ Under 'norms and values' the national voter research places phenomena such as decline of moral principles, individualization, intolerance, social cohesion.

⁷¹ Bourdieu (1984 [1979]).

⁷² Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 109).

⁷³ Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 109).

⁷⁴ 'In de verkiezingsjaren 1994 en 1998 is in de NKO's aan respondenten gevraagd zichzelf en de partijen te plaatsen op het strijdpunt van aanpassing van etnische minderheden aan de Nederlandse cultuur. Ook op dit postmaterialistisch strijdpunt verschuift in de periode 1994-1998 de opinie van de gemiddelde kiezer enigszins in een progressieve richting.' (Thomassen, Aarts and Van der Kolk, 2000, p. 252)

⁷⁵ Thomassen, Aarts and Van der Kolk (2000, p. 252).

and culminate in Fortuyn. Similarly, Uitermark notes that surveys ‘do not show a clear trend of decreasing support for multiculturalism or growing hostility towards minorities’.⁷⁶ The scenario that Bovens and Wille entertain, of a linear growth leading to an outburst of public concerns and dissatisfaction, does not stroke with existing research on the emergence of the LPF.⁷⁷ What needs to be explained seems to take the form of a sudden break, rather than that of a linear emergence:

Take the parliamentary elections on May 15, 2002 – the elections of Pim Fortuyn and LPF. Fortuyn himself was murdered one week earlier, but the LPF still attained an unprecedented result: eighteen percent of the vote, twenty-six seats in parliament. It was clear that the voters of the LPF were very dissatisfied with the policy of the second Purple cabinet under Wim Kok. Also the voters of other parties were dissatisfied in 2002 about the government. Remarkable is that those same Dutch voters, four years earlier, were more satisfied than ever before, with the same government coalition under the same Prime Minister. Why has their satisfaction about the policy pursued decreased so drastically over those four years? Had they become dissatisfied first, and did they then turn to Fortuyn, or did Pim Fortuyn talk them into their dissatisfaction, so to speak? The correct answers to these questions are far from clear.⁷⁸

Of course, the claim of Bovens and Wille that dissatisfaction with diploma democracy has something to do with the rise of populism is not implausible. Initially, the authors are quite cautious in their conclusions. We read that the emergence of new, more nationalist and populist parties can ‘partly’ be understood by the dissatisfaction of the lower educated with the dominance of the higher educated.⁷⁹ But soon the emergence of right-wing populism is described in more definite language: ‘The “revolt” of Fortuyn and the subsequent rise of populist parties in the first decade of the 21st century is a manifestation of a sudden eruption of resentment against the rise of diploma democracy.’⁸⁰ Or it is described as a by-product of diploma democracy, while that has not been demonstrated.⁸¹ Correlation is thus made into causality. It is unconvincing to

⁷⁶ Uitermark (2012, p. 22).

⁷⁷ Bélanger and Aarts (2006); Van der Brug (2003, 2004); Van der Zwan (2004).

⁷⁸ ‘Neem de Tweede Kamerverkiezingen op 15 mei 2002 – de verkiezingen van Pim Fortuyn en de LPF. Fortuyn zelf was een week eerder vermoord, maar de LPF behaalde toch een ongekend resultaat: achttien procent van de stemmen, en zesentwintig zetels in de Tweede Kamer. Het was duidelijk dat de kiezers van de LPF erg ontevreden waren over het beleid van het tweede Paarse kabinet onder Wim Kok. Ook de kiezers van andere partijen waren in 2002 ontevreden over het gevoerde kabinetsbeleid. Het opmerkelijke is echter dat dezelfde Nederlandse kiezers vier jaar eerder tevredener dan ooit waren, over dezelfde regeringscoalitie onder dezelfde minister-president. Waarom is hun tevredenheid over het gevoerde beleid in die vier jaar nu zo sterk gedaald? Waren ze eerst ontevreden geworden, en hadden zij zich vervolgens tot Fortuyn gekeerd, of heeft Pim Fortuyn hen de ontevredenheid als het ware aangepraat? De juiste antwoorden op deze vragen zijn allerminst duidelijk.’ (Aarts, 2005, p. 7)

⁷⁹ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 84; 2011a, p. 112).

⁸⁰ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 88).

⁸¹ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 100).

present the dominance of the higher educated, which has been present for decades, as the key to the emergence of populism. Then one needs to make clear why populism has not emerged before under comparable conditions. Bovens and Wille try to explain change from stability.

The logical inference from the above quote of Aarts is that Pim Fortuyn himself was a game changer, exercising an important influence on both the growth of political dissatisfaction and voter behaviour in the elections of 2002. Overrepresentation of the higher educated could have been a fertile breeding ground, one of the ingredients that can help us explain the astounding success of Fortuyn, but it was a breeding ground that had to be worked upon, sentiments that needed to be activated and given direction via a specific political discourse (in the above quote described in the somewhat informal term 'talking into') and being able to mainstream that discourse in the media. Then there is the question whether 9/11 and the murder of Fortuyn, both events that acted as catalysts of unrest, played a role in the electoral victory of the LPF. The major flaw in the study of Bovens and Wille is that the formative role of events and ideas is structurally ignored and/or underplayed. This seems to be the consequence of the author's mimetic or descriptive view of representation: the electorate is supposed to first have a clear-cut concern, which is only then politically articulated and represented by politicians, acting as political entrepreneurs. Here we have returned to the one-way traffic from the theoretical framework. That is why the authors have so much trouble explaining the fact that politicians on given occasions, such as the referendum on the European Constitution, do not seem to want to represent their electorates.

That political representation functions like two-way traffic, in the way the authors have defined it themselves, where a political leader such as Fortuyn takes the initiative, defines problems, determines political agendas and addresses the *demos*, the people, with proposals and solutions, does not fit with the 'mimetic' idea of politics that the authors would like to see.⁸² But it seems the only logical explanation for the sort of changes that we have seen in the past decennium in the Netherlands. It was not the electorate but Fortuyn who took the initiative, who put certain issues on the agenda, who forced a breakthrough by saying things that were not part of acceptable political discourse. It was Fortuyn who managed to bring together an unlikely voter coalition on the basis of a new form of right-wing politics that simply did not exist in the Netherlands before, neither in the minds of his electorate.

There is a degree of political innovation at work here that cannot be explained as a reflection of gradually heightened concerns and ideas on asylum seekers and immigration among the electorate. The same goes for the sudden transformation of the debate on asylum seekers and immigration, after the emergence of Fortuyn, into a debate on the threat of Muslims and Islam.⁸³ An important part of the explanatory work in *Diploma Democracy* is done by gradual and spontaneous developments: there is the 'gradual' development of the differing ideas on political representation and the

⁸² Bovens and Wille (2011a, p. 19).

⁸³ Uitermark (2012).

'gradual' development of a conflict dimension on cultural issues, two factors playing a key role in the explanatory scheme. The word 'gradual' seems to function as an instrument of mystification, it means that something is naturalized and remains unexplained. Are these truly spontaneous, gradual developments? Or are they the result of an active political struggle around agenda setting and the definition of problems? Are ideas on political representation not contested and influenced by protest movement such as the New Left and D66, or the New Right and Fortuyn, who demanded more democracy and attacked existing elites as out of touch, closed and authoritarian? Are the ideas on the urgency of crime for example, which in fact has decreased rapidly since the 1990s, not influenced by the campaigns of the country's largest (yellow press) newspaper *De Telegraaf*, where crime is prominently spread out on the front-pages and connected to the need for law and order, while critiquing the inadequacy and softness of government policy?

The essential question here is whether the right-wing populist vote is partly determined by the fact that its voters have a different conception of reality, because their experiences are framed and their political opinions formed by media such as *De Telegraaf*, *HP/De Tijd*, *GeenStijl* or *Elsevier*. What if voters believe, for example, that crime is rising, that the 'floodgates' are open, that Islamic immigrants pose a serious (demographic) threat, that the left has enacted a policy of mass immigration in the 1960s and 1970s, to mention just a few of the widespread right-wing tropes? This question, of course, falls outside of the post-ideological framework of the study *Diploma Democracy*. The authors have neatly agreed with each other from beforehand that 'the role of ideology or belief systems as a common yardstick for masses and elites has lost much of its importance'.⁸⁴ How the authors have reached that conclusion is puzzling: it is certainly not an empirical claim. And it is questionable whether that claim is currently tenable. The relation between masses and elite to be found with figures such as Fortuyn and Wilders and the right-wing media mentioned above, seems to be ideological, at the very least to a certain degree. How could one otherwise explain the concerns of voters on problems that are partly or completely untrue? For example, Muslims, consisting of a mere 5 percent of the population, pose no demographic 'threat', and it was a right-wing government of CDA and VVD, not the left that has decided on bringing over guest workers from Turkey and Morocco. One could of course claim that concerns about 'islamisation' in remote areas in Limburg and in isolated villages such as Urk – where Muslims are a rare occurrence and PVV-voters abound – have 'gradually' developed, but that serves to obscure rather than elucidate. Martin Bosma, the ideologue and speechwriter of Geert Wilders, is certainly not unaware of the formative nature of his discourse:

I will never forget when Geert said: 'This is exactly why we are here. Even if we keep only one seat, this is simply our mission.' He is completely right. Those words illustrate the special character of the Freedom Party. Of course, we hope, just like all

⁸⁴ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 71).

the other parties, to do well in elections. But our task is also a different one, namely that of telling the story of Islam and mass-immigration to form a counterweight against the rosy pipe dreams that those put above us, present us with. Breaking open the discussion is just as important as the amount of seats we win. We are not just politicians, we are also in part, missionaries. That is why it is beautiful to see how ordinary people pick up the message. After our success at the European elections, current affairs programmes went to look for our supporters in Volendam, where we won 40 percent of the vote. A man on the market says: 'Islam is not a religion. It aims at conquest.' At a PVV-gathering in Drachten, someone that just comes from the pier says the following: 'The leftists support Islam. They want to make dhimmi's out of us.' These are redeeming moments. The Netherlands is beginning to understand it better and better.⁸⁵

In the eyes of Bosma, his politics are not a response to the opinions of the electorate. It is the other way around: his political goal as a missionary is to ideologically form the opinions of the electorate. The composition of the population in provincial towns such as Volendam and Drachten is overwhelmingly white (95 percent). We can safely assume that their opinions on Islam are not empirical conclusions from everyday life experiences. The idea that the left is in cahoots with Islam, for instance, is a common 'Eurabia' conspiracy theory circulated by the Party for Freedom. It is unlikely that an inhabitant of Drachten will have personally discovered a leftist conspiracy to turn the Dutch population into dhimmi's (a term referring to non-Muslims living under Islamic rule paying a religious tax). That is not to say that the concerns fuelling the rise of right-wing populism are all smoke and mirrors. After all, the attacks on 9/11 and the assassination of Theo van Gogh were real events. The point is that it is misleading to adopt a methodologically individualist approach and consider people's concerns in isolation from the political discourse that provides them with their information and the ideological frames to make sense of it.

Political implications

The political implications of the reflective framework used in *Diploma Democracy* are far-reaching. What we see happening is that the emergence of populism is presented as

⁸⁵ 'Ik zal nooit vergeten hoe Geert zegt: "Dit is precies waarvoor we hier zitten. Al houden we één zetel over, dit is nu eenmaal onze taak." Hij heeft helemaal gelijk. Die woorden vormen een illustratie van het bijzondere karakter van de Partij voor de Vrijheid. Natuurlijk hopen ook wij, net als alle andere partijen, het bij de verkiezingen goed te doen. Maar onze taak is ook een andere, namelijk het vertellen van het verhaal van de islam en de massa-immigratie om zo een tegenwicht te vormen voor de roze wensdromen die de boven ons gestelden ons voorhouden. Het openscheuren van de discussie is minstens zo belangrijk als het aantal zetels dat we halen. We zijn niet alleen politici, we zijn ook een beetje zendelingen. Het is daarom altijd schitterend te zien hoe gewone burgers de boodschap oppakken. Na ons succes bij de Europese verkiezingen gaan actualiteitenrubrieken op zoek naar onze achterban in Volendam, waar we 40 procent van de stemmen behaalden. Een man op de markt zegt: "Die islam is helemaal geen godsdienst. Het is uit op verovering." Op een PVV-bijeenkomst in Drachten zegt iemand die net van de steiger komt: "De linksen steunen de islam. Die wil dhimmi's van ons maken." Het zijn momenten die veel goedmaken. Nederland gaat het steeds beter snappen.' (Bosma, 2011, p. 226)

the logical outcome of long-term, gradual developments in the opinions of the electorate. These changes are presented as some sort of natural phenomena, the spontaneous result of largely anonymous processes: migration, European unification, globalization. The takeaway is that politicians, if they desire to be democratic and representative, have to make a shift to the right to adjust to the wishes of the electorate. Bovens and Wille propose 'that the programme points of the new populist parties are adopted in moderate form by the existing political parties'.⁸⁶ The alternative, they argue, is a doom scenario, a rerun of the 1930s, where 'parliamentary democracy is no longer seen as legitimate'.⁸⁷

The observation that the lower educated have preferences as a class of their own, leads to a rather technocratic solution to the challenge of populism: better representative mechanisms to get the vote of the lower educated into politics, and more lower educated people in politics. It leads also to the conclusion that Geert Wilders' PVV is 'a healthy correction to the Dutch political system' because the views of his lower educated supporters were not represented before. That is the message that Bovens and Wille have put forward in the national newspaper of note, *NRC Handelsblad*, an explicit legitimization of the PVV as the representative of the preferences of the lower educated.⁸⁸ It was happily welcomed, of course, by the PVV itself.⁸⁹

When we depart from a vision of representation as two-way traffic, when we consider that there is a role for ideology in politics, then we arrive at very different conclusions. If the academic professor Fortuyn could sell his brand of politics to the lower educated, then we are not dealing with the intrinsic needs of the lower educated, to be represented by lower educated politicians. It is about who is best in selling their politics and ideology. The Dutch sociologist Dick Pels adheres to such a vision of representation:

Populist politicians say they represent the voice of the people, but the question is whether the people can speak for itself, without the politician first expressing what the people 'really' think. 'He said what I think,' many said of Pim Fortuyn. But did they really think it before he had said it? Populists want to 'listen to the people' and depart from its 'needs', but they forget that their supply of political slogans only articulates the need, and elevates gut feeling to an idea in the mind. In the political arena and on the market place, there is a reciprocity between an elite of producers, marketers and builders of brands and a base of consumers, buyers and voters. Only through this exchange between elite and masses, this tussle between entrepreneurs and consumers, economic and political needs are formed. Supply determines demand as much as demand determines supply.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 114).

⁸⁷ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 114).

⁸⁸ Leijendekker (2009).

⁸⁹ See: Leijendekker (2009).

⁹⁰ 'Het politieke populisme en het marktpopulisme hebben dus eigenlijk dezelfde structuur. Populistische politici zeggen de stem van het volk te vertegenwoordigen, maar het is de vraag of het volk wel voor zichzelf kan spreken als de politicus niet eerst heeft gezegd wat het volk eigenlijk denkt. "Hij zegt wat ik

Of course, as we have seen above with Bosma, it is not the populists who forget that politicians form their electorate politically. Rather, it is the political culture of Dutch elites that denies the relevance of ideology. Furthermore, we do not have to follow Pels to the point of (dis)qualifying the opinions of the right-wing populist electorate as gut sentiments per se. The observation of Bourdieu is sufficient here, that for producing a political opinion, people generally rely on the available positions in the political field, articulated by political and media elites.⁹¹ But the wider relevance of Pels' argument is that it leads to a fundamentally different analysis of the rightward shift in Dutch politics.

If we see politics in terms of an exchange between elite and electorate, then the conclusion is rather that the right has accomplished a stunning victory in determining the political agenda and winning the political debates in the last decades. The democratic task of other political parties is not necessarily to accept this victory and adopt the positions (and problem definitions) of the PVV in moderate form, as Bovens and Wille would like to see. Of course, that is the classic depoliticizing and accommodating strategy of Arend Lijphart's politics of accommodation. It is not surprising that scholars in public administration – a bulwark of Lijphartian pluralism – suggest this traditional political approach. The Lijphart model still serves as an expression of Dutch *raison d'État* and the recommendations in the study *Diploma Democracy* should be seen in that light. But why would the established political parties need to adopt the programme of Wilders in moderate form? Do they not have their own political vision to develop, and try to win over the PVV electorate on that basis? Parties can choose to challenge the way Wilders defines societal problems, and provide their own interpretations and answers to the concerns of the electorate. And finally, is that not a deeply political and normative choice, instead of a scientific judgement, that presents itself as 'neutral' and 'objective'?

If representation implies two-way traffic, this means that the viewpoints of the PVV are not necessarily representative of the interests of the lower educated. Nor does it mean that these viewpoints are necessarily 'healthy', 'natural' or 'good for the Netherlands'. The lower educated are a diverse group, they cannot simply be qualified as nationalist and do not have views, concerns and interests as a class in itself, nor as a class for itself, to adopt Marx' famous dictum. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu shows that people have very different capacities and ways to express a political opinion, that often is not their own personal opinion, but an opinion that has been acquired, or an external opinion given in order not to confound expectations. A given opinion recorded in quantitative voter research, take for instance the political urgency of crime in the Dutch

denk," zeiden velen over Pim Fortuyn. Maar dachten ze het wel voordat hij het had gezegd? Populisten willen graag "luisteren naar de mensen" en vraaggestuurd werken, maar vergeten dat hun aanbod van politieke slogans de vraag pas articuleert en het onderbuikgevoel verheft tot een idee in de bovenkamer. Zowel in de politieke arena als op het marktplein gaat het dus om een *wisselwerking* tussen een elite van producenten, marketeers en merkenbouwers en een achterban van consumenten, kopers, kijkers en kiezers. Pas in dit heen-en-weer tussen elite en massa, dit touwtrekken tussen ondernemers en klanten, worden economische en politieke behoeften en voorkeuren vormgegeven. (Pels, 2011a, pp. 71-72)

⁹¹ Bourdieu (1984 [1979], p. 430).

voter research that Bovens en Wille refer to, can be the result of very different perspectives on the nature of the problem and its possible solution.

Next to the ambiguity of the answers given, Bourdieu points to the political expressiveness of the non-response, as a form of protest, or consent, or as an expression of the inability to express a political opinion on the question given. Bourdieu's critique is that the superficial, nominalist fashion in which opinions are often measured, leads to these differences to be hidden from view, leading to *dispossession* (in which respondents have to translate their opinion in a language or formulation of a problem that is alien to them) and *misrepresentation* (in which the answer given is translated by researchers into a meaning that fits in the framework of the research) of opinions. The result is a distorted image of social reality. The way Bovens and Wille characterize the vote against the European Constitution as a form of lower educated 'nationalism' is a good example of *misrepresentation*. And the 32 percent of respondents in the Eurobarometer poll who cited a lack of information as the reason for their no-vote, is a good example of what Bourdieu calls a camouflaged non-response.

These shortcomings mean that in *Diploma Democracy* above all the data, but very little of the accompanying interpretation is useful for the analysis of contemporary Dutch political reality. This is ultimately retraceable to the preconceptions used by the authors.

2.3 The ideological dimension of pluralism

As I have attempted to show, the ambition of the study *Diploma Democracy* to offer a reading of the current Dutch constellation is hindered by the author's preconceptions. The most important of these are: first, the reflective or mimetic way in which representation is supposed to function, as one-way traffic; second, the idea that people vote out of their rationally conceived interests; third, the conviction that the role of ideology (and media) in forming opinions and interests is of little importance; fourth, a substantialist vision of the opinions of the electorate – 'what you see is what you get' – in which the differing perspectives that can result in a given opinion, are attributed with a single meaning; and fifth, the associated idea that social reality can be studied without taking into consideration societal structures, and their role in social reproduction.

These preconceptions are not a coincidental occurrence. The authors explicitly place their work in a broader tradition of research into political behaviour, such as the work of Philip Converse, Robert Dahl, Seymour Martin Lipset, and the Michigan School. This American research tradition, often referred to with the terms behaviouralism⁹² and political pluralism, was from the 1940s until the 1970s in large parts of the world the

⁹² A recurring complaint in the literature is that the term 'behaviourism' has a pejorative connotation and is used in an inaccurate manner by the critics of the current. That's why I've used the term 'behaviouralism' coined by David Easton, a prominent researcher within the current. This concept is also used by Hans Blokland in his study on Robert Dahl and pluralism. See: Blokland (2011).

dominant approach in the social sciences, specifically in political science. From the 1960s on, this school of research became the object of passionate controversy and powerful polemics. Some important critiques were formulated, even from within the tradition itself.⁹³ Also from the Netherlands, where Lolle Nauta and Abraham de Swaan criticized the tradition as a form of *neopositivism*.⁹⁴ The preconceptions of Bovens and Wille are very similar to the ideas that came under fire in the critiques of behaviouralism and pluralism.

In a broader sense, the academic debate on the rightward shift in the Netherlands is characterized by the dominant presence of studies in the behaviouralist and pluralist tradition. The emergence of right-wing populism is largely studied through quantitative analysis of changing voter behaviour and political participation, resulting in the thesis of the emergence of a new political cleavage between 'culturally progressive' higher educated voters and 'culturally conservative' lower educated voters.⁹⁵ In these studies, the critiques of the past decades are hardly considered. The attempt of making sense of the rise of Fortuyn and Wilders is obstructed by the ballast of uncritically inherited repertoires. An illustrative detail is that Bovens and Wille use a reference to an article from 1964 of Philip Converse to argue their case that in the Netherlands today 'the role of ideology or belief systems as a common yardstick for masses and elites has lost much of its importance'.⁹⁶ Apparently, Philip Converse had prophetic gifts.

Behaviouralism, or the 'behavioural approach in political science', as Dahl called it, was developed by researchers such as David Easton, Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Seymour Martin Lipset, in their attempt to model the social sciences on the natural sciences and make political science into an 'objective' discipline.⁹⁷ It focused on observable, measurable behaviour like voting data and political participation and had a strong empirical and quantitative character.⁹⁸ Pluralism as a political theory, as expressed in the work of Seymour Martin Lipset, Daniel Bell and (the early work of) Robert Dahl, was strongly interwoven with behaviouralism.⁹⁹ The pluralist conception of politics as the balanced outcome of an open struggle between competing interest groups that operated on the basis of utility maximization, functioned in many of the behaviouralist studies as an implicit theoretical premise; as a *Sein* and a *Sollen*, that described how

⁹³ Lindblom (1977).

⁹⁴ Nauta (1975).

⁹⁵ Houtman, Achterberg and Derks (2008).

⁹⁶ Bovens and Wille (2009, p. 71).

⁹⁷ Dahl (1961, p. 763).

⁹⁸ A striking detail is that the origins of the name of this current of research that attempted to realize an objective social science, was motivated by important ideological concerns, in the midst of the Cold War. The name *behavioural science* was created as a defensive manoeuvre against American members of Congress that campaigned against the social sciences as 'socialist sciences' Blokland (2011, p. 146). That the faculty of social sciences in Amsterdam is titled *Faculteit voor Maatschappij en Gedragwetenschappen* (Faculty for Societal and Behavioural Science) is more a result of the influence of the behavioural paradigm, rather than an expression of similar political concerns. Eventually, some of the leading figures of the pluralist school, such as Seymour Martin Lipset and Daniel Bell, went on to become the founders of US neoconservatism and played a prominent role in the ideological battles of the 1960s. The political views of Robert Dahl, in contrast, developed in progressive direction.

⁹⁹ Blokland (2011).

society functioned, and at the same time as an ideological expression of how it should ideally function.

Critiques of the ideological nature of pluralism and behaviouralism revolved around a series of interconnected themes. First, the most straightforward way behavioural political science was said to be ideological, was in its fidelity to older organicist thought and the major themes of Burkean conservatism: the pluralist defence of tradition, harmony, stability, elitism and gradualism. American political institutions were depicted by pluralists in Burkean fashion as complex organisms, developed through a long process of accidental developments, through trial and error.¹⁰⁰ An illustrative example of the Burkean view is the following statement by the then leading American political scientist Edward C. Banfield:

A political system is an accident. It is an accumulation of habits, customs, prejudices, and principles that have survived a long process of trial and error and of ceaseless response to changing circumstance. If the system works well on the whole, it is a lucky accident – the luckiest, indeed, that can befall a society. To meddle with the structure and operation of a successful political system is therefore the greatest foolishness that men are capable of. Because the system is intricate beyond comprehension, the chance of improving it in the ways intended is slight, whereas the danger of disturbing its workings and setting of a succession of unwarranted effects that will extend throughout the whole society is great.¹⁰¹

Second, pluralism and behaviouralism were criticized for the distorted view that was offered of the political process. What in reality was an elitist system, with little opportunities for political participation and a moderate influence of the electorate, was conceptualized in the pluralist model as a full-fledged democracy, in which the political decisions taken by elites reflected the interests of the electorate. For this reason, the leading intellectual historian Quentin Skinner wrote that Robert Dahl's *A Preface to Democratic Theory* could be characterized as a 'conservative political ideology', a legitimization of the status quo.¹⁰²

A third major theme of contention focused on the methodological approach as a source of bias. As Blokland argues in his overview of American pluralism, the old organicist conception of society resounded implicitly in the centrality of equilibrium models in pluralist methodology.¹⁰³ Organicist conservative thought had been brought into the US political science methodology in the post-war period by European *émigrés* such as the Czech-born political scientist Karl Deutsch. He theorized and modernized organicism into a practical model that could be used in empirical studies, which became known as equilibrium theory. In *The Political System* (1953), David Easton further elaborated on equilibrium theory. The ideas that Easton identified as

¹⁰⁰ Wolin (1969).

¹⁰¹ Wolin (1969, p. 1069).

¹⁰² Skinner (1973, p. 288).

¹⁰³ Blokland (2011, p. 295).

characterizing equilibrium theory were strikingly similar to organicism; on one side, the functional interrelatedness of all elements of a political system. On the other, the notion of a dynamic form of equilibrium pursued by all elements, leading to the continuation of the existing constellation. The argument of the critics was that the model erased power relations and political conflict from the picture. In *The Bias of Pluralism* (1969), the leading political thinker William Connolly argued that the equilibrium model steered thinking in a conservative direction. The pluralist approach effectively prioritized stability over change and tended to see everything that existed as functional and system sustaining and as such, good.¹⁰⁴ As the political theorist Sheldon Wolin proposed, pluralists and behaviouralists identified the status quo as 'normality' and went on to empirically research the conditions for securing that normality, here colourfully described:

There then follows the general explanation that the system has functioned normally, i.e., in a stable way, because it has avoided immoderation, i.e., 'extremism' or 'intensity'. America has been spared these evils, it is alleged, not because of the excellence of her institutions or her citizens, but because of such factors as: the absence of ideological conflicts and political passions, a healthy amount of voter apathy, a measure of voter ignorance, political parties whose genius is to abstain from presenting clearly defined alternatives, the influence of cross-pressures which fragment the citizen's loyalties and reduce his commitments to the consistency of Jello, a strategy of decision making which favours small or incremental change because it is not disruptive, and a system where access to power succeeds in keeping at bay the poor, ignorant, deviant and deprived.¹⁰⁵

Here we recognize some of the critiques levelled by Hofland at Lijphart, who applied pluralist thought to Dutch politics. Of course, it can be said of any theoretical model that it contains (ideological) preconceptions and steers observation to a certain degree. What piqued critics of pluralism and behaviouralism above all, was the pretension of objectivity assumed by empiricist social science and the dismissal of other approaches as 'unscientific'. In a seminal essay written in the early 1980s, Stuart Hall is quite unsparing in his review:

Questions of political process and formation before and beyond the ballot-box, issues of social and political power, of social structure and economic relations, were simply absent, not by chance, but because they were *theoretically outside the frame of reference*. But that was because the approach, though advanced as empirically grounded and scientific, was predicated on a very specific set of political and ideological presuppositions. These presuppositions, however, were not put to the test, within the theory, but framed and underpinned it as a set of unexamined

¹⁰⁴ Connolly (1969).

¹⁰⁵ Wolin (1969, p. 1069).

postulates. It should have asked, 'does pluralism work?' and 'how does pluralism work?' Instead it asserted, 'pluralism works' – and then went on to measure, precisely and empirically, just how well it was doing. This mixture of prophesy and hope, with a brutal, hard-headed, behaviouristic positivism provided a heady theoretical concoction which, for a long time, passed itself off as 'pure science'.¹⁰⁶

Hall focuses specifically on three of these postulates. First, the end of ideology: no fundamental ideological disagreements exist on the organization of society, only pluralist conflicts taking place within the confines of pluralist consensus, conflicts that are dealt with by observing the pluralist rules of the game.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Seymour Martin Lipset observed a common consensus on norms and values, all fundamental problems had been solved.¹⁰⁸ Second, a mimetic conception of representation: politics functions – and ought to function – as a neutral reflection of the policy preferences of the population, seen as rational, autonomous individuals: institutional power relations, societal structures and economic realities play no role in the analysis. And third, a one-dimensional conception of power, as influence: A influences B to take decision X.

From the 1960s on, a range of authors started to question and overturn these postulates, while promoting more social constructionist perspectives. Bachrach and Baratz famously expanded upon behaviouralism's reductive conception of power, by pointing towards the role of agenda setting.¹⁰⁹ Power can be exercised in almost invisible manner, by determining the agenda within politics and the media, and above all by deciding what is excluded from that agenda. Steven Lukes famously took the argument one step further in his book *Power: A Radical View*.¹¹⁰ There is the two-dimensional conception of power of Bachrach and Baratz: power is exercised when A dedicates efforts to promote societal values and institutional practices that lead to a selection of themes in the political debate that are beneficial to A. The addition of Steven Lukes is a three-dimensional conception of power, in which A exercises power by influencing, forming and framing the perceptions, needs and desires of individuals in a manner beneficial to A. This is the constructionist vision that Bovens and Wille have refused from the outset.

Finally, the critiques of pluralism in the 1960s also gave rise to alternative frameworks in political science that explain the rise of cleavages or conflict-dimensions, while allowing a greater role for political ideas. In 1960, Schattschneider published his book *The Semi-Sovereign People*. The basic thesis of this short and classical text is that democracy is inherently geared towards becoming an elite phenomenon, dominated by privileged groups with wealth and power. 'The flaw in the pluralist heaven,' Schattschneider contended, is that 'the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class

¹⁰⁶ Hall (1982, p. 60).

¹⁰⁷ Bell (2002 [1960]).

¹⁰⁸ Lipset (1963).

¹⁰⁹ Bachrach and Baratz (1970).

¹¹⁰ Lukes (2005).

accent'.¹¹¹ It is the element of competition in politics that offers a counterweight to this oligarchic tendency. Political conflict gives the broader population a possibility to engage itself politically, and in this way allows it to be at least semi-sovereign. As argued in the previous chapter, Daalder's critique of the Dutch 'regent mentality' contains strong parallels to Schattschneider's critique of pluralism. In contrast to pluralism, Schattschneider's theory emphasizes the ability of political elites to shape the conflicts that determine the political space, and socialize the electorate accordingly. It gives political ideology a more central role.

In Schattschneider's framework, political competition is structured along a series of dominant oppositions, or cleavages. Which cleavages dominate in a certain political context, determines what type of political ideas and political demands come to the fore. Important is that political conflict is not just a reflection of really existing social and political contrasts among the electorate, it also provides a structure in which these differences are lent coherence and relevance for ordinary citizens in the first place. It provides a structure in which opinions can be expressed and debated, and a process in which people become politically formed. If many said about Pim Fortuyn: 'he says what I think,' according to Schattschneider, they meant: 'he takes up a position in the political field, he engages in conflict with opponents in a way that allows me to situate my opinion in a political sense.' People come to identify themselves politically, with reference to the most important political oppositions. Certain conflicts can become dominant and deeply engrained; giving rise to a prevailing political language that prevents alternative narratives from entering the political stage. Seeing that certain conflicts can become institutionalized and politically socialize people, it is important for political actors to take care that their political conflict sets the tone. The most devastating kind of political strategy is to substitute one conflict for another.

One of the most convincing explanations of the exceptional political impact of Pim Fortuyn, is to be found in the work of the political scientists Huib Pellikaan, Sarah de Lange and Tom van der Meer.¹¹² It builds on the theory of Schattschneider. The argument is that Dutch politics is structured around a set of conflict dimensions, the socio-economic cleavage, the secular-religious opposition and a cultural opposition. In the 1990s, conflict dissipated. It created the opportunity for Pim Fortuyn to introduce a new cleavage focused on immigration and multiculturalism, where concerns had remained unaddressed politically for quite some time, partly due to the other oppositions structuring the political field. The authors subsequently show how the other parties started to position themselves in accordance to this cleavage, changing their party programmes in an effort to politically accommodate Fortuyn. In this way, the entire structure of the Dutch political field was changed. In the years that followed, the cultural opposition between conservative nationalists and multicultural cosmopolitans became the dominant political conflict, socializing the Dutch population with its

¹¹¹ Schattschneider (1960, pp. 34-35).

¹¹² Pellikaan, De Lange and Van der Meer (2007, 2016).

language. The next chapters will look at the political ideas that allowed those on the right to both foment and navigate this new cleavage.

2.4 Conclusion

Up to this point, I have discussed the central role of depoliticization in Dutch political life. Following Hans Daalder and Arend Lijphart, I have argued that the apolitical atmosphere in the Netherlands is not simply a natural consequence of the dimmed contrasts created by the moderating influence of the Dutch consensus model. It is also a result of a certain way of thinking about Dutch politics and history; an effect of a depoliticizing conception of politics that foregrounds harmony, stability and continuity. In the previous chapters, I traced this vision to the commandeering presence of organicist, historicist and pluralist ideology in the Dutch political tradition, ideologies that have made their mark on social science in a complex fashion. The consequence is that – borrowing Hans Daalder’s formulation – many political and ideological matters are not necessarily presented as such in the Dutch context. The close reading of the study *Diploma Democracy* has served as a concrete illustration of the contemporary relevance of that argument.

The study of Bovens and Wille illustrates a broader problem of the behavioural and pluralist framework: it has difficulties in taking into account the formative role of political ideas. These shortcomings can be retraced to the basic models that are being used in quantitative voter research, derived from the famous ‘funnel of causality’ of the Michigan School.¹¹³ The particularity of these models is that they implicitly conceptualize politics as one-way traffic, in accord with the pluralist conception of political representation as mimetic or descriptive. Quantitative voter research and the type of dataset it works with, tends to restrict itself to a one-dimensional conception of power: the influence of the electorate on politics. This lens poses problems for explaining political change, since the opinions of the electorate tend to be relatively stable over time. The Fortuyn revolt is a case in point. The consequence is that the approaches used in voter research, according to voices from the tradition itself, ‘are badly equipped to deal with political change.’¹¹⁴ And the problem with the shift to the right in the Netherlands, is that rapid political change is exactly what needs to be explained.

At the heart of this matter lies an important unresolved and often obscured issue in Dutch social science. That is the question of social structure, and what has come to replace the system of pillarization in the Netherlands. For Bovens and Wille, pillarization with its mass organizations is the historical contrast to today’s diploma democracy that excludes the lower educated. In the analyses of pillarization, politics and ideology played an essential role in shaping the views of the electorate. The elites

¹¹³ Niemöller and Van der Eijk (1990).

¹¹⁴ Aarts (2005, p. 7).

of the pillars formed their adherents ideologically through the media and a politically subdivided civil society:

Voters were politically socialized on the basis of their social class or religion, in pillarized organisations, leading to a preference for a specific pillar party and political opinions based on the ideology of the pillar.¹¹⁵

Pillarization is the process, in which several ideologically controlled groups, present in society, are adsorbed in organisational systems of social control, with the tendency of the organisation to prevail over the ethical ideals, and ideologically legitimize organisational control.¹¹⁶

After pillarization, it is as if the world and the people in it have started to function in qualitatively different ways. We are all autonomous individuals now, with independent opinions of our own, formed in splendid isolation. With the end of pillarization, it is assumed by scholars that political ideas have stopped socializing the public. The end of ideology had been reached. The leading historian Piet de Rooy is a typical example. He has argued that after 'the pillarized-corporate political culture was undermined in the 1960s', 'almost every ideology lost its ability to bind the voters; political parties came adrift, unable to shape and give direction to the public debate'.¹¹⁷ According to De Rooy, we are presently still in this post-ideological phase. In *Diploma Democracy* there is no such thing as ideology forming the public. Anonymous, secular trends such as globalization, European unification and immigration are at the root of the swing to the right. Seen from this perspective, the rightward shift, in classically organicist fashion, is merely a reflection of developments in society. The role of politicians and journalists is to adjust to that reality, or risk a return to the 1930s. In the introduction of this book, we cited James Kennedy's reference to the historicist language still governing Dutch politics, 'the rhetoric of circumstances beyond one's control.' Large, impersonal powers seem to be in control of the country. The only thing one can do is to adjust. What is remarkable about the study *Diploma Democracy* is the way in which it seems to mirror these qualities of historicist discourse in a social science context. Marx argued that a dominant ideology works by masking the contingent historical circumstances that a particular social order is built upon. In that sense, *Diploma Democracy* is an ideological report: it denies the contingent nature of the breakthrough of right-wing populism, in an attempt to depoliticize what is in fact deeply political.

¹¹⁵ 'Kiezers werden op basis van hun sociale klasse of kerkelijke richting politiek gesocialiseerd in zuilverwante organisaties, hetgeen leidde tot een voorkeur voor een zuilverwante partij en op de ideologie van de zuil gebaseerde politieke opvattingen.' (Thomassen, Aarts and Van der Kolk, 2000, p. 141)

¹¹⁶ 'Verzuiling is het proces, waarbij meerdere in één samenleving aanwezige, ideologisch beheerste groepen worden opgenomen in overwegend organisationele sociale controle-systemen, met een tendentie tot overwoekering van de ideële waarden door de organisatie en tot een ideologisch justifiëren van de organisationele beheersing.' (Van Doorn, cited in: Stuurman, 1983, p. 65)

¹¹⁷ De Rooy (2015, p. 292).

Following the logic of the Thoenes-paradox, this book will attempt to develop a less political and therefore more politicized interpretation of the Fortuyn revolt that accords political ideas a more central role.

Chapter 3

The rise of the Dutch New Right

The other side have got an ideology... we must have one as well.

Margaret Thatcher¹

The swing to the right in the Netherlands has often been cast as a return of the repressed, a politics of the gut. Long-ignored feelings concerning immigration, integration and Islam, are seen to have given rise to the 'voter revolt' of 2002. Expressed in spatial terms, the revolt was the result of an upward movement of ideas from the lower level of articulation, at the stage of largely unexpressed and stigmatized sentiments, towards the higher strata. Once articulated by political entrepreneurs as Fortuyn and Wilders, what was lingering in the underbelly of the Dutch electorate now became part of official political discourse. The previous chapter asserted that politics always implies two-way traffic; political discourse has an important role in assisting people in formulating and situating their ideas in the first place. The focus in this book is on the intellectual dimension of the political turnabout: not a politics of the gut, but a revolt of the mind. The Dutch swing to the right was preceded and accompanied by a conservative intellectual revolt against the 1960s, against the welfare state, against permissiveness, against cultural relativism, against multiculturalism. Political ideas were not simply oozing upwards out of the underbelly; they were also percolating down from the intellectual plane. First coming to the fore in the intense debates on immigration, multiculturalism and national identity in the 1990s, this conservative intellectual revolt remains an underestimated factor in the rightward shift in Dutch politics.

Following James Kennedy's interpretation of Dutch political transformation in terms of dialectics and paradigm shifts, the argument developed in this chapter is that this conservative intellectual movement can be understood as the advocates of an alternative paradigm, seeking to contest and replace the 'prudent progressive' paradigm that formed the legacy of the 1960s. The accommodating attitude of Dutch political elites prevented an earlier conservative reaction from emerging. Therefore, the conflict between New Left and New Right did not play out synchronically in the Netherlands, but rather sequentially. This chapter is dedicated to the central thesis of this book, namely that the emerging alternative paradigm of the 1990s and the 2000s

¹ Cited in: Robin (2011, p. 101).

can be understood as a belated iteration of the New Right backlash that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s in the Anglo-American context.

Political figures such as Fortuyn and Wilders, I argue, are merely the most eye-catching members of a broader conservative political and intellectual movement, the Dutch New Right. This loose and heterogeneous current of conservative politicians, journalists and intellectuals has been able to set the terms of the debate. In so doing, this broader tendency has preceded, accompanied and preconditioned the rise of right-wing populism. The use of the term New Right can be seen as a somewhat surprising analytical move, since the label has never really caught on in the Netherlands.² What further complicates the situation is that some other uses of the term exist in the Dutch debate. A Dutch extreme right splinter party has called itself *Nieuw Rechts* (New Right), in parallel with continental European far-right movements such as the French *Nouvelle Droite* and the German *Neue Rechte*.³ Dutch sociologists have introduced yet another usage of the term. For them, the New Right is a means to distinguish the primarily cultural concerns of right-wing populist parties from what they see as the principally economic concerns of the 'Old Right': the free market politics of Reagan and Thatcher.⁴

The label New Right as it is employed here, stems from the US and the UK, where it came into mainstream use to denote conservative movements that emerged in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, both in opposition and in parallel to the New Left. The high water mark of the New Right is generally associated with the politics of Thatcher and Reagan. What is considered to be 'new' about the New Right, is on the one hand its combination of free market ideas with cultural conservatism, and on the other, the radical break with the moderate conservatism and liberalism of the post-war period. The New Right sharply challenged existing elites and institutions, seen as compromised by the progressive legacy of the 1960s. My argument is that a similar conservative movement has made its mark on Dutch politics, but in a retarded and peculiar fashion. It took the form of a conservative undercurrent that emerged only fully in the 1990s, experiencing its political breakthrough around the Fortuyn revolt in 2002.

For a series of reasons, it makes analytical sense to look at the Dutch conservative undercurrent against the background of the British and American New Right. To begin with the most important reason: the major intellectual inspiration for the Dutch right-wing turn was provided by Anglo-American example. Whether it is erstwhile VVD-leader Frits Bolkestein, the right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn, the protestant conservative and early Geert Wilders ideologue Bart Jan Spruyt, the conservative new atheist Paul Cliteur, the later PVV ideologue Martin Bosma, the neoconservative journalist Hendrik Jan Schoo or Islam critic Ayaan Hirsi Ali; all of these leading figures have been deeply influenced by New Right thinkers. A second reason is that the framework of the New Right lavishes proper attention on the close entanglement of neoliberal and

² The term has been used in a similar manner by prominent politicians and intellectuals such as Joop den Uyl, Jos de Beus and Dick Pels, but it is not commonly used in the Netherlands. See: speech Den Uyl (1981, May 3); De Beus (2006a); Pels (2005).

³ Taguieff (1984); Woods (2007).

⁴ De Koster, Achterberg, Van der Waal, Van Bohemen and Kemmers (2014).

(neo)conservative ideas. As we will see, conservative figureheads such as Bolkestein, Fortuyn and Wilders first came to prominence as ardent neoliberals criticizing the Dutch corporatist welfare state. A third reason is that the New Right framework foregrounds the crucial role of the 1960s, and the conservative discomfort with the legacy of that period. The 'internal enemy' identified as progressive baby boomers, were considered as much of a problem as the 'external enemy', identified as (radical) Islam. Analytical frames that restrict themselves to anti-immigrant, nativist or anti-Islam sentiment often elide these broader dimensions of the Dutch swing to the right. The fourth reason is that the Dutch right-wing positions in the cultural debates have also been deeply marked by New Right inspirations, especially the 'clash of civilizations' thesis developed by neoconservatives such as Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington. The fifth and final reason is that the term New Right allows for a level of complexity and internal ambiguity necessary to capture the heterogeneous cross-party and extra-parliamentary alliances that make up the Dutch conservative countercurrent. Studies of party ideologies often gloss over the internal diversity of parties, and political ideologies have the mischievous tendency to not neatly restrict themselves to parties.

This chapter will try to make sense of this transposition of ideas from one political context to the other, as a process of translation. The structure is as follows: first the chapter introduces the concept of political transfer as developed in the field of political history. It will serve as a framework that allows me to place this particular case in a broader academic debate on the international diffusion of political ideas. Then it proceeds to tackle some basic conceptual questions: the term New Right will be introduced and distinguished from the commonly used (populist) radical right. With those basic building blocks in place, the chapter goes on to discuss the development of the Dutch New Right in the 1980s and 1990s. For the sake of analytical clarity, the development of the Dutch New Right will be separated in an analysis of the neoliberal dimension of this movement and the (neo)conservative one, even though the two strands are intermixed and sometimes represented by the same political figures. The analysis begins with a period in the 1980s, when the two coalition governments led by Ruud Lubbers formed the depoliticized Dutch pendant of the more radical neoliberal politics of Thatcher and Reagan. It then proceeds to discuss the rise of Dutch (neo)conservatism in the 1990s, when cultural conservatism increasingly comes to the fore. This latter conservative current eventually achieves a semi-independent status in the anti-Islam and anti-immigration politics of the populist radical right in the 2000s.

3.1 The New Right and the translation of political ideas

The rise of the Dutch New Right is the result of a process of translation of political ideas from one context to another, from the Anglo-American to the Dutch context. As we have observed in the first chapter, leading Dutch intellectuals such as Johan Huizinga and Willem Frederik Hermans saw the import and translation of foreign ideas as a hallmark of Dutch intellectual culture. I believe that is still the case today, with the important addition that the US and the UK have replaced Germany as the primary point of orientation. The process of ideological translation is challenging to study, since the

original inspiration can be lost from view. It also fits uneasily in the disciplinary focus of existing scholarly research. Comparative studies generally look at countries as ideal-typical wholes and pay less attention to interrelations and lateral connections. Studies of political history tend to have a more strictly national focus. As the historian Henk te Velde observes, 'political history not only ignored foreign examples and foreign imports but often also refused to acknowledge them, even when they had actually been used.'⁵ The same is true of contemporary studies of political ideas in the Netherlands: they often neatly restrict themselves to the national context.⁶

To deal with the challenge of translation, Te Velde has introduced the concept of 'political transfer'. He succinctly refers to it as 'the migration of political practices across national boundaries and their use as examples'.⁷ Concrete instances include new forms of social movements, new repertoires of politics in parliaments or new political or policy ideas, such as the emergence of the welfare state. A case of political transfer becomes of interest for scholarly study, Te Velde argues, when it fulfils three conditions.⁸ The first is that it changes the nature of politics in the country of its reception. International inspiration has always played an important role in political innovation. Te Velde refers to Eric Hobsbawm's notion of 'invented tradition', and suggests that political transfer is always about the reinvention of national political traditions, or at least the reinvention of national political practices. Such a new invention is never developed from scratch. It is generally composed of different elements often gleaned from elsewhere that are recombined with existing elements in a new synthesis. This also means that political transfer can serve a negative function, helping to negate or sideline old political traditions and practices. A second criterion involves the process of transfer itself. Does the case present us with insights on how processes of translation work? Does it consider the different stages, the original context, the actors involved and their role as 'brokers', the implementation in the other context, and above all the process of adaptation and translation to the new environment? Important is that what is being transferred, is no stable entity, but rather something that changes in the process. The third and final criterion is whether the study of political transfer calls into question dominant conceptions and interpretations of a certain period. Whether it opens new vistas and allows us to develop a different interpretation in comparison with approaches that restrict themselves to the national context.

In this chapter, I make the case that the Dutch New Right meets these criteria and lends itself to be studied as a form of political transfer. The body of ideas associated

⁵ Te Velde (2005, p. 205).

⁶ Justus Uitermark's powerful study on culturalism and the Dutch integration debate, for instance, sets out to investigate 'why discourses originate and why they prevail', but halts its otherwise incisive analysis at the national borders. See: Uitermark (2012, p. 4). The same is true of biographies of political leaders such as Bolkestein, Fortuyn and Wilders. While their ideas have largely been derived from international ideological currents, the analysis of their views generally remains strictly national. See: Fennema (2016); Pels (2003); Van Weezel and Ornstein (1999).

⁷ Te Velde (2005, p. 205).

⁸ Te Velde (2005, pp. 210-211).

with the Anglo-American New Right inspired a reinvention of conservative politics and national identity in the Netherlands. At the same time, it allowed for a break with older, established Dutch political traditions of consensual, moderate and pluralist politics. The process of adaptation of New Right ideas is so extensive in the Dutch case that the Dutch New Right needs to be seen as something qualitatively different than its British and American cousins. Finally, a perspective that focuses on the translation of New Right ideas fundamentally challenges dominant conceptions of the Dutch rightward shift and the nature of Dutch right-wing politics. In this chapter, the focus will be on the New Right and its composite parts: neoliberalism and (neo)conservatism. The subsequent chapter will deal more thoroughly with the aspect of adaptation.

Introducing the New Right

In the US, the origins of the New Right lie in the Cold War politics of the 1950s, when a new conservative current emerged that repudiated the isolationist and elitist conservatism of the Old Right. The New Right coalesced around William F. Buckley's *National Review*. It embraced 'fusionism', a conservative strategy to build a broad coalition based on the cohabitation between a free market strand (called libertarianism in the US), a traditionalist Burkean and Christian conservative strand, and an anti-communist strand with foreign policy hawks and – from the 1970s on – neo-conservatives.⁹ Ronald Reagan, whose presidency in the 1980s is seen as the apogee of a second generation of the US New Right, famously referred to US conservatism as a 'three-legged stool', comprised of free markets, conservative family values, and military hawks. The metaphor expresses the fusionist conviction: lacking one of the legs, the stool will fall.¹⁰

In the UK, the term New Right had a different trajectory and came into use with the rise of Thatcher to describe a new insistence on economics and ideas on individualism and markets.¹¹ The Old Right, conversely, was defined as a more philosophical current, with ideas stressing tradition and hierarchy. However, others soon pointed to the fact that with the rise of the New Right, also the ideas of the Old Right enjoyed a new ascendancy.¹² Thatcher and Reagan were seen as combining (neo-)liberal economic with authoritarian cultural conservative ideas. Roger Scruton, one of the most prominent ideologues of the British New Right expressed that combination as follows:

The New Right (if I may appropriate the label) believes in responsible rather than impersonal government; in the autonomy and personality of institutions; and in the rule of law. It recognizes a distinction between state and civil society, and believes that the second should arise, in general, from the unforced interaction of freely

⁹ See: Nash (1996 [1976], p. 17).

¹⁰ For studies of the US New Right see: Andrews, Cockett, Hooper and Williams (1999); Klatch (1999); Lowndes (2008); Lyons (1996).

¹¹ Bosanquet (1983).

¹² Hall and Jacques (1983).

contracting individuals, moderated by custom, tradition and a respect for authority and law.¹³

Many soon argued that the newness of the New Right resided not so much in the ideas as such, but in the fact that various strands of right-wing ideas were welded together in a new synthesis, with neoliberalism and (neo)conservatism being the most notable of these strands.¹⁴ In the UK, Thatcherism became the political expression of that fusion, as Andrew Gamble argued in *The Politics of Thatcherism*:

The New Right is the seedbed from which Thatcherism has grown and is composed of two rather different strands. There is the revival of liberal political economy, which seeks the abandonment of Keynesianism and any kinds of government intervention; and there is a new populism – the focusing on issues like immigration, crime and punishment, strikes, social security abuse, taxation and bureaucracy.¹⁵

Gamble went on to conclude that the newness of Thatcherism resided in the linkage between these two currents:

The real innovation of Thatcherism is the way it has linked traditional Conservative concern with the basis of authority in social institutions and the importance of internal order and external security, with a new emphasis upon re-establishing free markets and extending market criteria into new fields.¹⁶

It is this contradictory fusion that has become the subject of much scholarly debate on both sides of the Atlantic. A good example is the work of the political theorist Wendy Brown on the contradictory assemblage of neoconservatism and neoliberalism achieved by the American New Right:

How does support for governance modelled on the firm and a normative social fabric of self-interest marry or jostle against support for governance modelled on church authority and a normative social fabric of self-sacrifice and long-term filial loyalty, the very fabric shredded by unbridled capitalism?¹⁷

What is further seen as particular to the British and the American New Right is the break with the moderate, gradualist politics of the conservatism and liberalism of the post-war consensus, currents that participated in the construction of the welfare state. The neoliberal and neoconservative strands that made up the New Right were more radical in nature, and aimed to unsettle and undermine the previous social contract,

¹³ Dooley (2009, p. 30).

¹⁴ Levitas (1986).

¹⁵ Gamble (1983, p. 115).

¹⁶ Gamble (1983, p. 121).

¹⁷ Brown (2006, p. 692).

reconstructing the free market and restoring – or rather reinventing – moral authority. Faced with the immensity of this task, the New Right ditched the traditional scepticism and relativism of the Old Right, and embraced a belief in social engineering that is more commonly associated with the left. There is Ronald Reagan's Hollywoodian idea of a government that encourages us in reaching for the stars: 'We must always ask: is government working to liberate and empower the individual? [...] Is it encouraging all of us to reach for the stars?'¹⁸ And there is Thatcher's famous statement at the start of her first term: 'Economics are the method, the object is to change the heart and soul' of the nation.¹⁹ In working towards those ambitious goals, the New Right has pursued a politics of ideas. Following the philosophy of Friedrich Hayek, a foundational figure for both the British and American New Right, shaping the intellectual climate is seen as a precondition for taking power.

In the Netherlands, a similar political and intellectual movement emerged in the 1990s, combining neoliberal and (neo)conservative ideas. It challenged the mainstream in the established right-wing parties (the Christian Democrat CDA, and the right-wing liberal VVD) that had participated in the construction of the welfare state and the corporatist socio-economic compromise between employers and trade unions. The Dutch New Right embraced radical social engineering and pursued a politics of ideas. The former Shell-businessman Frits Bolkestein, leader of the VVD from 1990 till 1998, is without doubt the most singularly influential figure of the Dutch New Right.²⁰ It was Bolkestein who successfully adopted the New Right formula from the end of the 1980s on, combining neoliberal views with cultural conservatism, while sharply criticizing the consensual mores of the mainstream. The politics of figures such as Fortuyn, Spruyt, Bosma and Wilders can be characterized in a comparable fashion. The New Right agenda that took shape in the 1990s and 2000s continues to garner a significant appeal among the traditional mainstream parties, VVD, CDA and PvdA. And it has had clear effects on policy-making. In an exploration of Dutch policy on the terrain of immigration and integration, sociologists Willem Schinkel and Friso van Houdt have described the same synthesis in terms of a 'double helix' of 'cultural assimilationism' and 'neo-liberalism', or more succinctly 'neo-liberal communitarianism'.²¹ In the intellectual context, a major centre of New Right ideas is the Edmund Burke Foundation that provided a rallying point for conservative intellectuals after its creation in 2000 and made its mark on Geert Wilders and the PVV and the mainstream right. As in the US, there is a fusionist strategy on the Dutch New Right, mostly consciously and explicitly among the (cultural) Christian conservatives and new atheists that make up the Edmund Burke Foundation.²² In a broader sense, the Dutch New Right is an eclectic and unstable alliance among Christian conservatives, conservative liberals,

¹⁸ Reagan (1982, p. 938).

¹⁹ Interview with M. Thatcher. See: Butt (1981).

²⁰ That pioneering role is often mistakenly attributed to Pim Fortuyn. Dick Pels described Fortuyn as the 'eclectic forerunner' of 'the intriguing convergence between market-liberalism and neoconservatism'. In reality, Bolkestein preceded Fortuyn by many years. See: Pels (2010, p. 93).

²¹ Schinkel and Van Houdt (2010).

²² Spruyt (2006).

conservative social democrats and provocative nihilists. The last category is a Dutch peculiarity discussed in the final chapter of this study.

New Right versus populist radical right

An impressive array of books and analyses has been written on the rightward shift in Dutch politics. For a majority of Dutch scholars, the rise of (radical) right-wing populism provides the explanatory key to unlock the many mysteries of Dutch political transformation.²³ Analyzing Dutch political developments through the analytical lens of populism and populist radical right parties has obvious advantages, due to the clear delineation of the object of investigation. But it also has significant drawbacks. It takes the established parties out of the picture, and obscures the role of prominent figures therein such as Frits Bolkestein or, at a later point, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, whose views on Islam are very close to those of Geert Wilders. Frits Bolkestein and the VVD developed an anti-immigration politics long before the official emergence of political populism in the Netherlands. The presence of populist parties in Dutch politics has been fragmented and marginal in the period till 2010. Yet in the literature on radical right-wing populism, it is the populist parties who are commonly attributed with most of the agency, while the politics of mainstream parties on hot-button topics such as immigration, Islam and law and order is reduced to a more reactive role of accommodating populism or being contaminated by it.²⁴

From the perspective of the study of ideas, there is another problem with the analytical frame of populism. As we have seen in the previous chapter, pluralist studies of right-wing populism depart from a reflective or demand-focused explanatory scheme wherein the views of populist leaders are seen as a reflection of the opinions and values of their electorate. Consequently, accounts of right-wing populism give relatively little weight to political ideas and public debates. Populism research tends to undervalue the role of intellectuals and opinion makers in providing the ideological foundation for right-wing populists and in helping to make their positions acceptable in public opinion. These intellectuals are not generally explicitly linked to a party, such as Hendrik Jan Schoo, Paul Cliteur, Andreas Kinneging or Bart Jan Spruyt. Furthermore, studies of populism tend to lump together a wide variety of differing parties. When it comes to right-wing populism in Europe, more traditional far-right parties such as those in Eastern Europe are considered under the same banner as the populist radical right in the Netherlands, obscuring the transformation of right-wing ideology that is explored in this study.²⁵ Finally, what complicates matters further, is that populism is known to be a very slippery concept. It has often been characterized as a style, a technique, a form of rhetoric in which the populist leader purports to embody a monolithic, pure people while opposing an estranged establishment.²⁶ Political populism can take shape on the left or on the right and has in itself only limited

²³ See: Lucardie (2008); Mudde (2004); Pellikaan, De Lange and Van der Meer (2016); Van Spanje (2010).

²⁴ For a good example of that perspective, see: Akkerman, De Lange and Rooduijn (2016).

²⁵ Mudde (2007).

²⁶ Canovan (1999); Taggart (2000).

predetermined content. At most, it is a 'thin ideology' that attaches itself in almost parasitic fashion to another 'thick' ideology of stronger solidity.²⁷ It is that 'thick' ideology we are interested in here.

Interestingly, the picture of the New Right we have outlined above bears a surprising resemblance to the character profile of the radical right, the 'thick' ideology that right-wing populism is generally associated with. In his classic overview of the European radical right in the 1990s, Kitschelt identified a 'winning formula' of economic neoliberalism and cultural authoritarian and protectionist views.²⁸ Similarly, in his influential comparative analysis of radical right-wing populism, Hans-Georg Betz writes how these parties tend to blend a 'radical neoliberal program', with 'opposition to immigration'. Betz argues that the radical right takes much after Thatcher and the British New Right. Both currents promote neoliberal economic policies and appeal to a popular pragmatism, that 'put the family, respectability, hard work, "practicality", and order first'.²⁹ Similar to Thatcherism, Betz states, the radical right has offered 'an exclusionary ideology as a compensation for the anxieties inevitably created by the new insecurities generated by the globalization of the market place'. And he goes on to cite Simon Durning's analysis of 'the rationale behind the political strategy employed by Thatcherism'. Betz argues it is also central to the radical right:

The more the market is freed from state intervention and trade and finance cross national boundaries, the more the nation will be exposed to foreign influences and the greater the gap between the rich and the poor. Thatcherism's appeal to popular values can be seen as an attempt to overcome this tension. In particular, the New Right gives the family extraordinary value and aura just because a society organized by market forces is one in which economic life expectations are particularly insecure (as well as one in which, for some, the rewards are large and life exciting). In the same way, a homogenous image of national culture is celebrated and enforced to counter the danger posed by the increasingly global nature of economic exchanges and widening national economic divisions. The New Right image of a monoculture and hard-working family life, organized through traditional gender roles, requires a devaluation not just of other nations and their cultural identities, but of 'enemies within': those who are 'other' racially, sexually, intellectually.³⁰

Perhaps this notion of the conservative component of the New Right assemblage functioning merely as a compensation mechanism is too reductionist. But the example shows the clear lines of continuity between the New Right and the radical right. The major point of distinction lies in their respective radicalisms. The American and British

²⁷ Mudde (2007).

²⁸ Kitschelt (1995).

²⁹ Betz (1994, p. 171).

³⁰ Betz (1994, pp. 171-172). A similar compensatory strategy has been observed in the US concerning the 'paradox of blue-collar conservatives' in the 1980s. 'Reaganomics destroyed their economic security by exporting their jobs and dismantling their unions while Reaganism, especially through "family values", offered them a compensatory illusion of gender and racial power.' (Fiske, 1994, p. 32)

New Right were radical with regards to the legacy of the 1960s and the prevailing socio-economic order, Johnson's Great Society and the British welfare state. In contrast, the radical right is deemed radical because it exists in a state of tension with aspects of liberal democracy. While radical right parties (unlike the extreme right) accept the basic parameters of the democratic system, there is a commonly perceived tension when it comes to issues such as pluralism, the protection of minorities from the will of the majority, and checks on executive authority.³¹ Furthermore, in the course of the 1990s the neoliberal aspect of the radical right agenda became less salient, as radical right-wing populists tried to broaden their appeal to disheartened social democrat voters. Their focus increasingly centred on cultural themes, especially immigration.³²

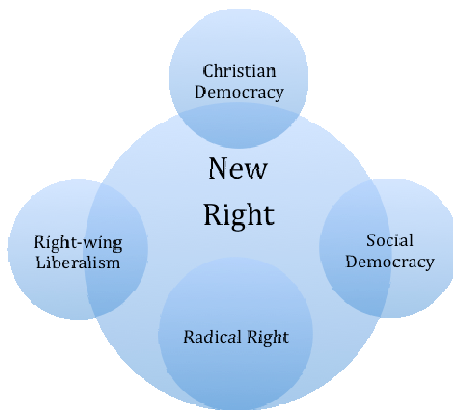


Figure 3.1 A Venn diagram roughly indicating the political space of the Dutch New Right

The radical right can therefore be seen as a subset of the New Right. In other words, the New Right refers to a larger political space that includes the radical right. This is due to the term's provenance from the Anglo-American context, where the first-past-the-post electoral system does not easily allow radical right-wing parties to emerge. In the Anglo-American context, radical currents tend to operate in a more fluid manner within the mainstream parties. When we transfer the label to the Dutch political context, it demarcates a space that includes both the right-wing currents within the mainstream parties and the populist radical right. Because this study is oriented at political ideas and our focus therefore does not restrict itself to party ideologies, adopting the broader framework of the New Right allows us to trace the development of ideas in a more precise manner. After all, the origins of the ideas of the radical right, both when it comes to neoliberalism and when it comes to authoritarianism, law and order and anti-immigration politics, derive for an important part from the New Right of the 1970s and 1980s. The relationship between the New Right currents within the mainstream right and the radical right itself is often fraught with difficulties. At times

³¹ Art (2011, p. 11); Mudde (2007).

³² Betz (1994); Kitschelt (2004).

they contest one another, at times they collaborate. Their political development from the 1990s on can be described in terms of what historians call a *histoire croisée*: ‘an interwoven or interconnected history where it is no longer very clear who is innovating, who is transmitter and who is receiver.’³³ On the one hand, the mainstream parties have had an important role in creating the radical right. In a profile on Geert Wilders in the *New York Times*, Frits Bolkestein described Wilders as the sorcerer’s apprentice. Wilders derived his politics from Bolkestein, but he had not learned how to apply the brakes and exercise political restraint:

Today Mr. Bolkestein likens Mr. Wilders to ‘the sorcerer’s apprentice,’ who, the story goes, uses one of his newly learned spells to enchant a broom into washing the floor for him. Soon the water is all over, and he realizes that he does not know how to stop the broom. He tries splitting it in two with an axe, but then there are two brooms, then four. ‘The apprentice can’t stop,’ Mr. Bolkestein said.³⁴

Similarly, the first copy of Fortuyn’s 1995 book *De Verweesde Samenleving* (The Orphaned Society) was warmly received by Enneüs Heerma, then leader of the Christian Democrat party, who gave a speech at the book presentation. According to top Christian Democrats, Fortuyn, who was indeed an intellectual sponge of sorts, had taken much of his conservative ideas from the CDA.³⁵

Conversely, the mainstream right has been able to realize some of its political agenda thanks to the electoral successes of the populist radical right. Illustrative here is a discussion within the Christian Democrat Party (CDA) after the election victory of Fortuyn in 2002. It resulted in the formation of the first Balkenende cabinet, based on a coalition of the CDA, the VVD and the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). As Thijs Jansen, the editor-in-chief of the journal of the Christian Democrat Party, went on to write:

Important elements of Fortuyn’s political agenda matched with the reform plans of the CDA, or had even been derived from there, I sometimes had the impression. In this way, Fortuyn functioned as a battering ram for the CDA to realize that agenda. In the existing literature up to now, there has absolutely been a lack of attention to the fact that the alliance between Balkenende/Fortuyn was for *both* parties a tactical and a strategic, content-focused alliance. Balkenende has used the momentum to realize his reform agenda that had been developed by the CDA in the years before.³⁶

³³ Te Velde (2005, p. 211).

³⁴ Rubin (2017).

³⁵ This point is made by the current leader of the Christian Democrat party, Sybrand van Haersma Buma (elected leader in 2012) in his book *Tegen het Cynisme* (Against Cynicism). A political assistant at the time, Buma wrote Heerma’s lecture at Fortuyn’s book presentation in 1995. Buma stresses the similarities of the ‘ideological critique’ of Fortuyn and the CDA. See: Buma (2016, p. 27, p. 56).

³⁶ ‘En een aantal belangrijke elementen uit dat politieke alternatief van Fortuyn strookten met de hervormingsagenda van het CDA, of waren daar zelfs – had ik soms de indruk – aan ontleend. En daarmee fungeerde Fortuyn als stormram voor het CDA om die agenda te realiseren. In de bestaande literatuur is tot op heden volstrekt onvoldoende aandacht besteed aan het gegeven dat het pact Balkenende/Fortuyn voor *beide* partijen evenzeer een tactisch als een inhoudelijk-strategisch verbond was. Balkenende heeft het

The accommodation strategy as outlined in the previous chapter often implies this intricate form of two-way traffic: the right-wing populists derived much of their politics from the Dutch mainstream right, while the radical currents within the mainstream parties used the populist radical right as a battering ram. Or to put it less dramatically, as an instrument to realize their own agenda, often while confronting the centrist or progressive forces within their own party. As the conservative Christian Democrat Hans Hillen argued: ‘Pim ploughs the field from which we can reap the harvest.’³⁷

In similar fashion, Wilders has ploughed the field from which the New Right currents within the VVD, the CDA and the PvdA have been able to harvest. The electoral success of Wilder’s Party for Freedom (PVV) in 2010 was in that sense an eerie repetition of 2002, it lead again to a tactical and strategic content-focused alliance with the VVD and the CDA in the first Rutte cabinet (2010-2012). In the previous chapter, I cited the same ‘reap the harvest’ Hans Hillen as a proponent of the accommodation strategy with regards to Wilders in 2010. In a similar dynamic, conservative social democrats have pushed for a stricter immigration agenda within the social democrat party, by pointing to the right-wing populist threat.³⁸ Wilders in turn, has achieved political legitimacy through his visible success in drawing the mainstream parties to the right.

As a consequence of the eye-catching role of the populist radical right, the ultimately more important role of the mainstream parties in achieving the shift to the right has been far less conspicuous. And as a result of a lingering adherence to a pluralist ‘end of ideology’ framework, many studies of populism conceive of populists as the only ideological player in the game. In this way the impression has been able to take hold that the populist radical right is the only historical actor, while the mainstream parties are merely accommodating and reacting to historical trends. Using the analytical framework of the New Right allows us to better address the complex political dynamic described above.³⁹ In the next two sections of this chapter, I will first

momentum aangegrepen om de hervormingsagenda te realiseren die in de jaren daarvoor binnen het CDA was ontwikkeld.’ (Jansen, 2004, p. 10)

³⁷ Cited in: Couwenberg (2004, p. 151).

³⁸ A typical example is the following opinion piece by the conservative social democrat journalist Hans Wansink pushing for a stricter integration policy. See: Wansink (2008). A more recent example of the same tactical discourse is Paul Scheffer’s essay on the politics of the border. He argues that the *bien-pensants* foment populism with their calls for hospitality for refugees. ‘Then sooner or later – probably sooner – the moment will come that people with an authoritarian mindset will draw those borders.’ Scheffer, cited in: Halsema (2017, p. 46).

³⁹ Of course, not all of the proponents of the accommodation strategy necessarily share the New Right agenda, as we’ve seen in the last chapter with Mark Bovens (who happens to be not only part of the Dutch policy elite, but also has been a longstanding member of the elite of the social democrat party). Here it is pertinent to recall James Kennedy’s remarks concerning the undervalued role of traditional elites in realizing the changes in the 1960s. Many of the traditional elites did not necessarily share the agenda of the protest generation back then. Their actions were motivated by the perceived need to adapt in order to channel historical trends and maintain equilibrium. A similar motivation accounts for the accommodating role of political elites who are not part of the New Right. The conundrum of Dutch politics is that it is often difficult to distinguish the active drivers of a trend from those politically accommodating that trend. Is Mark Rutte, the present Prime Minister, an exponent of the Dutch New Right or does he merely accommodate the New Right? It is difficult to tell the difference.

address the neoliberal strand within the Dutch New Right, followed by the (neo)conservative strand.

3.2 The neoliberal strand

The intellectual and political movement known as neoliberalism is a central reference point for the New Right. In the US, it is important to note, neoliberalism is more commonly identified as ‘libertarianism’ or ‘fiscal conservatism’, due to the progressive connotation of ‘liberalism’ in the American political tradition. Though there has been a lot of scholarly and public controversy surrounding the concept of neoliberalism, a recent series of intellectual histories has provided the analysis of this movement with a more solid footing.⁴⁰ Their approach is to empirically trace the development of neoliberalism, through the use of archival material and the analysis of primary sources. Neoliberalism’s earliest intellectual origins can be traced back to discussions on economic planning in the 1920s. Broadly conceived, it is fair to say that neoliberalism emerged as a reaction to the economic crisis of the 1930s, as a response to the perceived shortcomings of laissez-faire liberalism on the one hand, and the emergence of Keynesianism on the other. In the post-war years, neoliberalism developed into a broad intellectual current that resisted economic planning and the Keynesian welfare state. For decades, this movement remained relatively marginalized. Neoliberals experienced their breakthrough in the field of economics in the 1970s, when Hayek and Friedman received the Nobel Memorial Prize. Their political breakthrough followed shortly after. Neoliberals played an important role in crafting the Reaganite and Thatcherite policies of liberalization, privatization and deregulation. The Washington Consensus as advocated by IMF and World Bank economists in the 1980s became a global reference point for neoliberal policy.

A pivotal figure in the neoliberal movement is the Austrian philosopher and economist Friedrich Hayek, hailed as an intellectual guru by both Reagan and Thatcher. In 1944, Friedrich Hayek published *The Road to Serfdom*. It soon became a foundational text of the movement then referred to by its adherents as neoliberalism. In the book, Hayek portrayed central planning and government intervention in the economy as a slippery slope towards the bondage of man: totalitarian society. The intended target of his critique was above all democratic socialism and the dominant influence of the ideas of John Maynard Keynes. To contest socialism and Keynesianism, Hayek proposed a renewal of liberalism.

This renewal departed on the one hand, from a critique of the old, fossilized classic-liberal doctrines, which had led to liberal passivity. ‘Probably nothing has done so much harm to the liberal cause as the wooden insistence of some liberals on certain rough rules of thumb, above all the principle of laissez-faire,’ Hayek stated.⁴¹ The core of the renewal proposed by Hayek in relation to classic liberal doctrine, – why neoliberalism is

⁴⁰ Burgin (2012); Crouch (2011); Mirowski and Plehwe (2009); Peck (2010); Stedman Jones (2012); Walpen (2004). For a good Dutch intellectual history from an adherent and MPS-member, see: Meijer (1988).

⁴¹ Hayek (2005 [1944], p. 18).

'neo' – is the idea that state intervention is needed to create and maintain the conditions for free competition, starting with a proper juridical framework. It is at first sight a rather contradictory idea, known in the Netherlands as *marktwerking* (marketization): something that is not (yet) a functional free market, should be made into a free market by government intervention. In so doing, attaining the free market becomes a form of social engineering. Neoliberalism is not necessarily opposed to government intervention as such; it is opposed to governments (and trade unions) interfering with the establishment of prices by the market. The core idea of neoliberalism, Colin Crouch argues, is that 'optimal outcomes will be achieved if the demand and supply for goods and services are allowed to adjust to each other through the price mechanism'.⁴²

On the other hand, the liberal tradition needed to be warded off from its problematic progressive-liberal offshoot, originating in John Stuart Mill and subsequently leading to Keynes, the welfare state and finally – even inevitably in the eyes of Hayek – to socialism and totalitarianism. While the neoliberal movement contained a lot of internal diversity and disagreement, they shared a similar vision on what Michel Foucault called the 'field of adversity': the manner in which they framed their relation to opponents and competitors.⁴³ The shared position of the neoliberal movement was defined by a negative view of Keynesian economic planning as a slippery slope towards totalitarianism, a critical attitude towards *laissez-faire*, and the idea that a long-term battle of ideas was needed to turn the tide.

In April 1947, under the leadership of Friedrich Hayek and the Swiss businessman Albert Hunold, a group of economists and intellectuals converged on the Swiss mountain village Mont Pèlerin. In the days that followed they conferred and founded the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS), an intellectual network that soon became incubator and nerve centre of the global neoliberal movement. This network presented itself explicitly in the 1950s, in a series of texts, as 'the neoliberal movement'. 'Gone are the days when the few outmoded liberals walked their paths lonely, ridiculed and without response from the young,' Hayek would write after the first MPS gatherings, 'at least personal contact among the proponents of neoliberalism has been established.'⁴⁴ Milton Friedman wrote a text with a comparable sentiment in 1952, titled *Neo-Liberalism and its Prospects*, in which he presented 'the doctrine sometimes called neoliberalism' as 'a new faith' that is 'in many ways ideally suited to fill the vacuum that seems to me to be developing in the beliefs of intellectual classes the world over'.⁴⁵ In the decades that followed, thousands of researchers, politicians, businessmen and journalists would attend the yearly meetings, continuing up to the present moment. Directors of neoliberal think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the Institute of

⁴² Crouch (2011, p. 31).

⁴³ Foucault (2004, p. 107).

⁴⁴ Cited in: Nash (1996 [1976], p. 69). The concept was used in a comparable neutral or positive way by MPS-members such as Milton Friedman, Ludwig von Mises, Walter Eucken, Jacques Rueff, Ludwig Erhard, Albert Hunold, Alfred Müller-Armack, Wilhelm Röpke and Alexander Rüstow. See: Walpen (2004, p. 48).

⁴⁵ Friedman (1951).

Economic Affairs took part, and later helped shape the agenda of Reagan and Thatcher. The leading intellectual histories of neoliberalism have used the networks of the MPS as a pragmatic indication of the bandwidth of neoliberal ideology.

From the very beginning, there was a focus on 'the politics of ideas', a conviction that ideas play a central role in achieving political change. Hayek spoke at the foundational meeting of the MPS while referencing the renowned conclusion from Keynes' classic *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*:

[T]he ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.⁴⁶

According to Hayek, the rise of socialism was a result of the effort of socialist intellectuals in the preceding decades. Over a similar long period of several decades, Hayek told his MPS-associates in 1947, they would need to set their aims. Hayek called on the MPS to focus on a long-term battle of ideas. A great intellectual task had to be performed, before political action could be undertaken: the renewal of liberalism that had petrified into a rigid and unpractical ideology. On the second gathering of the MPS, Hayek circulated a now famous essay – *The Intellectuals and Socialism* – in which he argued that a long-term radical vision was needed to win that battle:

A program which seems neither a mere defence of things as they are nor a diluted kind of socialism, but a truly liberal radicalism which does not spare the susceptibilities of the mighty (including the trade unions), which is not too severely practical, and which does not confine itself to what appears today as politically possible.⁴⁷

What is politically feasible in the present moment should not be the first concern, Hayek argued. Of primary importance was the spreading of ideas that he considered necessary for the attainment of a free society. For that purpose, the neoliberals needed a utopian ideal, like the socialists:

The main lesson which the true liberal must learn from the success of the socialists is that it was their courage to be Utopian which gained them the support of the

⁴⁶ See: Keynes (2007 [1936], p. 242); Walpen (2004, p. 73).

⁴⁷ Hayek (2005 [1944], pp. 128-129).

intellectuals and therefore an influence on public opinion which is daily making possible what only recently seemed utterly remote.⁴⁸

Due to their role in developing this long-term strategy of a politics of ideas, Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman are seen as pivotal figures for both the American and the British New Right. George Nash opens his monumental *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America* with a discussion of the formidable impact of Hayek's *Road to Serfdom*.⁴⁹ At a moment when US conservatism was deeply marginalized, Hayek's book turned into a major intellectual event. A condensed version was spread by Reader's Digest in an edition of 600,000 copies. It was hailed by conservatives as a foundational text for the libertarian, free market wing of US conservatism. Together with Milton Friedman, Hayek became a major influence on the politics of Reagan. In the British case, Friedrich Hayek is known both as the most important personal inspiration of Margaret Thatcher and together with Friedman, the principal reference point for Thatcherite economic policy. The Institute of Economic Affairs, the powerful think tank seen as the originator of Thatcherism, was founded on Hayek's explicit instruction by a wealthy reader of *The Road to Serfdom*. A famous scene at a Conservative Party meeting in the late 1970s perhaps best illustrates Hayek's significance. Margaret Thatcher, confronted with a plea for centrist pragmatism by one of her colleagues, reached into her briefcase and took out a book. 'It was Friedrich von Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*. Interrupting, she held the book up for all of us to see. "This", she said sternly, "is what we believe", and banged Hayek down on the table.'⁵⁰

A depoliticized neoliberal turn

Neoliberalism first emerged in the Netherlands in the late 1940s and 1950s. There was an explicit neoliberalism debate at the time, with reference to Hayek and the MPS. Liberal and Christian politicians embraced neoliberalism, but it ultimately failed to break through.⁵¹ A second neoliberal wave in the 1980s proved more successful but had a more implicit and rhetorically subdued character. The curious story of Dutch neoliberalism in the 1980s is perhaps best started by reference to a speech. On May 3, 1981, a large crowd gathered in Paradiso, the illustrious Amsterdam church-turned-

⁴⁸ Hayek (2005 [1944], pp. 128-129). Here it is important to distinguish my reading of Hayek with that of the Dutch philosopher Hans Achterhuis. Achterhuis argues that it was Hayek's utopianism, following the formula of the utopian good intentions leading to unintended consequences, that resulted in Hayek's assistance to the dictatorial regime of Pinochet in Chile. My perspective on Hayek differs from Achterhuis in that I do not see Hayek's utopianism as the source of his antidemocratic leanings. The temporary suspension of democracy is not an unintended consequence for Hayek. It is consistent with his philosophy, where economic freedom trumps political freedom. Ironically enough, this central theme in Achterhuis' work, the Popperian notion of the utopian good intentions leading to unintended totalitarian consequences, is a product of the neoliberal critique of democratic socialism that Hayek and Popper developed together at the MPS. See: Achterhuis (2010, 2012), Oudenampsen (2016c).

⁴⁹ Nash (1996 [1976], pp. 1-50).

⁵⁰ Ranelagh (1991, p. ix).

⁵¹ Mellink (2017); Oudenampsen (2016c).

music-hall. They came to hear Joop Den Uyl speak, then leader of the Dutch Social Democrat Party (PvdA) and arguably the most formidable intellectual figure of the Dutch post-war left. The speech lasted for a solid two-and-a-half hours. Over time, it developed into a historical reference point for a younger generation of centre-left intellectuals and politicians coming of age in the 1980s. The Paradiso lecture represented the swan song of Keynesian social democracy, soon to be replaced by the social-liberalism of the Third Way. Den Uyl impressed upon his public that this was a pivotal moment. With the elections around the corner, Dutch society stood at a crossroads. The choice was either to walk the democratic road, or the road pointed out by the New Right, understood by Den Uyl as 'in essence a fusion of conservative and certain liberal beliefs'. The New Right was represented by the threatening rise of Reagan and Thatcher and the growth in popularity of the 'free market ideology' of Hayek and Friedman, also in the Netherlands.⁵²

Striking about the lecture is that Den Uyl identified the anti-democratic threat of the New Right in the Netherlands primarily as one of depoliticization and popular acquiescence. After evaluating the democratization movement of the 1960s and 1970s that took aim against the closed political culture of pillarization, Den Uyl argued that there was now an attempt to turn back the clock; an effort to pacify the electorate and undermine their belief in participatory politics. The New Right, Den Uyl explained to his audience in Paradiso, 'intended to return the steering wheel of society to a small group of strong but mostly powerful people. The state turned back in on itself. The motto is peace and order. Or: acquiescence without ordering.'⁵³ The intriguing paradox here is that the breakthrough of a new free market ideology, which purportedly served as a 'legitimation to attack the welfare state', appeared in the form of depoliticization. In fact, Den Uyl was not alone in this perception. The Dutch political science literature identifies the previous national elections of 1977 as a turning point from a more open, polarized and politicized decade, towards the 'no-nonsense politics' of the 1980s: a more closed period of pacification and depoliticization, in which Lijphart's 'rules of the game' of the politics of accommodation entered back into operation.⁵⁴

This paradox can be partly resolved by turning to recent historical scholarship that has attempted to correct the prevailing non-ideological image of the 1980s. In these accounts, the transformation that occurred in the 1980s is above all a shift from a more public and open engagement with politics and ideology to a more private and closed way of dealing with these matters.⁵⁵ That could explain the observation that neoliberal ideas were actively circulated and promulgated among policy elites, while the reforms

⁵² Speech Den Uyl (1981, May 3, p. 24). The ideas of Hayek and Friedman enjoyed a new ascendancy at the time, in books such as: Daudt and Van der Wolk (1978); Stevers(1979). Den Uyl had framed his own political views in opposition to Hayek's neoliberalism ever since the 1950s. The stark opposition Den Uyl sketched between a democratic road and a road to authoritarianism can be read as a response to Hayek's own use of that motif in *The Road to Serfdom*. See: Oudenampsen (2016c).

⁵³ Speech Den Uyl (1981, May 3, p. 26).

⁵⁴ Andeweg and Irwin (2002, p. 41).

⁵⁵ Turpijn (2011); Van Klaveren (2016).

of the 1980s were not presented as such in public discourse. Instead, they were depoliticized as largely technocratic, pragmatic measures.

The Dutch counterpart to Thatcher and Reagan was formed by the coalitions led by Ruud Lubbers (1982-1994) and his Minister of Finance Onno Ruding (1982-1989). The latter was parachuted into government from his position as executive director at the IMF, at that time an institution at the very heart of the neoliberal revolution in economic policy. The rapidly deteriorating condition of Dutch public finance and the declining rate of corporate profitability in the late 1970s led to a concerted attempt by political and business elites to sideline the corporatist institutions. These deliberative bodies where Dutch trade unions and employers traditionally presided over socio-economic policy, were in a state of deadlock. After increasingly anxious attempts to reach a compromise with trade unions and employers at the end of the 1970s, it was finally decided to unilaterally implement harsh austerity measures and cut public sector wages under the first Lubbers cabinet of 1982, comprised of Christian Democrats (CDA) and right-wing liberals (VVD).

Instead of Thatcherite all-out confrontation however, Lubbers chose to pacify the opposition – the leadership of the trade unions and later the social democrats – resulting in the Wassenaar Agreement of 1982 and the Dutch wage moderation strategy. This was clearly an agreement that was forcefully imposed by the state and Dutch business elites, signifying a historical retreat by the Dutch trade unions. In their classic *A Dutch Miracle*, Visser and Hemerijck described the reforms of the 1980s as an expression of ‘a shift in the balance of power between the separate interests of organized capital and labour’, where ‘those who lose power must learn’.⁵⁶ Yet it was successfully sold to the public as a voluntary, consensual agreement, soon to assume mythical proportions in the Dutch public imagination as the birth of the ‘polder model’. Here we should remember Lijphart’s argument concerning the politics of accommodation. Dutch politics is a game where all parties are supposed to win, where painful (read: polarizing) political defeats, or at least the impression thereof, have to be prevented as much as possible.⁵⁷

The reinvigorated politics of accommodation resulted in a markedly different historical development than the path taken in the US and the UK. The neoliberal turn in the Dutch context did not lead to an open confrontation with the previous political order and was ultimately more moderate than its Anglo-American counterparts. There was no settling of accounts with the progressive legacy of the 1960s and 1970s, no public battle of ideas with the adherents of Keynesianism, no epic confrontations with the trade unions. Yes, there were large demonstrations and strikes against the austerity measures of the Lubbers cabinets and there was obvious political polarization. But the ideological nature of the political turn was carefully downplayed and the policies of the subsequent Lubbers cabinets were depoliticized and framed using the technocratic label of ‘no-nonsense’ politics.⁵⁸ Dutch Christian Democrats were partly confronting

⁵⁶ Visser and Hemerijck (1997, p. 78). See also: Hemerijck (1992, p. 330).

⁵⁷ Lijphart (1968, p. 125).

⁵⁸ Daalder (1990, pp. 98-99).

their own Christian trade union, the progressive or corporatist wing of their own party, and a considerable part of their voter base – Christian workers – so they had little incentive to aim for open confrontation.

In 1984, *Time Magazine* portrayed Lubbers as Ruud ‘Shock’, supposedly tougher than the Iron Lady. The article featured a reverential quote by Margaret Thatcher on a visit to Lubbers in the Netherlands:

‘Mr. Lubbers, are you really intending to cut the salaries of your public employees by more than 3%?’ she demanded. ‘That’s a disaster. I am supposed to be the toughest in Europe. You are going to ruin my reputation as the Iron Lady.’⁵⁹

But Lubbers never attained the tough image of ‘iron lad’ in the Netherlands. In fact, it would have been more appropriate for *Time Magazine* to call him Ruud ‘Smog’, due to his reputation as a verbal smoke machine. Among others, Pim Fortuyn later pointed to Lubbers’ ‘sphinx-like character’ and remarked on his consensual ‘magic formulas’, so ‘Jesuitically unclear’ that ‘all participants left with the impression that they had been proven right’.⁶⁰ Bolkestein called Lubbers ‘compromise incarnate’.⁶¹ The lacking ideological profile of the reforms of the 1980s made it rather difficult for all parties involved to distinguish it from mere pragmatism.

The Rutten Boys and the political nature of technocracy

In the UK and the US, the switch from a Keynesian demand-side model to a neoliberal supply-side model has been studied as a Kuhnian paradigm shift in which political and media elites ideologically confronted the established economic policy elites, who held Keynesian views.⁶² Surprisingly, in the Netherlands, the more radical and ideological role was taken up by established economic policy elites. The man that is often mentioned as the ideological linchpin of the economic reforms of the 1980s is Frans Rutten, an economist from a Catholic background who served as the head of the department of Economic Affairs from 1973 till 1990. A senior figure at the Dutch Employers Federation hailed him as ‘the man that has made the case for Reaganomics in the Netherlands’.⁶³ Rutten headed the taskforce *Algemene Economische Politiek* (AEP, General Economic Policy), an elite ministerial think tank overseeing macro-economic policy. Echoing the famous name of the Chilean Chicago Boys trained by Milton Friedman, the group serving under Rutten were dubbed the ‘Rutten Boys’. In a retrospective interview, Jarig van Sinderen, one of the Rutten Boys, highlighted the

⁵⁹ *Time Magazine* (1984).

⁶⁰ Fortuyn (1992, p. 111).

⁶¹ Bolkestein (1995, p. 217).

⁶² Blyth (2002); Hall (1993). Dutch scholars have used Peter Hall’s work on Kuhnian paradigm shifts in economic policy to describe Dutch developments, but they have left out the role of ideological confrontation, which is deemed crucial in Peter Hall’s model and the analysis of the transformation in the Anglo-American context more generally. The Dutch literature, typically, has a more depoliticizing character. See: Touwen (2008); Visser and Hemerijck (1997).

⁶³ Jorritsma and De Waard (2009).

trailblazing role of the AEP in its turn from the demand-side economics of Keynesianism to the supply-side model of Reaganomics:

‘There was a huge crisis, incomparable to what we experience now, a budget deficit of eight, nine percent. Something had to happen, and at AEP we reflected on it with a lot of creativity. Traditionally, the commission had a strong connection with economics departments at the universities. But if we were to depart from the views that were held there, the budget deficit was allowed to be even higher. Cutbacks are bad for expenditures and as such for the economy, that was the dominant theory.’ The AEP directorate was thinking of a change in policy. AEP-members had looked around in the United States, where Reagan aimed for economic recovery with his Reaganomics recipes: cut taxes and let the market do its work. The committee adopted ideas that had not reached the Netherlands yet. ‘We were vilified for it,’ says Van Sinderen.⁶⁴

Politically, the shift from Keynesianism to Reaganomics had been prepared and proposed by the Wagner commission, a powerful extra-parliamentary committee of technocrats and business leaders installed by the previous government in 1980. The committee was named after its chairman, the former chairman of Shell, Gerrit Wagner, also a prominent Christian Democrat. Again, it was Frans Rutten who had selected and screened the members of the Wagner commission, and who can be considered the intellectual godfather of its policy ideas. The first Lubbers cabinet adopted almost all of the reform measures proposed by the Wagner commission without much alteration. Understandably, Rutten took full credit for the economic policies of the Lubbers cabinets in an interview in *Trouw* at his resignation:

In the beginning of the 1980s, the Dutch economy was in a deep recession. The Social Economic Council (SER) stopped functioning, the labour movement was obstructing and politicians would not come to their senses. On the initiative of two senior officials of the Finance Ministry and Economic Affairs, an informal club was created with business leaders and civil servants. That group set out a new economic course. When at the end of 1982, the first Lubbers cabinet entered power, the case

⁶⁴ “‘Er was sprake van een enorme crisis, onvergelykbaar met wat we nu meemaken, met een financieringsstekort van acht, negen procent. Er moest iets gebeuren en bij AEP werd daar met veel creativiteit over nagedacht. Vanouds had de directie een sterke binding met de economische wetenschap aan de universiteiten. Maar als we zouden afgaan op de daar gekoesterde inzichten zou het financieringstekort zelfs nog wel hoger mogen zijn. Ombuigingen zijn slecht voor de bestedingen en dus ook voor de economie, dat was de destijds gangbare theorie.’ Bij de directie AEP werd nagedacht over ander beleid. AEP'ers hadden rondgekeken in onder meer de Verenigde Staten, waar president Reagan de economie er met zijn Reaganomics-recepten bovenop wilde helpen: verlaag de belastingen en laat de markt haar werk doen. De directie deed er ideeën op die in Nederland nog niet doorgedrongen waren. “We werden erom verguisd,” zegt Van Sinderen.’ See: Obbink (2003). For a more extensive analysis of the role of the AEP, see: Raes, Van Sinderen, Van Winden and Biessen (2002).

had already been thought out. It is one of the most impressive feats in the sphere of economics in the Netherlands of the past century.⁶⁵

Rutten had formulated his economic views in a series of articles in the leading Dutch economics journal *ESB*. Taken together, it amounted to a surprisingly radical reform agenda inspired on Reaganomics. In his article of 1987, he retrospectively called this programme *De Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* (The New Objectivity). The core idea is that the 'government needs to concentrate on its primary tasks (such as justice, education, roads, defence) and should limit its less essential tasks (all sorts of subsidies and other interventions in the market economy)'. In the long run, the government should stop taking care of 'quasi-public goods (social security, healthcare, education)' altogether, and transform these terrains into markets through vouchers.⁶⁶ An approach famously advocated by Milton Friedman. Not surprisingly, Rutten wrote that Dutch economic policy was in need of a long-term radical vision, and that he based his vision on the writings of Adam Smith and Milton Friedman.⁶⁷ This ideological vision however, remained in the sphere of technocracy and was not publicly advocated by the Lubbers cabinets. It appears to be another instance of the Thoenes-paradox: the exceptional political role of ostensibly depoliticized technocratic knowledge in the Netherlands. Frans Rutten later remarked that the political controversy surrounding the reforms had led the government to mask its politics behind technocratic language:

Critical remarks by the Minister of Finance Ruding [...] and the President of the Dutch Central Bank Duisenberg about the tenability of the welfare state, provoked storms of critique during the tenure of the first Lubbers cabinet. The question was raised whether the bank director could be ejected from the social democrat party. The officials in question soon had no other choice but to keep their mouths shut about socially sensitive issues. On instructions from the government, deregulation was reduced to a technocratic exercise.⁶⁸

Ideological critiques of the new course were rare and largely restricted to the technocratic sphere. A good example is Wim Kok, the former trade union leader who

⁶⁵ 'Begin jaren tachtig zat de Nederlandse economie in een diep dal. De SER functioneerde niet meer, de vakbeweging werkte tegen en de politiek wou niet tot zinnen komen. Op initiatief van twee ambtenaren van Financiën en Economische Zaken is er toen een informeel clubje gekomen met mensen uit het bedrijfsleven en ambtenaren. Dat groepje heeft de bakens op economisch gebied verzet. Toen eind 1982 Lubbers I aantrad, was de zaak al uitgedacht. Het is een van de knapste staaltjes op economisch gebied die deze eeuw in Nederland vertoond zijn.' See: Rutenfrans (1999).

⁶⁶ Rutten (1993, p. 55).

⁶⁷ Rutten (1995, p. 37).

⁶⁸ 'Kritische betogen van de minister van Financiën Ruding (op de bank bij Tante Truus) en de president van de Nederlandse Bank Duisenberg over de inrichting van de verzorgingsstaat riepen tijdens de kabinetsperiode Lubbers I stormen van kritiek op. De vraag werd opgeworpen of de bank-president uit de PvdA kon worden verwijderd. De genoemde functionarissen hadden al snel geen andere keuze dan over sociaal gevoelige thema's hun mond te houden. De deregulering verviel op instructie van het kabinet tot een technocratische exercitie.' (Rutten, 1995, p. 58)

succeeded Den Uyl as leader of the Dutch social democrats in 1986. He criticized the technocratic appearance of the New Objectivity in a rather dense, technocratic contribution to an anniversary publication of the Dutch Association of Economists. Kok indicted it as a clear-cut ideological programme dressed in a 'seemingly objective garment': 'The ideological dimension of the new objectivity is clearly expressed in the plea of Rutten for a concentration of the government on its primary tasks (such as justice, education, roads, defence); so a concentration on "core business".'⁶⁹ According to Kok, the New Objectivity was part of a historical development, in which 'the free play of [market] forces triumphs over the striving towards social consensus'. According to the free market perspective, Kok argued, 'a government that goes beyond its night-watch tasks is seen as ruining the game. This overreach could consist of an "artificial" aim of full employment, or a less skewed income distribution.'⁷⁰

As a result of the closed, technocratic and depoliticized nature of the Dutch neoliberal turn, the word neoliberalism was not frequently used in Dutch public debate. Prominent observers however, have pointed to the neoliberal character of the reforms. A case in point is Wil Albeda, a leading economist who had been Minister of Social Affairs under the previous Van Agt-Wiegel cabinet (1977-1981). Albeda was the face of the progressive, pro-union wing of the Christian Democrats. In a retrospective on Dutch economic policy written after his retirement in 1999, Albeda referred to Rutten's abovementioned interview in *Trouw*, in which Rutten applauded himself for the reforms. Albeda argued that Rutten should have been a bit more modest: 'That seems too much honour. A small group like this could draw on the neo-liberal arsenal, as it had been thought out in the US.'⁷¹ Referring to Hayek and Friedman, Albeda argued that the Dutch economic reforms inspired on their views, implied something more than mere pragmatism. Rather, it was a 'sea-change in the ideological thinking of economists'. Referring to neoclassical and monetarist economists, Albeda concluded that 'presently a new ideology comes to the fore, that chooses for the minimal state, not out of necessity but out of conviction'.⁷²

Right-wing discontent with the reforms of the 1980s

Returning to Den Uyl's cautionary lecture on the ascendancy of the New Right in 1981, the question is whether the three Lubbers cabinets can be fully equated with the New Right. At most, it was a half-hearted variant: Lubbers lacked the radical impulse of Thatcher and Reagan. As the conservative journalist Hans Wansink noted with disappointment: 'Ruud Lubbers is no Margaret Thatcher. Her 1980s had truly been a revolution, she did engage in a politics of confrontation, but Lubbers let things slide after his first government, lacking the conviction.'⁷³ All in all, the Dutch rightward turn of the 1980s was a more muted and moderate affair compared to the UK and the US. In

⁶⁹ Kok (1987, p. 368).

⁷⁰ Kok (1987, p. 373).

⁷¹ Albeda (1999, p. 420).

⁷² Albeda (1999, p. 424).

⁷³ Wansink (1996).

the Dutch case, conflict has been more subdued, the dialogue with trade unions has ultimately been maintained and most of the political transformations have been discussed and enacted behind the scenes, in technocratic language.

A second important contrast is the relative weakness of the cultural conservative strand in the Netherlands. The conservative law professor Couwenberg had welcomed the economic crisis in 1981 as a 'blessing in disguise' that would put short order to the hedonistic 1960s rebellion against duty and decency.⁷⁴ Similarly, Jos de Beus concluded that the conditions for a 'conservative backlash' against 'the explosion of progressiveness from the 1960s' were there. But all in all, conservative efforts had been 'rather limited and moderate'. Consensus needed to be maintained, the trade unions needed to be accommodated and there was a peak of progressive and Christian mobilization around nuclear proliferation.⁷⁵ We might add that the legacy of pillarization and the lingering presence of the religious cleavage in Dutch politics prevented a broad conservative mobilization. The VVD was economically on the right but culturally progressive, due to its historical opposition to religious morality. The right-wing liberals won big in the 1982 elections with the free and easy slogan 'simply allowed to be yourself'. The subdued breakthrough of neoliberalism under Lubbers did however, lead to a new radicalism on the right, as free market thought increasingly became the prevailing policy consensus. It seems fair to argue that the Dutch New Right only fully emerged as a response to the Lubbers cabinets, as an attempt to fulfil a job seen as half-done, tainted by too much compromise.

In a bid to placate the progressive wing of his party and to keep the Christian Democrats in the centre, Ruud Lubbers discarded the right-wing liberals (VVD) in 1989 as a coalition partner and invited the social democrats (PvdA) to partake in the third Lubbers cabinet (1989-1994). This development was made possible by the (cautious) embrace of free market ideas in the PvdA in the late 1980s, culminating in the Dutch Third Way in the 1990s.⁷⁶ Still, the new government was seen as an explicit choice for a more centrist course by Lubbers. Many on the right were deeply disappointed. The chance of making a radical break with the progressive legacy of the Dutch welfare state and its corporatist socio-economic arrangements seemed to have subsided. Frustration with Lubbers and the reforms of the 1980s became a central theme of the Dutch New Right of the 1990s, who increasingly came to see the Dutch political culture of consensus and corporatist compromise as a bulwark against neoliberal reform that needed to be challenged. Among the disappointed was Frans Rutten, who was asked to leave his powerful position as head of Economic Affairs in 1989. The disenchantment was also felt in the conservative wing of the CDA itself, personified by Elco Brinkman, the doomed successor of Lubbers. Brinkman would lead the party in the elections of 1994 by insisting on the need for a radical right-wing break, 'a watershed'. Amid great

⁷⁴ Couwenberg (1989, p. 196).

⁷⁵ De Beus (2006a, p. 223).

⁷⁶ Oudenampsen (2016b).

controversy, Lubbers advised against his successor, resulting in historic Christian Democrat losses in the elections.⁷⁷

But the most significant expression of right-wing discontent was – poignantly enough – Frits Bolkestein’s contribution to Lubbers’ *liber amicorum* (*feestschrift*). In a text that is traditionally supposed to be a celebratory salute, Bolkestein launched a litany of complaints against Lubbers. The problem was that Lubbers had been politically formed under Den Uyl and ‘never developed into a convinced supply-side economist’; Lubbers ‘never squarely positioned himself behind his Minister of Finance Onno Ruding’; he was too soft on social security and did not have ‘a clear vision on the future of the welfare state’; Lubbers was too corporatist and insisted too much on cooperation with the trade unions; and he had started moderating the government’s stance from 1986 on, in a conscious effort to move back to the centre and the social democrats. Lubbers would not go down in history as ‘the Prime Minister who has buried the legacy of the 1970s’, Bolkestein’s illuminating measure of achievement. In short: Lubbers was not radical and neoliberal enough. In his typical measured, dry and evocative prose, Bolkestein described Lubbers as ‘a politician with a perfect radar but with a defective gyroscope’. Lubbers received signals from all directions flawlessly, but he lacked a long-term vision, an internal conviction that kept him on course. Not that everything was the fault of Lubbers, who had to contend with the progressive current within the CDA. Bolkestein also blamed the centrists and progressives in his own party: due to its lack of ‘internal cohesion’, the VVD had ‘offered too little resistance against the watering down of the austerity policies at the end of the 1980s’.⁷⁸ But what had been half-done could still be fully achieved. In the years that followed, Bolkestein became the principal standard-bearer of the Dutch New Right, inspiring a generation of conservative politicians and intellectuals while exercising a dominant influence on the Dutch opinion climate.

Bolkestein and the battle of ideas

Because of his well-known aversion to the Dutch political culture of consensus and ideological toleration, Bolkestein is often described as an un-Dutch politician, a rather polarizing and even unsociable figure. In the Dutch political tradition, it is common for politicians and intellectuals alike to praise the golden mean, to practice self-doubt, to build bridges and to compromise. Bolkestein’s approach was radically different: ‘A bridge is not a stance. A bridge is to sleep under or to walk over.’⁷⁹ Bolkestein had joined the parliamentary party of the VVD in the run up to the elections of 1977. He had worked for Shell from 1960 to 1976 in East-Africa, Honduras, El Salvador, London (co-ordinating the Middle-East, Asia and Australia), Indonesia and Paris. During this period, he developed his political views, in the crucible of Cold War and

⁷⁷ De Vries (2005, p. 40).

⁷⁸ Bolkestein (1995, pp. 217-220).

⁷⁹ Bolkestein (1995, p. 159).

decolonization.⁸⁰ Returning to the Netherlands, he described himself after the John Le Carré novel as ‘the man who came in from the cold’.⁸¹ Unpleasantly surprised by the progressive opinion climate in the Netherlands, he took up a position on the right flank of the VVD.

Besides their common distaste for compromise and the centrists in their parties, Bolkestein shared with Thatcher a fascination for the work of Friedrich Hayek. He described the Austrian thinker as ‘perhaps the most important liberal political philosopher of the twentieth century’.⁸² It is not surprising then, that Bolkestein subscribed to Hayek’s belief in the power of ideas. ‘The primary resource of politics is formed by public opinion, that is to say the outlook that can be considered dominant at a certain point in time,’ Bolkestein noted.⁸³ The notion of a long-term battle of ideas, as the authors of Bolkestein’s biography rightly state, is fundamental to his political career. ‘To bring about a new consensus,’ Bolkestein argued, ‘you first need a collision of perspectives, a *choc des opinions*. Politics is about achieving dominance for one body of ideas above another.’⁸⁴ In the Dutch context however, Friedrich Hayek is hardly known, and many observers have expressed their bewilderment concerning the political views of what journalists have called ‘the enigma-Bolkestein’. The leading political journalists who wrote Bolkestein’s otherwise carefully researched biography, fail to mention Hayek’s name even once in the entire book. Nevertheless, they capture some of the essence when they portray Bolkestein in the introduction as ‘the first Gramscian thinker in Dutch political history’, more interested in fighting the intellectual hegemony of the left, than to jostle for positions in The Hague.⁸⁵

His first book *De Engel en het Beest* (The Angel and the Beast), a collection of his many lectures and opinion pieces from the 1980s, reads as a fierce and sustained attack on Dutch progressive intellectuals. He describes them as a ‘passionate minority’ blinded by their ideology, that had ‘dominated the opinion climate’, influencing an ‘entire generation of policy makers’.⁸⁶ This belief that the ideas of a passionate minority had moved the country to the left had as its corollary the conviction that another

⁸⁰ In his biography, Bolkestein is quoted as saying that he first became interested in politics during his work for Shell in El Salvador. ‘El Salvador was a polarized society, with big contrasts between rich and poor. You were automatically sucked into politics. I developed more of an eye for the relations between Shell and the trade unions. At Shell, the norm is to not get involved in politics, but that was impossible there.’ Significantly, at the time of Bolkestein’s stay, El Salvador was run by the US-backed colonel Rivera Carballo, who organized paramilitary death squads to deal with leftists and trade unionists. In that context, Bolkestein’s comments are intriguing to say the least. ‘El Salvador was een gepolariseerde samenleving, met grote tegenstellingen tussen rijk en arm. Je werd daar automatisch de politiek ingezogen. Ik kreeg daar meer oog voor de relaties tussen Shell en de vakbonden. Bij Shell bestond een moraal van: bemoei je niet met de politiek, maar dat was daar onmogelijk.’ (Van Weezel and Ornstein, 1999, p. 52)

⁸¹ Van Weezel and Ornstein (1999, p. 64).

⁸² Bolkestein (1995, p. 15). See also Edwin van de Haar, who describes Bolkestein as the Dutch exponent of Hayek’s battle of ideas (Van de Haar, 2004). Van de Haar, at that time, was a member of the Edmund Burke Foundation.

⁸³ Bolkestein (1995, p. 58).

⁸⁴ Van Weezel and Ornstein (1999, p. 159).

⁸⁵ Van Weezel and Ornstein (1999, p. 14).

⁸⁶ Bolkestein (1990, p. 17).

passionate minority could perform the opposite feat and move the country back to the right. Bolkestein's sentiment here can be compared with that other disciple of Hayek, the American libertarian Frank Chodorov:

We are not born with ideas. We learn them. If socialism has come to America because it was implanted in the minds of past generations, there is no reason for assuming that the contrary idea cannot be taught to a new generation. What the socialists have done can be undone.⁸⁷

At the same time, Bolkestein was very much aware of the logic of the Overton window, the famous theory stipulating the range of acceptable opinions in a given opinion climate. In the short-term, he needed to tactically curtail his radicalism to curry influence with his views, so as to move the Overton window in his direction in the long term:

The reigning intellectual fashion naturally leaves space for dissenting views, but that space is limited. The Dutch political debate takes place between the far ends of a range of opinions. Politicians who move outside of that bandwidth of acceptable opinion, lose credibility. What you say is heard, but not understood. You lose your effectiveness and will not be considered for an electable position [on the list of candidates] in the next nomination procedure.⁸⁸

Besides his crucial Hayekian inspiration, it is also true that 'the enigma-Bolkestein' employs a confusing amount of differing registers in his thinking. He accused the Dutch progressive intellectuals of being a *lumpenintelligentsia*, second-hand dealers in ideas whose bric-a-brac mindset was a product of the trauma of secularization. They had filled the void of Christian redemption for a secular messianism, expressed in a vulgarized Marxism.⁸⁹ It is perhaps all too fitting that Bolkestein's counteroffensive consisted of a similar ideological bric-a-brac, an unstable *bricolage* of second-hand ideas borrowed from international neoliberal, conservative and neoconservative thinkers. The resulting contradictions in his views make it difficult at times to lend these a coherent description.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Cited in: Nash (1996 [1976], p. 39).

⁸⁸ Bolkestein (1990, p. 69).

⁸⁹ Bolkestein criticized the politics of baby boomers for being more interested in intentions than results. He relied on the Weberian distinction between *Gesinnungsethik* and *Verantwortungsethik*, proclaiming the superiority of the latter. It became a recurring motif in his many opinion pieces. Daniel Bell had used this Weberian distinction to criticize the American left in his book *The End of Ideology*. *Gesinnungsethik* departs from the intention of an ethical deed. *Verantwortungsethik* focuses on the estimated results. While Weber argued that politics needs to contain both ethics, Daniel Bell presented it as a dilemma, a choice between one or the other. Bolkestein appears to have taken this motif from Bell. It allowed Bolkestein to take up the position of the realist, while skilfully masking a more prosaic reality, namely that Bolkestein had markedly different intentions and aspirations than his progressive opponents. See: Bolkestein (1990, p. 33-46).

⁹⁰ One brief example: central to Bolkestein's intellectual project in socio-economic terms, was to locate the ideas that the Dutch welfare state was based on. On the one hand, he argued that the Dutch welfare state

The best approach is perhaps to differentiate these registers. There is a conservative Bolkestein who entertains a pessimistic perspective on man, who is sceptical about the capacity of politics to change the world. The conservative Bolkestein poses as a sober realist and distances himself from ideology and abstract ideas.⁹¹ There is a neoliberal Bolkestein, who embraces the power of ideas and the capacity of politics to radically change the world in the direction of a Hayekian ideal image. The neoliberal Bolkestein warns us for the use of morality in politics and public life and sees Christian ethics as the problematic source of Dutch leftist politics. He cites Mandeville's 'private vices, public benefits' and has made Mandeville's anti-moralistic philosophy into his personal motto, the so-called 'thesis of Frits'.⁹² And there is a neoconservative Bolkestein, as we will soon see, who laments the erosion of moral values in the Dutch public sphere and pleads for a moralizing politics. The neoconservative Bolkestein embraces the Christian identity of the Netherlands as a foundation for the Dutch moral order.

These three voices continuously intermingle. In short, Bolkestein embodies all the contradictions of the fusionist project of the New Right. He is the personification of the three-legged stool. To be fair, as a prominent politician, Bolkestein simply did not have the time to develop a consistent philosophy. He admitted as much in interviews, he was not a real intellectual, but rather a 'pamphleteer and a politician'. Dutch political journalists were simply too intellectually underdeveloped to notice the difference.⁹³ Many of Bolkestein's articles, essays and lectures were (co-)written by his staff, which naturally leads to some eclecticism. Considering these limiting conditions, Bolkestein was surprisingly productive, well read and eloquent, fulfilling a crucial role as 'broker' of foreign intellectual currents that were largely unknown in the Netherlands.

Bolkestein was most explicit about these international inspirations when he went abroad. He gave an insightful lecture at the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) during his time as European Commissioner. As noted before, the IEA played a fundamental role in providing the ideological foundation for Thatcherism, by popularizing the work of leading members of the Mont Pèlerin Society. But it also had a significant part in Thatcher's famous internal struggles with the centrists in her party, the so-called 'wets'. Bolkestein opened his speech at the IEA as follows:

Ideas have consequences. I have always been persuaded of the truth of this statement and so it was only logical that, as a budding young MP (well, young, I was a sprightly 45 year-old), I decided to take a subscription to the publications of a

departed from an *ontplooiingsideologie* (an ideology of personal development) premised on a pessimistic image of man, in need of constant improvement. Bolkestein argued that his own views in contrast, departed from a positive vision of man as strong and independent. In the very same book, Bolkestein argues that the welfare state arose out of a positive image of man as inherently good and strong, a view that completely dominated Dutch politics. In contrast, his own politics were based on a pessimist vision of man. See: Bolkestein (1995, p. 20, p. 59).

⁹¹ This voice prevails in Bolkestein's most accomplished book *De Intellectuele Verleiding* (Bolkestein, 2011).

⁹² Bolkestein (1990, p. 43).

⁹³ In an interview with the magazine of the youth department of the VVD, Bolkestein suggested that the founder of his party, P.J. Oud, was a 'real intellectual'. He himself was not. 'I am a pamphleteer and a politician,' Bolkestein said. See: JOVD (1995).

free market research institute which at that time was very much at the forefront of the battle of ideas. That research institute was the IEA and I owe it a profound debt of gratitude. The Institute and its authors, many of them Nobel laureates, have equipped people such as myself with the intellectual tools to fight, and win, the great political debates of the 1980s and 1990s.⁹⁴

Moving Dutch liberalism to the right

It is tempting to see Bolkestein's battles with the centrists in his party as a less dramatic reiteration of the efforts of Thatcher and the IEA in the 1970s, even though the contexts and periods are rather different. Together with a group of intellectuals at the VVD think tank, the Telders Foundation, Bolkestein sought to provide a new ideological foundation for Dutch liberalism. That new foundation departed from the views of Hayek. This took shape through a series of publications. The historical development of neoliberalism was chronicled in *Liberalisme en Politieke Economie* (Liberalism and Political Economy) a remarkably thorough and philosophically accomplished study by Andreas Kinneging and Klaas Groenveld.⁹⁵ Kinneging had only just finished his studies in political philosophy, and rapidly became an important figure within the VVD. Kinneging also worked on a subsequent publication, the study *Liberalisme, een Speurtocht naar de Filosofische Grondslagen* (Liberalism, a Search for Philosophical Foundations) published in 1988.⁹⁶ Kinneging was assisted this time by a commission of political heavyweights, amongst whom the later Minister Uri Rosenthal, coming party leader Frits Bolkestein and the sociologist Jacques van Doorn. As Gerry van der List, a colleague at the Telders Foundation confirmed, 'the theories of Hayek were adopted as a guideline' for the report.⁹⁷ In classic Hayekian fashion, the report made a black-and-white distinction between two forms of liberalism, a conservative 'utilitarian liberalism' (or neoliberalism) and a progressive liberalism epitomized by John Stuart Mill, the ideology that allegedly formed the basis for the welfare state.

Hayek's negative appreciation of the progressive-liberal tradition had been elaborated by Isaiah Berlin, in his famous distinction between negative and positive freedom. In short, the freedom from (the absence of compulsion and external government-intervention as a condition for freedom) and the freedom to (the availability of resources as a condition for freedom), the principle that is at the basis of the welfare state. Like Hayek, Berlin saw positive freedom – and in extension progressive-liberalism – as a pathway to totalitarianism.⁹⁸ The Telders study adopted this position. 'The

⁹⁴ Speech Bolkestein (2001, November 19). The opening words 'Ideas have consequences' seem to refer to the eponymous title of a 1948 book by the US conservative thinker Richard Weaver. It is considered a classic in the American conservative movement. Weaver was part of the fusionist tradition that went on to combine neoliberal ideas with more traditional conservative political thought, just like Bolkestein himself.

⁹⁵ Groenveld and Kinneging (1985). While the study used the word neo-liberalism for the earlier period of the neoliberal movement, it reverted to 'classical economic liberalism' to describe its later offshoots such as the Chicago School, the neo-Austrian school and supply-side economics.

⁹⁶ Kinneging (1988).

⁹⁷ Van der List, (1993, p. 30)

⁹⁸ See Zeev Sternhell's discussion of Isaiah Berlin in: Sternhell (2009).

pursuit of positive freedom to the detriment of negative freedom,' it stated, 'does not lead to greater freedom, but entails a destruction of both aspects of freedom and that what one seeks to achieve with positive freedom, will naturally arise out of negative freedom.'⁹⁹ Also present in the study is Hayek's liberal utopian ideal, a long-term radical vision that does not confine itself to what is politically feasible at the moment. This was the 'gyroscope' that Lubbers lacked. The study identified this ideal as the minimal state, or *waarborgstaat* (guarantor state), based philosophically on Hayek's conception of the Rule of Law. This minimal state does not engage in socio-economic redistribution. The only exception identified by the report, is a remittance for those that fall below an absolute minimum. This framework echoes Milton Friedman's plea for a basic income, a measure he promoted as a way to minimize more extensive welfare state programmes and forego any other form of redistribution or welfare state arrangements.

Bolkestein later expanded on the report in an essay titled *Modern Liberalisme* (Modern Liberalism). He wrote that the radical restructuring of the Dutch welfare state in the direction of a guarantor state would mean going 'back to the future', to a point in Dutch history before the expansion of the welfare state. Bolkestein referred to the social democrat Prime Minister of the 1950s, Willem Drees, who coined the term *waarborgende staat* (guaranteeing state), a state that only guarantees minimal social security.¹⁰⁰ Bolkestein depicted the early social democrats as neoliberals. Using Drees as a reference allowed Bolkestein to present his neoliberal programme as a return to the roots of social democracy, rather than an attack on its legacy:

Drees remained as relevant as ever for Bolkestein, if not in all respects. 'The Old Left is neo-liberal' the VVD-leader states, 'and with that I have said everything there is to say. We propagate the guarantor state of Drees in which an existence at subsistence level is guaranteed for everyone. In that respect, my party is the heir of social democracy. What Drees called the guarantor state, we call a basic system (*basisstelsel*). We also advocate the same sober realism.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Kinneging (1988, p. 55).

¹⁰⁰ The Dutch New Right has a fascinating fondness for Willem Drees. Drees was the Dutch social democrat leader and Prime Minister during the sober period of post-war reconstruction, from 1948 to 1958. New Right politicians admire Drees for his opposition to the expansion of the Dutch welfare state in the 1960s and for his sharp critiques of immigration and the New Left. In a prominent public lecture in 2013, the Prime Minister Mark Rutte presented Drees as an important inspiration for his ambition to further curtail the Dutch welfare state. Rutte hailed Drees as a 'realist' and argued that the realism of Drees 'resounded in his preference for the guarantor state rather than the welfare state.' See: Speech Rutte (2013b, October 14). Martin Bosma, the ideologue of Geert Wilders, presented Drees in his book *De Schijnélite van de Valsemunters* (The Fake Élite of Counterfeiters) as a political forefather of the PVV. Bosma saw Drees as the Dutch equivalent of the first generation of US neoconservatives. Not wholly without reason, as we shall soon see. See: Bosma (2011, p. 205).

¹⁰¹ 'Drees bleef voor Bolkestein echter altijd aktueel, hoewel ook weer niet in alle opzichten. "Oud-links is neo-liberaal" poneert de VVD-leider, "en daarmee heb ik eigenlijk alles gezegd. Wij propageren de waarborgstaat van Drees waarbij voor iedereen een bestaansminimum is gegarandeerd. In dat opzicht is mijn partij de erfgenaam van de sociaal-democratie. Wat Drees de waarborgstaat noemde, noemen wij een basisstelsel. Ook propageren wij dezelfde nuchtere zakelijkheid.'" See: Versteegh (1995).

In the US, it would be the equivalent of a return to the time before the civil rights movement and the Great Society programmes under Lyndon Johnson. As Bolkestein outlined in *Modern Liberalisme* (Modern Liberalism), regulation needed to be diminished, government services privatized and decentralized, and taxes lowered. At the same time, Bolkestein (and the Telders study) noted that the expansion of the caring functions of the state had marginalized its traditional law and order tasks: security, police, justice and infrastructure.¹⁰² In addition, Bolkestein proposed a radical assault on 'the decayed structures of corporatism': social security should be reduced to 60 percent of the minimum wage, collective labour agreements should no longer be declared universally valid by the state, the labour market needed to be flexibilized and the Socio-Economic Council (where trade unions and employers deliberate over policymaking) needed to be abolished. Bolkestein presented these measures as a change from a Rhineland model to a 'mid-Atlantic model'. All in all, it amounts to a surprisingly radical neoliberal programme, legitimized with an extensive philosophical underpinning.¹⁰³

What sparked controversy, is that the commission of heavyweights that signed off on the report explicitly recommended the neoliberal vision of the guarantor state 'as a basis for political action'.¹⁰⁴ It was meant as a challenge to the still powerful centrist and progressive currents within the VVD. The study of the Telders Foundation served as the basis for the discussion paper *Liberaal Bestek '90* (Liberal Compass '90). It proposed to sharply move the party to the right, both in terms of the proposed restructuring of the welfare state towards a guarantor state, and in terms of the restriction of immigration and the intensification of law and order policies. Sharp reactions followed. Wim Kok warned the VVD to not marginalize itself on the right. *De Volkskrant* described it as 'a return to Dickens', or 'unfiltered bourgeois conservatism'.¹⁰⁵ The threat was clear: the VVD was isolating itself from possible future coalitions. The progressive and centrist forces in the VVD resisted the proposed changes. A record amount of two thousand amendments were filed by party members at the annual party conference, effectively burying the report. While Bolkestein was made party leader in 1990 and stayed on till 1998, the Bolkestein-wing of the party effectively remained in a minority position. Uri Rosenthal later looked back at the controversy of 1988 by commenting that it formed part of Bolkestein's grand strategy of a long-term *choc des opinions*. Rosenthal concluded that the strategy clearly paid off in the 1990s.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² It evokes sociologist Loïc Wacquant's definition of neoliberalism in terms of a strengthened right hand of the state to the detriment of the left hand of the state. See: Wacquant (2010).

¹⁰³ Bolkestein (1995, pp. 15-41).

¹⁰⁴ Kinneging (1988, p. v).

¹⁰⁵ Koeneman, Noomen and Voerman (1989).

¹⁰⁶ Van Weezel and Ornstein (1999, p. 93).

Neoliberalism as a formative influence on Fortuyn and Wilders

Against the background of this neoliberal discontent, the figures that would become part of the populist movements of the 2000s enter the scene. Before immigration and integration became the all-important topics, their radicalism was defined much more in terms of their opposition to corporatism and the Dutch welfare state, an opposition inspired by neoliberalism.

Pim Fortuyn, the former Marxist professor and future right-wing populist leader, joined the wave of free market enthusiasm sweeping the country at the end of the 1980s. In 1991, Fortuyn kicked off his new career as a right-wing opinion maker with his inaugural lecture at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, titled *A Future Without Civil Servants*. The lecture was soon published as the first in a series of popularizing books in which Fortuyn proposed a frontal neoliberal assault on Dutch bureaucracy and political elites.¹⁰⁷ Fortuyn's critique of Dutch consensus culture, as we have seen in the first chapter, was inspired by Hans Daalder's 1964 analysis of pillarization and the 'regent mentality'. The 1960s critique of Dutch political culture was given a new twist by Fortuyn, who now portrayed the free market as a force of emancipation and public sector bureaucracy as the principal source of oppression. A state-led modernization programme aimed at privatizing, flexibilizing, and decentralizing government bureaucracy was needed to set Dutch citizens free.

Like Bolkestein, Fortuyn blamed the first Lubbers cabinet for having squandered a wonderful opportunity. Lubbers had assembled his government of 'vital men of action' and confronted the Dutch public sector workers, achieving a great victory in 1983, thanks to broad popular support.

The great blunder of the first Lubbers cabinet is that he did not use that political capital to tackle the problem of high expenditures on public sector wages once and for all. [...] We would have been much further ahead if Lubbers had chosen the method of amputation instead of servicing a medicine that offered only temporary relief.¹⁰⁸

Fortuyn went on to enthusiastically elaborate on the meaning of this proposed amputation: firing half of all Dutch public sector workers. Meanwhile, the third Lubbers cabinet was in his eyes so incredibly boring and decent that it failed to inspire anyone, not even negatively. Perhaps Lubbers' discursive agility had masked the fact that he did not have any political views at all. Fortuyn called for a 'Dutch Margaret Thatcher' to deal with the trade unions, by which he most likely meant himself.¹⁰⁹

Seeing that Fortuyn was a fascinating and eccentric figure, it is not strange that the existing literature has often been beholden to the seduction of explaining his political views in terms of his personal psychology. The single most accomplished analysis of

¹⁰⁷ Fortuyn (1991, 1992, 1994). An interesting historical irony is that Fortuyn's special chair at the university was named after Wil Albeda, the face of Christian Democratic corporatism.

¹⁰⁸ Fortuyn (1992).

¹⁰⁹ Fortuyn (1994, p. 113).

Fortuyn's ideas, the intellectual biography by the Dutch sociologist Dick Pels, is despite its merits a good example of the limitations of that approach. In the enticing and eloquent psychological analysis of Pels, Fortuyn's evolving political views are depicted as a mirror of his personal trajectory. His rejection of the Dutch political establishment is understood in terms of his 'eccentricity' and 'outsider-status'. His switch to neoliberalism is connected with a career change to the private sector: 'Fortuyn privatizes himself in this period, and switches to a neoliberal ideology in which free market thought, calculating citizenship and contractual society are the central themes.'¹¹⁰

Here Mannheim's critique of individualist methodology and his insistence on the collective nature of political thought seem relevant. The problem with the psychological explanation offered by Pels is that it is possible to make the very opposite claim: Fortuyn's views can just as well be portrayed as an expression of his normalcy and insider-status. His political trajectory from leftist sociologist in the 1970s to neoliberal firebrand in the 1990s was not unusual. In fact, it conformed to dominant trends in the Dutch opinion climate. In the year 1986, presented by Pels as Fortuyn's moment of conversion to the free market, Fortuyn had been posted by his university at the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR). At this influential state think tank, the neoliberal turn was actively discussed at the time. The Wagner commission had been formed in reaction to a report published by the WRR in 1980 and the think tank had close links to the 'Rutten Boys' at Economic Affairs. Frans Rutten actually served as chairman of the WRR not long after, from 1990 till 1993. Fortuyn's views of the early 1990s are clearly derived from the ideas circulating among the highest levels of Dutch economic policy elites, and they have much in common with Frans Rutten's 'New Objectivity' agenda.¹¹¹

Fortuyn's inaugural lecture consisted in large parts of a popularization of reports from the AEP think tank, explicitly mentioned in the references, as well as Bolkestein's abovementioned book, *De Engel en het Beest* (The Angel and the Beast). Of course, Fortuyn added some unique touches of his own, in particular the democracy critique from the 1960s. But overall, his proposals were eerily similar to those of the AEP and Bolkestein. Fortuyn also pleaded for an end to corporatist institutions such as the Social Economic Council and the universal status of collective labour agreements. He copied Bolkestein's Friedmanian plea for reducing social security provision to a basic income at subsistence level. And these neoliberal themes remained an important element in Fortuyn's politics. The critique of the bureaucracy of the corporatist welfare state, enshrined in the language of personal choice, provided the core of his analysis in bestselling publications such as *De Puinhopen van Paars* (The Disasters of the Purple

¹¹⁰ Pels (2003).

¹¹¹ Very similar radical free market ideas were voiced by the economist Rick van der Ploeg (a prominent member of the social democrat party) in his inaugural lecture from 1992, in which he proposed to abolish corporatist institutions, development aid, social housing and the minimum wage. See: Van der Ploeg (1992).

Coalitions), which famously accompanied Fortuyn's spectacular electoral breakthrough in 2002.¹¹²

Similarly, for Geert Wilders, the later leader of the Party for Freedom, neoliberal views formed the original inspiration of his anti-establishment stance. Wilders began his political career as a staff member of Frits Bolkestein in 1990. He was hired as an expert on social security, and his first notable contribution was the background research for a 1991 opinion piece by Bolkestein on the neoliberal policy plank of a radical reform of corporatist structures in social security.¹¹³ It would be his foremost topic of expertise for some time. Wilders referred to these formative neoliberal inspirations when he started his rebellion against the centrist party leadership of the VVD in 2003, culminating eventually in his break with the party in the following year. In an interview in *de Volkskrant*, Wilders suggested that

it would be worthwhile to excavate an old VVD-document from the archives. The document *Liberalisme: Een Speurtocht naar de Filosofische Grondslagen* written in 1988 by the think tank of the VVD, was professionally swept under the carpet by then VVD-leader Voorhoeve, Wilders remembers. The report was crafted under the leadership of his great example, the current European Commissioner Frits Bolkestein. In [the Dutch weekly] *HP/De Tijd* Wilders told what he had learned from him: 'That you need to withstand great resistance, that you need to set the agenda, have a thick skin, and that being proven wrong today does not mean that you are wrong tomorrow.'¹¹⁴

When Wilders left the VVD to create his own party in 2005, he published the pamphlet *Kies voor Vrijheid* (Choose for Freedom). It refers again to the publication of the Telders Foundation on utilitarian liberalism. In the pamphlet, Wilders laments the lack of ideological substance of the ordinary VVD parliamentarians, who had not read the Telders publications and did not even know what utilitarian liberalism was.¹¹⁵ Neoliberal ideas remained an important element in Wilders first official party documents, in *de Onafhankelijkheidsverklaring* (Declaration of Independence) from 2005, in *Klare Wijn* (Straight-Talk) from 2006 and the accompanying economic programme *Een Nieuwe Gouden Eeuw* (A New Golden Age) that promised US Republican-style tax cuts.¹¹⁶ In subsequent years, Wilders has tactically chosen to adopt

¹¹² Fortuyn (2002 [1995]).

¹¹³ Fennema (2016, p. 14).

¹¹⁴ 'En het zou de moeite waard zijn een oud VVD-geschrift uit de archieven op te diepen. Het document, *Liberalisme: Een speurtocht naar de filosofische grondslagen*, in 1988 vervaardigd door het wetenschappelijk bureau van de VVD, werd door de toenmalige VVD-voorman Joris Voorhoeve "vakkundig onder tafel gewerkt", herinnert Wilders zich. Het rapport was opgesteld onder leiding van zijn grote voorbeeld, de huidige euro-commissaris Frits Bolkestein. In *HP/De Tijd* heeft Wilders aangegeven wat hij zoal van hem geleerd heeft: "Dat je tegen grote tegenstand moet kunnen, de agenda moet willen bepalen, een dikke huid moet hebben, en dat vandaag geen gelijk niet betekent dat je morgen ook ongelijk hebt.'" See: De Boer and Koelé (2003).

¹¹⁵ Wilders (2005, pp. 26-27).

¹¹⁶ See for a more expansive analysis: Vossen (2017).

a more centrist rhetoric on socio-economic issues, but his programme and voting record party has remained (moderately) fiscally conservative, with some notable exceptions, such as health care.

Conclusion of the neoliberal strand

The aim of this section has been to trace the trajectory of a body of ideas, more specifically the free market strand of the New Right assemblage. Due to space constraints, the chapter has not addressed the much more difficult question: whether there is such a thing as a specifically Dutch neoliberalism and how to properly define and delimit its existence. The more modest goal has been to show a transmission of ideas from the international neoliberal movement to the Dutch context. The depoliticizing effect of the politics of accommodation could explain the relative invisibility of this paradigm shift in the 1980s and the prevailing apolitical image of that decade. It also offers a possible explanation for the lack of a more dramatic, polarizing break in Dutch politics in that period. Right-wing disillusionment with Lubbers – who failed to live up to his Thatcherite image abroad – prompted the belated ascendancy of the New Right in the 1990s.

Rather than foregrounding personal psychology as an explanation for the political views of Bolkestein, Fortuyn and Wilders, it arguably makes more sense to take a step back and consider these figures in the larger ideological context of the time. Seen from a Kuhnian perspective, it is a moment in Dutch political history when the old Keynesian corporatist paradigm had been discredited and the new paradigm was still taking shape. Like the entrepreneurial scientists in Kuhnian paradigm shifts, the radical views of the 1980s and 1990s reflect a period of ‘exceptional science’ that allows for more far-reaching changes to the existing socio-economic paradigm. Unlike the UK or the US, where neoliberalism entailed a polarizing confrontation with the trade unions, the Dutch reforms were channelled through neo-corporatist structures. The changes had been agreed with employers and trade unions, heralding what is known as ‘responsive corporatism’ or more commonly, the Dutch polder model.¹¹⁷ Some scholars have described Dutch neoliberalism as a – restructured – continuation of the corporatist model, rather than a departure from it.¹¹⁸ Such a hybrid reality is not exceptional when we consider the recent literature on neoliberalism. ‘To the extent that neoliberalism has been, since the 1970s, “victorious” in the war of ideas,’ Jamie Peck argued in his well-crafted study, ‘its victories have always been Pyrrhic and partial ones.’ ‘As a result, it is doomed to coexist with its unloved others, be these the residues of state socialism, developmental statism, authoritarianism, or social democracy.’¹¹⁹ In the Dutch case, those ‘unloved others’ have been corporatism and consensus politics. The Dutch New Right arose out of dissatisfaction with the emerging synthesis, and tried to take the newly forming paradigm several steps further in the direction of their Anglo-American inspirations.

¹¹⁷ Visser and Hemerijck (1997).

¹¹⁸ Scholten (1987, pp. 120-152).

¹¹⁹ Peck (2010, p. 7).

Neoliberal ideas, however, were not the sole or even main driver of the political breakthrough of the Dutch New Right. Free market thought was accompanied by a new body of conservative ideas, which forms the subject of the following section.

3.3 The neoconservative strand

The neoliberal elements of the Dutch New Right form a complex assemblage with ideas drawn from another powerful intellectual movement, that of US neoconservatism. Similar to neoliberalism, neoconservatism refers to a movement with a lot of internal diversity and historical dynamism, a movement that has chosen to influence existing parties rather than forming a political organization of its own. Like neoliberalism, it is therefore a rather vague and often contested label. In one of the more widely acclaimed studies of neoconservatism, the French scholar Justin Vaïsse has resolved the problem of the current's historical and political heterogeneity by subdividing the movement in 'three different formative impulses': the three ages of neoconservatism.¹²⁰

Neoconservatism gradually developed out of the anti-Stalinism of the 1930s and the Cold War liberalism of the 1950s and 1960s. Anti-communism was a prominent theme from the beginning, with many neoconservatives participating in the Congress for Cultural Freedom, an anti-communist advocacy group staffed by intellectuals and funded by the CIA. But the focus in the first age lies more in the realm of domestic rather than foreign policy. The immediate cause for the rise of neoconservatism was the leftward turn of US liberalism exemplified by Johnson's Great Society programmes and the rise of the New Left in the 1960s. A group of liberal intellectuals moved to the right in response to these developments (some of them had been founders of pluralism as we have seen in the previous chapter). These 'neoconservatives' criticized the perverse effects of Johnson's welfare programmes. They introduced the 'culture of poverty' thesis that linked the poverty of the black population to cultural deficiencies, in particular the lack of family values. They opposed the New Left, criticizing 'the adversary culture' of the baby-boomer generation: its individualism, hedonism and moral relativism. And they rallied against attempts to diversify the academic curriculum, criticizing these developments under the labels of 'multiculturalism' and 'political correctness'. In so doing, neoconservatives played a crucial part in igniting the *culture wars* that determine American politics up to the present day.¹²¹ Two intellectual journals had a formative function for this first generation: *The Public Interest*, founded by Irving Kristol and Daniel Bell, and *Commentary*, edited by Norman Podhoretz. Around these journals, a larger group of intellectuals gathered, some of the leading lights included Nathan Glazer, Seymour Martin Lipset, Gertrude Himmelfarb and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. This first generation can be considered centrist on socio-economic issues and conservative on cultural issues.

¹²⁰ Vaïsse (2011, p. 6). See also: Drolet (2011); Fukuyama (2006); Kristol (1995); Steinfels (2013 [1979]).

¹²¹ Hartman (2015).

The second age begins in the early 1970s when the New Left, represented by George McGovern's *New Politics* in the 1972 elections, is powerfully defeated by Richard Nixon. Neoconservatives saw the electoral defeat of the Democrat Party as a result of the abandonment of the 'silent majority', in particular culturally conservative blue-collar workers, who felt sidelined in favour of a 'rainbow coalition' of students, blacks, Hispanics, women and homosexuals. Neoconservatives opposed the counterculture and pleaded for a return to the defence of law and order and family values. Some neoconservatives, such as Kristol and Moynihan, now jumped ship to Nixon and the Republican Party. Others formed the conservative wing of the Democrat party, where foreign policy became the major focus, promoted by figures such as Richard Perle, Frank Gaffney, Paul Wolfowitz, Elliot Abrams and Douglas Feith. The most prominent object of discontent was the 'détente' with the Soviet Union, advocated by Republicans such as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. As part of this political stance, fervent support for Israel became a major policy plank, portrayed as the defence of a democracy threatened by autocratic Arab regimes armed by the Soviet Union. In 1980, neoconservatism became almost fully Republican as neoconservatives entered the halls of power under Ronald Reagan, where they successfully pushed for an intensification of the Cold War. At this point, the neoconservative movement had become a fixture of the right, even though many still referred to their liberal origins, most notably Irving Kristol, who defined neoconservatives as 'liberals mugged by reality'.

A third phase in neoconservatism starts in the 1990s, when the Cold War is finished and neoconservatism has become a full-fledged element of the Republican Party, unambiguously on the right. Newcomers such as William Kristol, Robert Kagan (both editors of the *Weekly Standard*), Francis Fukuyama, David Brooks, Max Boot and David Frum no longer had leftist or even Democrat origins. The emergence of a unipolar world furthered global ambitions of neoconservatives. The only remaining progressive legacy of neoconservatism at this point is the rhetoric of Wilsonian liberalism ('Wilsonianism with boots') that resounded in foreign policy. Military intervention was defended in terms of the universal values embodied by American democracy. Progressive thinking about domestic policy had by now fully disappeared. After the 9/11 attacks, the neoconservatives infamously become the initiators of the *War on Terror* and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. In the public view, the epic scale of these events has had the effect of reducing the meaning of neoconservatism to this last episode in its variegated history.

Leo Strauss and the philosophical inspirations of neoconservatism

Turning to the more philosophical aspect of neoconservatism, a core element connecting the different periods is the conviction that the struggle against an external threat has politically beneficial effects.¹²² Neoconservatives have championed an image of the world as divided by a dramatic conflict of starkly contrasted forces of good and evil. They have stressed the benevolent nature of America's dominant global role, as a

¹²² Steinfels (2013 [1979]); Vaisse (2011).

harbinger of democracy and human rights. Particularly the philosophy of Leo Strauss would become one of the foremost sources of inspiration.¹²³ Strauss, a Jewish refugee from the Nazi regime, rose to prominence at the University of Chicago in the 1950s. He founded a Straussian school of philosophy. Among the Straussians were many neoconservatives who would later acquire positions of power in government, in military and foreign policy circles, and in neoconservative think tanks.¹²⁴ Elaborating on the thesis of the German jurist Carl Schmitt that friend-enemy distinctions form the essence of politics, Strauss saw the struggle against an enemy – portrayed as an absolute moral evil – as a necessary condition for the construction and safeguarding of a healthy moral community.¹²⁵

For Strauss, the problem of Burkean conservatism was that it had developed a relativist philosophy in opposition to radical Enlightenment thought. Philosophically, the French Revolution had been grounded in the universalist appeal to natural law, to the inalienable and universal rights of man. Burke had responded in relativistic terms, by positing the unique nature of national traditions, and by appealing to historical contingency. In his seminal response to the French Revolution, Burke framed human rights as the historic accomplishments of specific national traditions. He opposed universal rights with the notion of ‘the rights of Englishmen’ based on their ‘entailed inheritance’.¹²⁶ In the Burkean perspective, national traditions were spontaneously grown, naturally evolved, complex organisms that defied human reason and could not be reduced to abstract formulas. In *Natural Right and History*, Strauss took aim against the cultural relativism of Burkean conservatism and the rejection of universal standards and natural law. Without such a higher standard, Strauss contended, conservatism would revert to accepting whatever history imparted and what a particular society’s way of life and institutions had come to accept. From such a point of view ‘the principles of cannibalism are as defensible or sound as those of civilized life’, Strauss argued. ‘It is only a short step from this thought of Burke to the supersession of the distinction between good and bad by the distinction between the progressive and the retrograde, or between what is and what is not in harmony with the historical process.’¹²⁷ Strauss went back further in history to classical thought, in particular Plato, to articulate a new conservatism grounded in a metaphysics that could do away with relativism and properly distinguish good and evil. As Francis Fukuyama noted, of particular importance for Strauss and the neoconservatives was Plato’s plea for the necessity of a civil religion in *Laws*. Reason does not suffice to obtain obedience to the law; a higher truth supplied by myth and religion is required. ‘Non-rational claims of revelation’ can never be expelled from politics.¹²⁸ Hence, neoconservatives, although secular in conviction, saw religion as a necessary foundation for a non-relativist notion of identity

¹²³ Fukuyama (2006); Kristol (1995).

¹²⁴ Norton (2005).

¹²⁵ On the link between Schmitt and Strauss, see the dissertation by Cornelissen (2014).

¹²⁶ See Zeev Sternhell’s discussion of Burke as an often underappreciated founder of organic nationalism in: Sternhell (2009, pp. 422-425).

¹²⁷ Strauss (1953, p. 318).

¹²⁸ Fukuyama (2006, p. 30).

and moral order. Leo Strauss thus supplied the philosophical basis for neo-conservatives to criticize cultural relativism, to defend the Christian identity of the US, to define cultures in terms of their core values and to pinpoint enemies of the West as axes of evil. Under Reagan, this led to anti-western regimes being labelled as an absolute moral evil. After 1989, Islamic fundamentalism took over the role of communism as the dominant enemy image, as articulated in the clash of civilizations thesis developed by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington.

Neoconservatism in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, US neoconservatism has remained relatively unknown to the larger public and there are few studies of its Dutch reception.¹²⁹ The period that has rightly received attention from journalists and academics is that of the controversial 'coming out' of self-proclaimed Dutch neoconservatives in the years from 2000 till 2006.¹³⁰ But neoconservative ideas have been circulating among Dutch intellectuals since at least the end of the 1980s, often in a less explicit manner. Neoconservative ideas played an essential role in the debates on national identity, Islam, integration and immigration of the 1990s. Again, there is a leading part for Frits Bolkestein as a 'broker' and translator of ideas. He frequently referred to neoconservative authors such as Nathan Glazer, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Francis Fukuyama, Daniel Bell, Irving Kristol, Gertrude Himmelfarb and Samuel Huntington in his lectures and books and engaged some of them in debate on their visits to the Netherlands.¹³¹ In that same period, the journalist Hendrik Jan Schoo became another important bridgehead for neoconservative ideas. In the 1990s, Schoo served as editor-in-chief of the largest Dutch (right-wing) weekly *Elsevier*. He appointed Pim Fortuyn as a columnist in 1993 and is said to have been an important influence on Fortuyn's conservative turn in the mid-1990s.¹³² From 1999 on, Schoo became sub-editor and then columnist for the social democrat leaning newspaper *de Volkskrant*, which made a shift in conservative direction in that period. An influential circle of conservative (former) social democratic journalists and intellectuals such as Martin Sommer, Herman Vuijsje, Hans Wansink, Jos de Beus, Paul Scheffer and Chris Rutenfrans would take up Schoo as their inspiration. This group remained somewhat critical of neoliberalism and can be equated politically with the first age of neoconservatism. A third significant figure is Paul Cliteur, law professor in Leiden, former director of the VVD think tank and occasional text writer for Bolkestein. He published an epic 600-page dissertation on European conservatism and US neo-

¹²⁹ There is an earlier collection of Dutch essays on neoconservatism: Kroes (1984). At that time though, the influence of neoconservative ideas was still quite limited.

¹³⁰ De Jong (2008); Pellikaan and Van der Lubben (2006); Van Kesteren (2012); Vogelaar (2010). For primary texts written by Dutch supporters of neoconservatism, see: Vink and Rutenfrans (2005).

¹³¹ Neoconservative ideas are present in all of his books, but most explicitly in his 2002 lecture on the Dutch adversary culture: Bolkestein (2002). See also his aforementioned book *De Intellectuele Verleiding* (The Intellectual Temptation), in which the grand dame of neoconservatism, the historian Gertrude Himmelfarb, has an important role: Bolkestein (2011). Finally, there is also his interview with the 'first age' neoconservative Nathan Glazer in *Het Heft in Handen* (Seizing Control), where Bolkestein displays an intimate acquaintance with the neoconservative literature of the time (Bolkestein, 1995, pp. 135-153).

¹³² Spruyt (2007, pp. 83-88).

conservatism in 1989 and described himself as an early fan of Irving Kristol. Cliteur became the principal exponent of the Dutch New Atheist current, and an influential critic of Dutch multiculturalism. (He would soon be outdone by a brighter star, his former pupil Ayaan Hirsi, to whom chapter five is dedicated.) In what follows, we will look at the reception of four core neoconservative ideas: the clash of civilizations thesis, the notion of civil religion, the cultural contradictions of capitalism and the theory of the new class.

The clash of civilizations thesis

While there had been some loose references to neoconservatives before, Dutch engagement with this current really picked up during the neoconservative discussion surrounding the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the summer of 1989, Francis Fukuyama's famous essay *The End of History?* was published in *The National Interest*, a neoconservative foreign policy journal founded by Irving Kristol in the 1980s.¹³³ The publication of the essay marked a phase of crisis and transformation for the neoconservative movement. The implosion of communism, the archenemy that neoconservatives had directed their daunting intellectual energies against since the very beginning of the movement, led to the search for a new grand narrative. What story could give meaning and coherence to the newly emerging world order, with the US as sole superpower? Fukuyama's thesis of the end of ideological rivalry was an attempt at creating such a narrative. He would soon be outdone, however, by his former PhD supervisor Samuel Huntington. In 1993, Huntington published the essay *The Clash of Civilizations?* where he identified Islamic civilization as a new source of hostility for the West, allowing history to proceed its course.¹³⁴

Frits Bolkestein became actively involved in this discussion. He wrote a public response (in Dutch) to Fukuyama in the autumn of 1989 and debated him at two occasions in the Netherlands in 1992 and 1995. Already in his reaction to Fukuyama in 1989, Bolkestein a priori took Huntington's side and identified Islam as a new ideological rival for the West: 'The fact remains that the world contains a billion Muslims, of which many consider their ideology superior to the 'godless, materialist, and egoistic liberalism of the West.' Bolkestein pointed to demographic factors, to a frustrated Islamic intelligentsia 'confronted with television images of our post-modern societies', to the Rushdie affair and the French controversy surrounding the veil.¹³⁵

The clash of civilizations thesis became a central touchstone for the development of the Dutch New Right in the 1990s and 2000s, as the cultural conservative strand of the New Right became more and more prominent. The thesis of the clash of civilizations did not originate with Huntington. Bernard Lewis, the neoconservative Orientalist, had

¹³³ Fukuyama (1989).

¹³⁴ Huntington (1993).

¹³⁵ Bolkestein (1990, pp. 139-140). Significantly, Bolkestein also expressed the hope that a new conservative ideology would arise in the Netherlands: 'In our restless society, in which freedom can lead to licentiousness, many long for community, spiritual values, social stability, even hierarchy.' See: Bolkestein (1990, p. 141).

been promoting the idea of such a clash on and off ever since the 1960s. In 1990, a month after the beginning of the First Gulf War, Lewis published the essay *The Roots of Muslim Rage* in *The Atlantic*. In this text, Lewis described the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and argued that Islamic civilization was inherently hostile to the West: 'This is no less than a clash of civilizations – the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both.'¹³⁶ The rhetoric of the clash of civilizations performed several political functions simultaneously. To begin with, the thesis effectively transposed the image of a centrally organized political adversary, Soviet Russia, unto a world religion that was in reality deeply divided. As the leading French Islamic fundamentalism scholar Gilles Kepel pointed out,

The clash of civilizations theory facilitated the transfer to the Muslim world of a strategic hostility the West had inherited from decades of Cold War. And the neoconservative movement played a crucial role in bringing about this rhetorical and theoretical permutation.¹³⁷

The Islamic world, Kepel remarked drily, is a civilization more at war with itself than with the West. At the same time, the clash of civilizations thesis also served to redefine the image of the West. Crucial is that the neoconservatives portrayed the secular modernity of the West as the product of Christianity, as 'Judeo-Christian heritage'. Modern liberal values were culturalized and historicized, they were portrayed as a specific product of the religious legacy of the West. In so doing, liberal modernity was presented as wholly absent in Islam. Thirdly, the clash assumes an incompatible, antagonistic relation between the West and Islam, both framed as neatly contained cultural monoliths without internal contradictions or overlaps. This opposition between the West and Islam is presented as the terrain for a new ideological conflict, a new Cold War. The field of struggle revolves around two options: wholesale rejection of the West by Muslims or their assimilation to Western values.

These very same themes come to the fore in a contentious lecture by Frits Bolkestein during the congress of the Liberal International in 1991 in Luzern. The text sparked an avalanche of responses in the Netherlands and kicked off the infamous Dutch integration debates that came to dominate Dutch politics in the next decades. Bolkestein spoke on the integration of minorities. He expanded on his lecture in an opinion piece in *de Volkskrant*:

European civilization, even if it has a lot to answer for, is saturated with the values of Christianity. A liberal politician acknowledges that too. Rationalism, humanism and Christianity have, after a long history that includes many black pages, brought forth a number of fundamentally important political principles, like the separation of

¹³⁶ Lewis (1990, p. 48).

¹³⁷ Kepel (2004, pp. 62-63).

Church and State, freedom of speech, tolerance and non-discrimination. Liberalism claims universal validity and significance for these principles. That is its political vision. This means that according to liberalism, a civilization that affirms these values, is superior to a civilization that does not. Liberalism cannot accept the relativity of these political values without renouncing itself.¹³⁸

Bolkestein proceeded to depict 'the Islamic world' as both inferior and 'antithetical' to liberalism. He portrayed the presence of a large number of Muslim immigrants as a threat to European values, and he called for the uncompromising defence of these values. This threat is compounded by the spectre of 'cultural relativism', a common tendency of Dutch progressive intellectuals to deny the superiority of their culture. In essence, Bolkestein's minorities lecture is a Dutch translation of the clash of civilizations theory, in which the integration of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands is framed as an ideological conflict. The theory performs the same functions as identified above. The main difference is that Huntington and the US neoconservatives predominantly focused on foreign policy and military confrontation, whereas the Dutch New Right focused on domestic policy and a discursive confrontation with Islam, through the public debate.

The central contradiction in Bolkestein's discourse is the notion of universal values, which are at the same time presented as contained in a specific cultural tradition. Access to these universal values can only be had through acculturation, through the embrace of (superior) Western culture. Universal values are thus enlisted in the service of a particularistic discourse of Western superiority and cultural confrontation. And if one takes the 'culturalist' view that human behaviour is primarily determined and contained by culture, to assert the superiority of Western culture is to claim the superiority of its people. Culture, if conceived in sufficiently static, self-contained and monolithic terms, can thus serve as a substitute for discrimination on the basis of race.¹³⁹ In this way, in the early 1990s, the Dutch New Right found a way to talk about immigration and race without conjuring the memory of the Second World War and the image of right-wing extremism.

This paradoxical idea of universal values, enclosed in a particular cultural tradition, is a prominent theme of US neoconservatism. It undergirded American military intervention abroad, depicted as a way to spread the universal values that the American tradition embodied. Meanwhile, the anti-war movement and the counterculture of the

¹³⁸ 'De Europese beschaving, wat zij verder ook op haar geweten mag hebben, is doordrenkt van de waarden van het Christendom. Ook een liberale politicus zal dat erkennen. Na een lange geschiedenis met tal van zwarte bladzijden hebben rationalisme, humanisme en Christendom een aantal fundamentele politieke beginselen voortgebracht, zoals: de scheiding van kerk en staat, de vrijheid van meningsuiting, de verdraagzaamheid en de non-discriminatie. Het liberalisme claimt universele geldigheid en waarde voor deze beginselen. Dat is zijn politieke visie. Dit betekent dat volgens het liberalisme een beschaving die deze beginselen in ere houdt, hoger staat dan een beschaving die dat niet doet. Het liberalisme kan de relativiteit van deze politieke waarden niet aanvaarden zonder zichzelf te verloochenen.' See: Bolkestein (1991).

¹³⁹ On 'culturism' in the Dutch context, see: Schinkel (2017); Schrover and Schinkel (2014). For the analysis of a similar conservative discourse on race within the New Right see: Ansell (1997); Smith (1994).

1960s and 1970s were derided as cultural and moral relativists.¹⁴⁰ In the Netherlands, that same formula has been used as a tool on the domestic front to plead for tougher immigration and integration policies and to reinvent Dutch identity in opposition to both progressive ‘cultural relativists’ and a ‘backward’ Islam. This discourse soon came to dominate the Dutch integration debate. Whereas before, the socio-economic aspect (work, education) was seen as central to the integration of immigrants, in the 1990s that view was increasingly marginalized in favour of a socio-cultural insistence on the need to assimilate Western values.

Civil religion as a foundation for Dutch identity

A logical consequence of the embrace of the clash of civilizations thesis is the affirmation of the religious identity of Europe and the Netherlands. Progressive values that have historically been claimed in confrontation with Christianity are now depicted as the accomplishments of (Judeo-)Christian culture. Bolkestein, Fortuyn, Wilders and consequent political leaders of the CDA and VVD employed a variety of these formulas in Dutch integration politics: rationalist-humanist-Christian values, Judeo-Christian values or Judeo-Christian-humanist values. Pim Fortuyn posited ‘unbridgeable differences’ between the ‘Judaean-Christian humanist culture’ of the Netherlands and the culture of Islam, even in its ‘liberal variants’.¹⁴¹ Geert Wilders proposed to replace the first article of the Dutch constitution – which contains the principle of equality and the proscription of discrimination – with a reference to a *Leitkultur* of Judeo-Christian-humanist values.¹⁴² As the religious scholar Ernst van den Hemel points out in a sharp analysis of this new discourse, we are not dealing with historically accurate, neutrally descriptive terms for existing religious-cultural affinities. There is no such thing as a unitary Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather it should be seen as an invented tradition:

[T]he appeal to Judeo-Christian roots should be seen as a performative linguistic act, an invocation rather than a description, that has as its goal the simultaneous defence and construction of a community that is perceived to be under threat, by appealing to a tradition that cannot be grasped in rational, objective terms.¹⁴³

Conservatives sought for a way to distinguish the identity of the white Dutch population from first- and second-generation immigrants in the Netherlands. In the 1960s and 1970s, Dutch identity was redefined in opposition to German occupation and the Second World War, with largely progressive results. Now Dutch conservatives aimed to redefine and reconstruct Dutch identity in opposition to Islam on one side and the ‘cultural relativism’ of the 1960s on the other. Van den Hemel traces this appeal to the Christian roots of Dutch culture back to Leo Strauss and the neoconservative conviction that some conception of natural right, bolstered by religion

¹⁴⁰ Vaïsse (2011, p. 10).

¹⁴¹ Fortuyn (1997, pp. 108-109).

¹⁴² PVV (2006a).

¹⁴³ Van den Hemel (2014, p. 27).

and myth, is needed to sustain a moral order and inspire obedience to the law. In March 1994, Bolkestein gave a controversial interview, again igniting a flurry of debate, in which he adopted this approach and pleaded for a *bezielend verband* (spiritual bond):

A society needs a bond. That is why I have attacked cultural relativism in the framework of the minorities' debate. The laws are the walls of the state, the Old Greeks said. Except that the government is powerless faced with a massive breach of the law. When the sense is lacking that it is morally bad to break the law, the walls of the state have no foundation. In the past, the manifesto of the VVD stated that the party based itself on a series of fundamental values, among which Christianity. In the 1970s, when everything was possible and allowed, it was dropped. This makes sense, seen purely from the liberal tradition. But we now live in a society that is adrift, with a million of allochtons [minorities] in the year 2000. Perhaps the reference to Christianity needs to be included once more in our program.¹⁴⁴

For some, the neoconservative origin of this argument concerning religious morality as the foundation of the 'walls of the state' was obvious. According to Paul Cliteur, Bolkestein's 'reference to Christianity as a foundation for our moral values, is found in Kristol'.¹⁴⁵ (Kristol, in turn, attested to inspiration by Leo Strauss.) Cliteur saw Bolkestein's intervention as part of a wider embrace of neoconservative ideas among the intellectuals of the VVD:

When I wrote an article in 1987 on Irving Kristol, I did not think there was anyone in the Netherlands that seriously studied his work. But who compares the book of Kristol with the ideas of the aforementioned thinkers [VVD-intellectuals such as Bolkestein, Kinneging and Van der List] will find significant similarities. [...] The ideologues of the VVD have gone through a trajectory from Rawls to Hayek, and from Hayek to Kristol, or so it seems.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ 'Een samenleving heeft betrokkenheid nodig. Daarom heb ik in het kader van het minderhedendebat het cultuurrelativisme aangevallen. De wetten zijn de muren van de staat, zeiden de oude Grieken. Alleen staat de overheid machteloos tegenover een massale overtreding van de wet. Als het besef ontbreekt dat het slecht is om de wetten te overtreden, hebben de muren van de staat geen fundament. Vroeger stond in het beginselprogramma van de VVD dat de partij zich baseerde op een aantal fundamentele waarden, waaronder het christendom. In de jaren zeventig, toen alles kon en mocht, is dat geschrapt. Dat klopt ook, voor wie zuiver denkt in de liberale traditie. Maar we leven nu in een maatschappij die op drift is geraakt, met een miljoen allochtonen in het jaar tweeduizend. Die verwijzing naar het christendom moet daarom misschien weer terug in ons program.' See: Van den Brink (1994).

¹⁴⁵ 'Toen ik in 1987 een artikel schreef over Irving Kristol, dacht ik niet dat er in Nederland iemand was die zijn werk serieus bestudeerde. Maar wie anno 1996 het boek van Kristol naast de opvattingen van de hiervoor genoemde denkers legt, zal aanzienlijke overeenkomsten signaleren. De ideologen van de VVD hebben een ontwikkeling doorgemaakt van Rawls naar Hayek en van Hayek naar Kristol, zo lijkt het.' (Cliteur, 1996, p. 121)

¹⁴⁶ Cliteur (1996, p. 121).

In the debate that followed Bolkestein's opinion piece, Dutch Christian Democrats expressed their doubts concerning the instrumental nature of his appeal to Christian values. Why did Bolkestein take recourse to something he himself did not believe in? Here Leo Strauss' appeal to Plato and the necessity of myth and religion in grounding the identity of a community and acquiring obedience to the law, provides the answer. Bolkestein's relation to Christianity, however, is far more troubled than that of the American neoconservatives. His view of the Dutch Christian tradition is marked by a deep ambivalence. Looking back at Bolkestein's writings, a largely negative picture of the legacy of Dutch Christianity appears. Both the Dutch welfare state and the progressive ideas of the 1960s and 1970s were in his opinion a product of Christian feelings of guilt and sympathy with the suffering of one's fellow man. Bolkestein's political career can be described as a long drawn-out attack on the harmful (progressive) effects of Christian values in the Netherlands. He reserved specific scorn for the influential Christian pacifist organizations protesting the Cold War arms race in the 1980s. That negative attitude never fully subsided. In a prominent intervention at a later date, Bolkestein attributed the Western penchant for cultural relativism to Christian values. The Christian ethic of 'turning the other cheek' Bolkestein argued, spelled doom for European civilization in the struggle with Islam.¹⁴⁷

Within the Dutch New Right, not everyone was content with Bolkestein's appeal to Christianity. Paul Cliteur, who had been one of the earliest to introduce neoconservative ideas to the VVD, rejected the use of religion to reframe Dutch identity. Cliteur published a philosophically worded response to Bolkestein at the end of 1994, in which he outlined his objections and proposed an alternate approach. He agreed with Bolkestein on the need for a metaphysical foundation of moral values, in which some conception of natural law was used. Drawing on the work of American conservatives, Cliteur alternately called this a 'cosmic police agent', a 'metaphysical dream' or a 'civil religion'.¹⁴⁸ But in contrast to Bolkestein, Cliteur proposed to use appeals to the Enlightenment and universal human rights as a foundation for Dutch identity, as a way of declaring Western culture superior to Islam.

In his PhD thesis, Cliteur had taken up a position in between Burke and Strauss, and in between positive law and natural law. Taking from Burke the notion of evolutionary development of national traditions, and from Strauss the idea of the need for natural law and universal standards, Cliteur formulated a synthesis that he called *cultuurrecht* (cultural law). The core idea is that evolutionary development of a culture can give rise to moral standards that are superior to those of other cultures. He elaborated on that vision in books such as *Filosofie van Mensenrechten* (Philosophy of Human Rights) published in 1999 and *Moderne Papoeas* (Modern Papuans) in 2002, an influential critique of multiculturalism and cultural relativism. In these books, Cliteur did with universalism and Enlightenment values what Bolkestein had tried to do with

¹⁴⁷ Bolkestein (2009b).

¹⁴⁸ Cliteur (1994).

Christian religion: he used them in an instrumental and paradoxical fashion to construct a particularistic discourse of cultural superiority:

For a cultural relativist there can be no such thing as the superiority of one culture. But from the perspective of the universalist it is self-evident that the question can be resolved. If we can outline one corpus of universal values, it is possible to identify one culture where those values are, by and large, best protected. The culture in which that is the case, is the best culture. And 'the best', is 'superior'.¹⁴⁹

Cliteur and his former student Hirsu Ali became the Dutch representatives of a hugely influential anti-religious tendency within the New Right. They were the Dutch representatives of New Atheism, the current that achieved prominence internationally after 9/11 through the work of intellectuals such as Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris. Eventually Cliteur (and Hirsu Ali) were dubbed 'Enlightenment fundamentalists' by the sociologist Dick Pels.¹⁵⁰ Curiously, this has been the charge that seems to have stuck over time. The caveat here is that Cliteur's embrace of Enlightenment values is as ambivalent as Bolkestein's embrace of Christianity. We should not forget that Cliteur is a self-declared conservative thinker. He is one of the most prolific authors on conservatism in the Netherlands, a tradition he himself defines in opposition to Enlightenment thought. Cliteur's most important inspirations, Hayek and Burke, whose writing has supplied the building blocks for his own philosophy, were both avowed opponents of universal human rights. And when push comes to shove, Cliteur has a rather spotty record as a defender of human rights. When discussing the torture of suspected terrorists in his 2002 book on multiculturalism, Cliteur writes that universal human rights are, as a rule, not absolute: exceptions should be allowed.¹⁵¹ A similar contradiction is found in the politics of Ayaan Hirsu Ali, who defends universal human rights fervently and at the same time pleads for a liberal jihad, meaning the suspension of human rights for suspects of terrorism.¹⁵² If Cliteur and Hirsu Ali are truly fundamentalists, they are strikingly flexible in their fundamentalism. And if Cliteur and Hirsu Ali are truly universalists, they are strikingly tribal in their universalism.

A true proponent of universalism would argue that universal values transcend cultures, and can therefore also be found within the Islamic world. What is arguably happening here is that Cliteur and Hirsu Ali enlist universalism and the Enlightenment in the service of a particularistic discourse of cultural superiority and conflict. As Ian

¹⁴⁹ 'Voor een cultuurrelativist kan van de superioriteit van één cultuur natuurlijk geen sprake zijn. Maar vanuit het perspectief van de universalist ligt het voor de hand dat die vraag wel degelijk beantwoord kan worden. Immers als er één corpus aan universele waarden kan worden omlijnd, is het niet onmogelijk dat tevens één cultuur kan worden aangewezen waarin die waarden grosso modo het beste worden beschermd. De cultuur waarin dat het geval is, is de beste cultuur. En "de beste", is "superieur".' (Cliteur, 2002, p. 29)

¹⁵⁰ Pels (2005, p. 111).

¹⁵¹ Cliteur (2002, p. 24).

¹⁵² Wilders and Hirsu Ali (2003).

Buruma observed sharply: ‘the Enlightenment has a particular appeal to some conservatives because its values are not just universal, but more importantly, “ours,” that is, European, Western values.’¹⁵³ Neoconservatives have historically used the universalist discourse of Wilsonian liberalism to bolster American patriotism. Similarly, in the Dutch context, universalism came to denote a new Dutch patriotism.

The cultural contradictions of capitalism

Neoconservative theory also helped to underpin the Dutch New Right strategy of combining neoliberal and (neo)conservative convictions. A central reference point, introduced by Bolkestein at a Telders Foundation conference on liberalism, conservatism and communitarianism in 1994, was the book *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* by Daniel Bell. The basic thesis of this classic from 1976 is that capitalism is inherently prone to create its own gravediggers.¹⁵⁴ It undermines the cultural preconditions of its very existence. Bell’s analysis was inspired on Max Weber’s sociological classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. On the one hand, capitalism functions thanks to an underlying conservative (protestant) morality based on frugality, a strong work ethic, patience, self-discipline, perseverance and so on. On the other hand, capitalism is a system of ongoing rationalization. Its technology and dynamism are revolutionary and derive from the spirit of modernity. It is the dynamic of capitalism itself that threatens to destroy existing traditions and communities. Irving Kristol’s slogan *Two cheers for capitalism* aptly expressed the neoconservative reservation.

The image of capitalism evoked by neoconservatives is perhaps best explained by reference to a passage from *The Communist Manifesto*. Here, Marx depicted capitalism as ‘the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world that he has called up by his spells’:

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.¹⁵⁵

Marx welcomed this cultural dynamic as a historically necessary liberation from feudalist bondage, while critiquing capitalism largely on socio-economic grounds. The neoconservatives, in contrast, wanted to save capitalism by counteracting its influence in the cultural field. Ever since Edmund Burke, conservatives have cherished the ‘ancient and venerable prejudices’ as essential to the maintenance of the social order.

¹⁵³ Buruma (2006, p. 29).

¹⁵⁴ Bell (1976).

¹⁵⁵ Cited in: Berman (1983, p. 21).

The neoconservatives were no exception to that rule. Daniel Bell saw the emergence of the libertine and hedonistic culture of the 1960s and 1970s as an outgrowth of the revolutionary nature of capitalism, in particular its consumer culture. Above all the progressive elites in the culture industry – where all sorts of profanity was on offer – undermined the conservative morality necessary for the continued existence of capitalism.

At the time of the appearance of *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, the neoconservatives were drifting further to the right. They joined Reagan's New Right coalition. As part of that new reality, they were proponents of unleashing capitalism through free trade and globalization, through liberalization, deregulation and flexibilization. At the same time, at the cultural level, they refused the norms and values that capitalist modernity entailed, while pointing to progressive cultural elites as the cause of the problem. Bell's analysis became the intellectual expression of a broader strategy of the American conservative movement: the discontent and anxiety generated by an unbridled capitalism was addressed on the terrain of culture. In *What's the Matter with Kansas* Thomas Frank famously described this political strategy as 'the Great Backlash'.¹⁵⁶

In his presentation at the Telders Foundation conference in 1994, Bolkestein made the case for a similar two-pronged strategy. On the economic terrain he was a strong proponent of neoliberal globalization, privatization, flexibilization and deregulation. On the cultural sphere he advocated conservatism:

We need to take into account the different domains that Daniel Bell has distinguished within society. The Dutch economy is not very flexible and progress can be made by getting rid of unnecessary rules and decayed corporatist structures. But on the cultural level, partly due to the arrival of lots of people with other norms and values, instability and fragmentation pose a greater danger than rigidity. Hence the importance of the Christian and humanist tradition for our society as a binding element. This combination of economic progressivity and cultural conservatism is not opportunistic, but a consequence of the analysis of the present social condition of the Netherlands.¹⁵⁷

Again the historical irony is stark: at the very moment of liberal triumphalism concerning the fall of the Berlin Wall, the VVD of all parties was reintroducing a critique of capitalism. The right-wing liberals turned to (cultural) conservatism at a time when

¹⁵⁶ Frank (2004, p. 5).

¹⁵⁷ 'Binnen een maatschappij dient men een open oog te hebben voor de verschillende domeinen die Daniel Bell heeft onderscheiden. Zo is de Nederlandse economie weinig flexibel en kan vooruitgang worden geboekt door overbodige regels af te schaffen en vermolmde, corporatistische structuren af te breken. Maar op cultureel vlak vormen, mede door de komst van veel mensen met andere normen en waarden, instabiliteit en verbroekeling een veel groter gevaar dan starheid. Vandaar het belang van de Christelijke en humanistische traditie voor onze maatschappij als bindend element. Deze combinatie van economische progressiviteit en een zeker cultureel conservatisme vloeit niet voort uit opportunisme, maar uit een analyse van de maatschappelijke situatie in het Nederland van nu.' (Bolkestein, 1995, p. 132)

all other parties turned to embrace liberalism. Like the abovementioned rationale of Thatcherism spelled out by Doring, the insecurity created by economic developments was addressed in the sphere of culture. The most devastating political strategy, Schattschneider argued, is to change the conflict that is central to the political field. The Dutch New Right did just that, by moving the major left-right opposition from the socio-economic to the cultural terrain.

The leading sociological analyses of the emergence of the radical right, such as those of Kitschelt and Betz, point to deindustrialization and the rapid socio-cultural and socio-economic changes of the 1980s and 1990s as the driver of the success of this radical right politics.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, the Netherlands in the 1990s was subject to sweeping changes due to processes such as deindustrialization, globalization, individualization and neoliberalization. The consequences of deindustrialization were specifically harsh for the former guest workers who had decided to stay and bring their families over in the 1980s. For them, the difficulty of accommodating themselves to the new context was compounded by the spectre of mass unemployment. Meanwhile, the Netherlands signed the Maastricht Treaty formalizing the European Monetary Union in 1992 and was swept up in the wave of globalization and free market reform. The civil society institutions that had become part of the Dutch welfare state were drastically cut back under the cutbacks and privatizations of the 1980s and 1990s. Concurrently, the massive introduction of part-time employment for Dutch women meant a momentous break with the old Fordist breadwinner model. In this turbulent context of rapid socio-cultural and socio-economic change, a conservative discourse emerged that self-assuredly pointed to immigration, Islam, the 1960s and the cultural relativism of baby boomers as the source of the erosion of community, the loss of tradition and the attrition of national identity.

After the 1994 conference on liberalism, conservatism and communitarianism, the Telders Foundation came with the publication *Tussen Vrijblijvendheid en Paternalisme* (Between Permissiveness and Paternalism.)¹⁵⁹ Cliteur, Kinneking and Van der List were among its authors. In the publication, the Dutch debate on communitarianism, excessive individualization and moral decline was subtly channelled into the direction of Hayek and the neoliberal reform programme outlined in the 1988 Telders publication *Liberalisme, een Speurtocht naar de Filosofische Grondslagen* (Liberalism, a Search for the Philosophical Foundations). The 1995 report expressed the fusionist ambition of uniting conservative and neoliberal convictions. Gerry van der List, the secretary of the working group that produced the report was quite explicit about this motivation: 'We want in some way or other, to incorporate conservative morality in the liberal creed of freedom.'¹⁶⁰ The report referred to Bolkestein's plea for a 'spiritual bond', and resulted in a proposal to include a reference to Christian foundations in the party programme. Gerry van der List argued for a 'conservative alliance' with the CDA to fight together against the 'culture of permissiveness' and 'the legacy of the 1960s'. The core of this

¹⁵⁸ Betz (1994); Kitschelt (1994).

¹⁵⁹ Groenveld, Cliteur, Hansma, Kinneking and Van der List (1995).

¹⁶⁰ Cited in: Ten Hooven (1995).

agenda would be a restoration of 'common decency', next to cutbacks in government spending, the encouragement of business initiative, the promotion of law and order policies and a 'civilized nationalism'.¹⁶¹ It is this combination that forms the hallmark of the New Right.

New class theory and the assault on the 1960s

The neoconservatives had formulated a theory about the cultural elites who were the target of the backlash strategy in the US. This was the notion of the 'new class', described by Steinfels in his famous study of neoconservatism as 'half-analytical concept, half-polemical device'.¹⁶² The protest movements of the New Left, neoconservatives had argued in the 1960s, threatened to undermine the stability of American democracy. It wasn't Vietnam or the situation in the inner cities. The crisis was above all moral and cultural. The problem was the decay of values, the decline of moral standards and the corruption of manners. Individualism and hedonism had replaced traditional conventions of family, community and work. The breeding ground for this erosion was the new class: a new cultural elite comprised of erstwhile students who had climbed the ladder to become society's intellectuals, academics, bureaucrats, social workers, managers, consultants, lawyers and so forth. Leftist politics, the neoconservatives argued in the 1970s, is a rationalization of the interests of this class: a way to increase their power by expanding the (welfare) institutions they dominated. This new class was described as culturally progressive, hostile to traditional morality and the working class politics of the Old Left.¹⁶³

Almost thirty years later, new class theory turned into an important inspiration for the Dutch backlash. In April 1995, a landmark essay appeared in the Dutch weekly *Elsevier*, titled *Herdenken in Deemoed* (Commemorating with Humility). In this text, H.J. Schoo argued that the progressive counterculture of the 1960s still presided over Dutch politics, due to the rise of a new social class. This 'new class', Schoo argued, dominated the sphere of knowledge production: the fields of policy formulation, academia, culture and the media. The 'new class' in the Netherlands had monopolized the memory of the Second World War and used it to push through its egalitarian agenda while stifling the debate.

[T]he baby boomers, presently, in 1995, in their fifties, have been in command of the country for the past 25 years. Not economically (the private sector has other masters) or strictly speaking, politically. No, their ideology sets the pace in the 'consciousness industry': governance and policy, education and culture, science and media. They have the power over the written and spoken word, formulate ideas, decide what are the issues of the day, and define reality.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Ten Hooven (1995).

¹⁶² Steinfels (2013 [1979], p. 120).

¹⁶³ Vaïsse (2011, pp. 77-78).

¹⁶⁴ '[D]e babyboomers, nu aan weerszijden van de vijftig, voeren al zo'n vijftientig jaar het bewind in Nederland. Niet economisch (het bedrijfsleven heeft andere meesters) of politiek in strikte zin. Nee, hun

Here we find *in nuce* an idea that would become extremely popular during the Fortuyn revolt: the idea of the 'leftist elite', portrayed as a dominant force in Dutch society even if the Dutch left had been excluded from political power in the 1980s and remained in electoral retreat ever since. Ironically, this notion of an all-pervasive 'leftist elite' was brought in circulation by Schoo almost at the same time that leftist intellectuals, such as Bart Tromp and Ruud Koole, were busy debating the terminal decline of the left.¹⁶⁵ That Schoo used neoconservative ideas to theorize Dutch developments was not a coincidence. Schoo had studied in the US in the late 1960s. When Bart Jan Spruyt described Schoo in an essay as one of the leading Dutch neoconservatives, Schoo responded privately as follows:

It is strange to see myself named among the 'hall of fame' of Dutch neocons. The reason of course, is that I prefer to remain unlabelled and indefinable, but on balance I think it is correct. I have since my distant American years felt a kinship with people such as Moynihan, Glazer, Podhoretz, the old Kristol, Buckley. Later came Himmelfarb, first as 'psychohistorian', then as the author of *The Demoralization of Society*. And Lasch has of course been an important influence; he is never seen as a neocon, but in many respects he really is.¹⁶⁶

In public though, Schoo remained in the closet and was careful to not out himself as a neoconservative, for fear of being sidelined in the debate. It underlines the earlier observation of the incentives in Dutch society to not make the ideological character of one's ideas explicit.¹⁶⁷ One of the outstanding qualities of US neoconservatism as an intellectual movement was its use of sociological journalism, combining an accessible style with an admirable grasp of social theory and a passionately pursued political agenda. While translating US neoconservative ideas to the Netherlands, Schoo developed an incisive form of sociological journalistic commentary that stood out in the Dutch media landscape and ultimately became very influential.

The major difference with the US, Schoo contended in his essay, was that the new class in the Netherlands had been more powerful than anywhere else, due to the

gedachtegoed zet de toon in de "bewustzijnsindustrie": bestuur en beleid, onderwijs en cultuur, wetenschap en media. Zij hebben de macht over het geschreven en gesproken woord, formuleren ideeën, bepalen wat kwesties zijn, definiëren de werkelijkheid.' (Schoo, 2008, p. 41)

¹⁶⁵ Koole (1993, pp. 73-98).

¹⁶⁶ 'Het is merkwaardig om mezelf opgenomen te zien in een "eregalerij" van Nederlandse *neocons*. Komt natuurlijk doordat ik liever ongrijpbaar en niet etiketteerbaar blijf, maar *on balance* denk ik dat het terecht is. Heb me al sinds m'n verre Amerikaanse jaren verwant gevoeld met mensen als Moynihan, Glazer, Podhoretz (die je niet noemt), de oude Kristol, Buckley (die je ook niet noemt). Later kwam Himmelfarb daarbij, eerst de "psychohistorica", daarna vooral de auteur van *The Demoralization of Society*. En Lasch is natuurlijk een aanmerkelijke invloed geweest; hij wordt nooit als *neocon* gezien, maar in veel opzichten is hij dat wel.' (Joustra, Meijer and Vuijsje 2007, p. 84)

¹⁶⁷ In the introduction of a posthumous collection of Schoo's writings, the leading journalist Marc Chavannes describes Schoo as a 'humane, radical realist'. The label 'realism', also used by Bolkestein, Spruyt, Wilders and Rutte, is often used as a euphemism for conservatism in the Netherlands. See: Schoo (2008, p. 7).

weakness of traditional Dutch institutions, as a result of depillarization and secularization. From the ruins of the old pillars, the 'new class' in the Netherlands had crafted a more or less cohesive new moral order, embodied by the welfare state. Schoo called this progressive order 'the official state doctrine'. This progressive ideology had been constructed in opposition to National Socialism and the German occupation during the Second World War. Consequentially, the new class saw hierarchy and authority as overwhelmingly negative. Any appeal to repressive measures by the state was made suspicious by using references to the war. In their generational rebellion, the new class took its revenge on the moral failings of their parents under German occupation by embracing an anti-authoritarian welfare state and by welcoming mass immigration. While Schoo observed in 1995 that the belief in the welfare state had subsided somewhat, he argued that the first article of the Dutch constitution had become a new object of national veneration, enshrining anti-racism as a public religion. The official activities surrounding the public remembrance of the war and the celebration of liberation on the fifth of May connected Dutch identity to a 'harnessed anti-fascism': 'The memory of the war is made to serve the utopian creed of the coming multicultural society'.¹⁶⁸

In this way, Schoo reconstructed the messy, improvised and in reality rather negligent record of Dutch immigration and integration policy – that began with the pragmatic and economically motivated decision of a right-wing government to invite guest workers – as a consistent, intentional and deeply idealistic multicultural agenda of the left.¹⁶⁹ His treatment of the ideas of the 'new class' and the baby-boomer generation had a similar sharpening effect. As mentioned in the first chapter, the protest generation of the 1960s was critiqued from both left and right for its lack of a clear political vision, its arrested intellectual development and its 'ideological Styrofoam'. The conservative historian Kossmann even depicted the absence of a clear progressive ideology as a reason for the lack of a conservative response. In the hands of Schoo, what was in reality a rather spontaneous and practical movement without an exceedingly coherent agenda, suddenly became a streamlined ideological operation of unreconstructed radicals, controlling the minds of the Dutch population well into the 1990s. It is as if time had stood still. Schoo transposed an image of the baby-boomer generation dating from the politicized period in the 1960s, straight into the technocratic reality of the 1990s. In so doing, Schoo provided the theory of Dutch progressivism that Dutch progressives had failed to deliver themselves. The Dutch conservative undercurrent of the 1990s now had a clear target to mobilize against.

Schoo's new class theory provided the inspiration for the revisionist immigration narrative put forward by Fortuyn and Wilders, stipulating that the Dutch left had

¹⁶⁸ Schoo (2008, p. 44).

¹⁶⁹ For a good overview of the Dutch immigration debate and a critical review of the 'immigration myth' that progressive elites had pursued a policy of mass immigration, see the work of Leo Lucassen and Jan Lucassen: 'A crucial element of the Dutch "pessimistic turn" was the belief broadly shared on both left and right that progressive elites were to blame for the rise of illiberal Islam in the Netherlands and for the problems caused by the descendants of immigrants.' (Lucassen and Lucassen, 2015, p. 76) See also: Lucassen (2017).

orchestrated mass immigration. The problem with that accusation of course, was that the left was not in power when the most important decisions were made.¹⁷⁰ The new class theory neatly worked around that problem, by arguing that also mainstream Dutch right-wing parties were dominated by a leftist elite in 'the consciousness industry'. As Jos de Beus correctly observed, 'a conservative critique of progressive hegemony has to devolve in our case into a critique of the softening of Christian Democrats and right-wing liberals.'¹⁷¹ The new class theory was eminently suitable for this purpose. It actually served to attack the pragmatist centre in Dutch politics, policy and media by linking it to an ephemeral, omnipresent spirit of 1968. The added advantage was that the spirit of 1968 would not fight or talk back, since it had long since departed.¹⁷² Schoo connected this critique of the new class with a forceful attack on political correctness.

The liberators, the generation of the 1960s, quickly became the gatekeepers of political correctness. [...] The Dutch public domain is littered with pitfalls, with emergency triangles; with zones we cannot enter unpunished. Almost anyone that writes or speaks on the market place of public opinion, does so with the aid of a ever vigilant internal censor.¹⁷³

Next to his personal influence on Fortuyn whose views on immigration and globalization were still very (neo-)liberal in the early 1990s, perhaps the biggest impact of Schoo was in conservative social democrat circles. As noted before, in 1997 the sociologist and journalist Herman Vuijsje published his hugely influential book *Correct*, in which he reiterated and elaborated on Schoo's baby-boomer theory.¹⁷⁴ Vuijsje represented a growing conservative sentiment among Dutch social democrats circles in the 1990s, famously dubbed *Nieuw Flinks* (a contraction of 'New Left' and 'toughness'), by Dutch comedians Van Kooten en De Bie. These conservative social democrats aligned themselves with the New Right in the Dutch culture wars of the 1990s and 2000s. Illustrative is that Vuijsje presented the first copy of his book to Frits Bolkestein, praising him for having done most to challenge the totems and taboos erected by the baby boomers. The basic thesis of Schoo and Vuijsje would later be taken up in the landmark essay titled *Het Multiculturele Drama* (The Multicultural Drama), by social

¹⁷⁰ Duyvendak (2011); Lucassen and Lucassen (2011).

¹⁷¹ De Beus (2006a p. 329).

¹⁷² Martin Bosma, the ideologue of Geert Wilders, went on to use the neoconservative 'new class' theory as the core argument of his 2010 bestseller *De Schijn-Élite van de Valse Munters* (The Fake Elite of the Counterfeiters) (Bosma, 2011).

¹⁷³ 'De bevridders, de generatie van de jaren zestig, werden al snel de hoeders van het politiek correcte denken. [...] De Nederlandse openbaarheid is bezaaid geraakt met voetangels en klemmen, met gevarendriehoeken, met zones die we niet straffeloos mogen betreden. Bijna iedereen die pen of woord voert op het marktplein der opinies, doet dat aan de hand van een uiterst waakzame inwendige censor.' (Schoo, 2008, p. 45)

¹⁷⁴ Vuijsje (2008 [1997]).

democrat intellectual Paul Scheffer.¹⁷⁵ His later work *Land van Aankomst* (Country of Arrival) can be read as a dialogue with US neoconservatism.¹⁷⁶

Conclusion of the neoconservative strand

This section has attempted to show how neoconservative ideas inspired the conservative wave of the Dutch New Right in the 1990s and provided much of its political idiom. The contention is not that these ideas were ideological in the sense of being completely false. An ideology can only be effective if it is convincing, if it corresponds in some degree to an existing reality. But the transposition of neoconservative ideas from the far more politicized and polarized American culture wars context, helped Dutch conservatives in painting a much more dramatic, radical and ideological portrait of the Dutch baby-boomer generation than the really-existing 'prudent progressive' consensus allowed for. Especially on immigration policy, Dutch conservatives succeeded in popularizing a revisionist history, in which mass immigration was framed as an idealistic agenda of the left.

Neoconservative theory assisted Dutch conservatives in this dramatization and helped them in tying the issue of immigration irrevocably to the political legacy of the 1960s. It taught them to raise the spectre of cultural relativism, originally theorized by Leo Strauss in the late 1940s. And it showed them how to reformulate Dutch identity while breaking with traditional pluralist, sceptical and organicist understandings of Dutch national identity. Particularly important was the clash of civilizations theory that served to portray the Netherlands as a front in the global confrontation between Islam and the West. When 9/11 occurred, the Dutch New Right had a narrative in place that could make sense of the new geopolitical constellation. It should be stressed that there were significant differences of opinions among the New Right, on the use of religion to reframe Dutch identity or even on the integration of immigrants. The process of translation was never a smooth, coordinated operation.

Politically, the conservative undercurrent in the 1990s failed to break through. As noted before, the conservative wing of the Christian Democrats experienced a powerful defeat in the elections of 1994, taking them out of the game till their resurgence in 2002

¹⁷⁵ Scheffer (2000).

¹⁷⁶ *Land van Aankomst* (Country of Arrival) is a discussion of Dutch immigration and integration, through the lens of the debate in the US. Often without mentioning their neoconservative affiliations, the book features an impressive array of neoconservative authors such as Nathan Glazer, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Dinesh D'Souza, Bernard Lewis, Niall Ferguson, Thomas Sowell, the early Francis Fukuyama, Hirsi Ali and Samuel Huntington. Scheffer has written the book as a dialogue between two camps, positioning himself in the middle, which makes it difficult to properly identify his views. Scheffer nonetheless embraces the ideas of Huntington and writes of 'a culture of poverty' in the Netherlands. See: Scheffer (2007, p. 74). A strange time lag can be observed in the book, not uncommon to posterior Dutch adaptations of neoconservatism, as we have seen with Schoo. The original neoconservative 'culture of poverty' thesis from the 1960s was inspired on the now very much outdated sociology of the Chicago School from the 1930s and 1940s, which portrayed culture as a biological essence. Scheffer reproduces that Chicago School sociology in his book as if it were still valid today. The book was later reworked into a PhD thesis. See: Scheffer (2010). Leo Lucassen (2010, p. 296) has connected Scheffer to a larger 'communitarian-organic' tradition on the European left. In his books though, Scheffer largely derives his ideas on immigration from the US.

under Balkenende. Also the conservative current in the VVD failed, at first, to impose its views within the party. After the publication of the Telders report *Tussen Vrijblijvendheid en Paternalisme* (Between Permissiveness and Paternalism) centrist and progressive forces in the VVD once again rebutted the Bolkestein-wing. In a party council meeting in 1996, the party cadre rebelled against the proposed conservative turn. The bone of contention was the notion of a moralizing government, as advocated by Bolkestein and the Telders think tank. 'If you mention the word moralism once more, you will leave the building covered in tar and feathers,' one member famously snapped at the party leadership.¹⁷⁷ The VVD cadre, historically defined by its cultural opposition to pillarized religiosity, was not ready to embrace conservative morality.

In fact, the party was moving back to the centre also in socio-economic terms, it softened its stance as part of its response to the economic boom of the mid-nineties. Bolkestein became more and more marginalized, and the progressive liberal Dijkstal took over in 1998. Bolkestein left for Brussels to become a European Commissioner and vowed to continue his fight for free markets there. New Right intellectuals such as Kinneging and Cliteur left the VVD in protest. In 2000 they would found the Edmund Burke Foundation, an influential conservative think tank that powerfully shaped the Dutch debate in the years to come. Significantly, Hendrik Jan Schoo spoke at its first meeting. Political scientists have argued that this shift to the centre and the failure of the VVD to cover its conservative flank provided the opportunity for the Fortuyn revolt.¹⁷⁸ Paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, one can argue that behind every populism, there is a failed revolution. In this instance, it was a failed palace revolution of the New Right in the mainstream parties.

3.4 Conclusion

Figures such as Pim Fortuyn and Geert Wilders have often been cast as the original innovators who for the first time represented the sentiments of long-ignored segments of the population, who made debatable what had been considered taboo. What this chapter has shown is that both Fortuyn and Wilders were part of a larger and longer conservative wave. They drew on ideas that had been introduced by politicians and intellectuals of the Dutch New Right. Almost all of the major themes that were central to the breakthrough of right-wing populism in 2002 had been formulated and passionately discussed by the mid-1990s. Already in 1995, Hendrik Jan Schoo argued that the debate on national identity implicitly revolved around the lack of political conservatism in the Netherlands. He predicted that 'the large political parties, with the exception of D66, will in this sense become conservative'.¹⁷⁹

This conservative undercurrent has gone strangely unnoticed by many prominent authors. The still prevalent image of the 1990s is that of waning ideological contrasts.

¹⁷⁷ "‘Als u nog een keer moralisme zegt, gaat u hier besmeurd met pek en veren de deur uit,’ kreeg partijvoorzitter Hoekzema zaterdag van een partijraadslid te horen.' See: De Zwart (1996).

¹⁷⁸ Pellikaan, De Lange and Van der Meer (2016).

¹⁷⁹ Schoo (2008, p. 66).

The historian Piet de Rooy wrote in 2002 that the peace movement of the mid-1980s formed 'the final possibility to divide the country in a progressive and a conservative part'. In his eyes, the 1990s appeared to be the time 'of overcoming all ideological differences that had come into being since the second half of the nineteenth century.' De Rooy further notes that some observed a 'worrying degree of unanimity', and that 'lively debate or political oppositions were sadly missed'.¹⁸⁰ Another illuminating example is the newspaper *NRC Handelsblad*, that wrote in 1990, during a veritable peak of intellectual activity within the VVD: 'Is it that they are not allowed, or is that they're not willing to discuss matters in the VVD? [...] Intellectual laziness and poverty are catchwords that seem to cling to the party.'¹⁸¹ Perhaps the intellectual debates covered here were not taken very seriously at the time, or unfamiliarity with New Right ideas has hindered analysis, perhaps some have been looking in the wrong places. Perhaps, as the reference to a 'final opportunity' suggests, some Dutch scholars really wanted to believe in the end of ideology.

The underlying argument of this chapter has been that the case of the Dutch New Right lends itself to be studied as a form of political transfer. The import of foreign ideas has been of central importance for the ideological renewal of Dutch right-wing politics. The chapter has attempted to trace the process of translation of New Right ideas. I have described some of the 'brokers' of these ideas, their original inspiration and some of the process of translation: from the turn to Reaganomics at the AEP think tank, from the Hayekian inspirations of Bolkestein and the Telders Foundation, to the adoption of neoconservative ideas by Bolkestein, Cliteur and Schoo. These international inspirations have allowed a Hobsbawmian reinvention of tradition, in particular when it comes to national identity and conservative politics in the Netherlands. I have identified the New Right in terms of a series of characteristics: the fusionist combination of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, the break with the moderate politics of the post-war consensus, the belief in a politics of ideas and a renewed faith in social engineering. A similar tendency, with roughly comparable characteristics, can be identified in the Netherlands. It has been argued by Te Velde that political transfer can serve a negative function too, in sidelining old traditions and practices. Arguably that has been the case in the Netherlands, where old conceptions of moderate consensus politics and traditional notions of Dutch national identity have been challenged by the New Right as part of the attack on what they have called cultural relativism.

¹⁸⁰ 'De mate van eensgezindheid die over het land was neergedaald, werd door een aantal intellectuelen zelfs verontrustend groot gevonden. Zoals Van Eeden ruim een eeuw eerder geklaagd had over het oprukken van de saaie en vulgaire "allegaagschheid", zo miste men nu de tegenstellingen, het levendige debat, voor een deel zelfs de rellen die de jaren zestig zo interessant hadden gemaakt. [...] Daarmee leken de jaren negentig in het teken te staan van het overbruggen van nagenoeg alle ideologische verschillen die sinds de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw waren ontstaan.' (De Rooy, 2005, p. 278)

¹⁸¹ 'Mogen ze niet, kunnen ze niet, of willen ze niet over zaken discussiëren in de VVD? [...] Intellectuele luiheid en intellectuele armoede zijn trefwoorden die aan de partij lijken vastgeklonken.' See: Kranenburg and Van Roessel (1990).

The difficult question is how to label ideas stemming from currents such as neoliberalism or neoconservatism once they are adapted to the Dutch political climate. Can we claim the existence of a full-fledged Dutch neoconservatism or a Dutch neoliberalism? More importantly, what do we exactly mean by that? The explicit positions of intellectuals, journals and think tanks in the more competitive and politicized Anglo-American contexts makes the labelling of currents easier to accomplish. In the more moderate, ideologically foggy and consensual context of the Netherlands, it remains a more challenging question, which cannot be fully answered here. With regards to the later development of the radical right-wing populism of Fortuyn and Wilders, there is something to be said for the interpretation that the (neo)conservative strand of the Dutch New Right had become so successful that it branched off into an independent (populist) current in the 2000s. Another perspective would be that the populist and establishment elements of the New Right together form one current, whose different components may clash and chafe on some terrains, while reinforcing each other on others. I have had limited opportunity to explore the adjustment of these ideas to the Dutch context. The next chapter deals more extensively with the process of adaptation.

The conservative embrace of progressive values¹

While left-wing intellectuals probed their emptiness, nursed their wounds, and turned towards post-modern humility (qualified by some as 'self-hatred'), right-wing intellectuals have once again taken on the prophet's mantle, clothing themselves in the truth and justice of Western civilization and its 'non-negotiable' core values.

Dick Pels²

Up to this point, the analysis of the emergence of the Dutch New Right has been described a relatively straightforward process of translation of political ideas. The transposition of ideas from one context to another however, necessarily involves a significant degree of translation and adaptation. This chapter seeks to further explore the complexities involved with that translation process, zooming in on the contradictory aspects of the Dutch New Right backlash. The New Right in the US and the UK had a more traditional conservative character, expressed in the opposition to feminism and gay rights. The belated occurrence of the New Right backlash in the Netherlands in contrast, and the depth of the progressive wave of the 1960s and 1970s, meant that the Dutch conservative countercurrent had to accommodate progressive values to a much greater degree. The Dutch New Right needed to deal with the progressive sexual, anti-authoritarian and secular ethos that had become common sense after the 1960s and 1970s. Following the lead of Pim Fortuyn, Dutch conservatives embraced the Enlightenment and progressive values such as individualism, secularism, women's equality and gay rights. They presented themselves as the true defenders of the progressive accomplishments of Dutch culture against the 'backward culture' of Muslim immigrants. As a result, the Dutch New Right backlash had a far more contradictory character than its Anglo-American counterparts. This chapter uses Angela McRobbie's theory of a 'complex backlash' – a backlash that selectively incorporates certain elements of the current that it opposes – to make sense of this incongruous Dutch reality.

¹ A previous version of this text has been published in Dutch as: Oudenampsen (2013).

² 'Terwijl de linkse intellectuelen hun leegte peilden, hun wonden likten en vervielen in postmoderne bescheidenheid (door sommigen aangeduid als "zelfhaat"), hebben rechtse intellectuelen de profetenmantel opnieuw omgeslagen, zich hullend in de waarheid en rechtvaardigheid van de westerse cultuur met haar "ononderhandelbare" kernwaarden.' (Pels, 2010, p. 94)

The argument of this chapter unfolds in three steps. First it explores the existing debate concerning the political character of the Fortuyn revolt. After rejecting portrayals of the revolt as unambiguously progressive or conservative, the alternative thesis of a 'complex backlash' is introduced. The second section seeks to answer the question whether such a contradictory form of conservative politics still qualifies as conservatism. It introduced a situational perspective on conservatism, drawing on Karl Mannheim. The basic thesis is that this contradictory form of backlash politics is not an aberration but actually a common feature of the conservative tradition. US neo-conservatism, the analysis shows, contains a similar situational logic. The third and final section of the analysis proceeds to demonstrate how US neoconservatism has inspired a renewal of Dutch conservatism. In particular, it looks at the crucial role of Pim Fortuyn in guiding Dutch conservatives towards their embrace of progressive values.

4.1 The Fortuyn revolt: Progressive or conservative?

One of the enduring controversies in Dutch politics is the way progressive values have been mobilized and incorporated in right-wing agenda's. Standard-bearers of the New Right such as Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders have presented their politics as the defence of progressive ideals such as secularism, individualism, women's equality and gay rights. They did not express their opposition to Islam, immigration and multiculturalism in the language of traditional right-wing discourse, but rather with an appeal to endangered progressive values.³

In a now famous interview in 2002, Pim Fortuyn – himself openly gay – declared that he did not want to 'have to repeat the emancipation of women and gays'⁴. His party, the LPF, presented its programme as the defence of Western modernity against Islam – in particular separation of church and state and progressive gender values – stating that 'emancipation is aimed at real freedom of choice for women and men'.⁵ Fortuyn explicitly distanced himself from far-right figures such as Le Pen and Haider abroad, and the far-right Centrum Democrats (CD) in the Netherlands, led by Janmaat. The Dutch political scientist Tjitske Akkermans noted how radical right populists such as Fortuyn 'sometimes even trump the vested liberal parties by posing as the staunch and exclusive defenders of the Enlightenment and its liberal heritage'.⁶ The leading populism scholar Margaret Canovan observed how 'his reasons for opposing Muslim immigration and multiculturalism found some echoes on the Left' and concluded that Fortuyn's agenda 'could not simply be dismissed as right-wing xenophobia'.⁷ Others would contend that Fortuyn's views on immigration can be described as exactly that: 'we have to close off the country and force those present here to integrate at record

³ Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens (2010); Van Bohemen, Kemmers and De Koster (2012).

⁴ Poorthuis and Wansink (2002).

⁵ LPF (2003).

⁶ Akkerman (2006, p. 341).

⁷ Canovan (2005, pp. 75-76).

speed; no integration means expulsion,' Fortuyn once said.⁸ Perhaps David Art strikes the right balance when he argues that Fortuyn clearly was the leader of an anti-immigrant party, but his homosexuality and the way he framed his message as a defence of Dutch tolerance, shielded him to a certain degree from associations with more traditional radical-right parties.⁹

A similar ambiguity characterizes the major figures of the movement that preceded and accompanied Fortuyn, and that followed in his wake. Ayaan Hirsi Ali presented her criticism of Islam as motivated by the defence of Enlightenment values and the emancipation of Muslim women. Paul Cliteur and Frits Bolkestein argued that the universalism of the Enlightenment, embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents a yardstick that allows us to distinguish superior from inferior cultures.¹⁰ The assassinated filmmaker and derisive columnist Theo van Gogh celebrated freedom of speech and attacked Muslim immigrants as 'a fifth column', 'believers that see gays as unclean, just like menstruating women, and unbelievers.'¹¹ The right-wing Minister of Immigration Rita Verdonk oversaw the introduction of an integration exam that confronted immigrants with pictures of topless women on the beach and kissing gay people on the street. It prompted the remark from philosopher Judith Butler that 'a certain conception of freedom is invoked precisely as a rationale and instrument for certain practices of coercion'.¹² In 2005, Geert Wilders presented his new political movement by declaring that 'once upon a time our forefathers transformed a swampy delta into an oasis of tolerance and economic success, with a flag that over the entire world is synonymous with freedom. That flag deserves to keep on flying in freedom.'¹³ As the political scientist Koen Vossen points out in his analysis of the ideology of Geert Wilders' right-wing populist Party for Freedom (PVV): 'The PVV advocates the right to abortion, euthanasia and embryo selection, while the party presents itself as a fierce defender of women and gay emancipation in the face of the advance of an "intolerant and backward Islam". It is hard to imagine another national populist party offering a resolution in parliament to allow gay soldiers to wear their military outfit in a gay parade.'¹⁴

The Fortuyn revolt, legitimated with an appeal to Enlightenment values, was from the very beginning ambiguous in its nature, rendering a clear political characterization more difficult. The interpretation of this turning point has generally proceeded through rather one-sided schemes. As a result of which, two completely opposing descriptions of the present political moment have been able to peacefully co-exist. On the one hand, those analyses that portray the turn-around as a purely conservative restoration, a return towards the past: towards the musty smell of the Dutch 1950s or even worse, the

⁸ Fortuyn (2001a, p. 102).

⁹ Art (2011, p. 180).

¹⁰ Bolkestein (2011); Cliteur (2002).

¹¹ Redactie *de Volkskrant* (2004).

¹² Butler (2008, p. 3).

¹³ Wilders (2005, p. 132).

¹⁴ Vossen (2013, p. 187).

brown stench of the 1930s.¹⁵ On the other hand, the analyses that stress the progressive character of the politics of the populist right and point towards the progressive values of its electorate.

In an essay published in 2006, the late political theorist Jos de Beus wrote of 'the return of conservatism in the Netherlands'. After extensive review of the both the intellectual landscape and studies of popular opinion, he attested to 'the implosion of the progressive consensus from the 1960s and the shift towards a new conservative consensus'.¹⁶ De Beus prophesied a 'paradigm change' and a new 'period of conservative hegemony', not seen in the Netherlands since before the Second World War.¹⁷ Chiming in with de Beus, the conservative journalist Hendrik Jan Schoo triumphantly proclaimed in *de Volkskrant* that 'the Netherlands has entered a conservative era'. 'The turnaround came in 2002,' Schoo noted, 'when Fortuyn emerged practically out of the blue. Upon closer consideration, his appearance isn't simply an electoral whim, but an event marking the closure of the progressive era after the Second World War.'¹⁸ The same reference to conservatism and traditionalism is to be found in the work of the leading progressive sociologist Willem Schinkel, who has described present Dutch society as a 'museum' ruled by a 'gerontocracy', that expresses itself in 'fossilized thinking'. In his view, contemporary Dutch society is bound by an imagination that 'can only proceed along the beaten track, that is ideologically exhausted and has lost its youthfulness of mind'.¹⁹

Exemplary of the contrasting vision is yet another prominent sociologist, Jan Willem Duyvendak, who writes of a 'homogeneous progressive moral majority' in his book on Dutch nativism, *The Politics of Home*.²⁰ According to Duyvendak 'almost the entire autochthonous Dutch political spectrum sides with progressive values'.²¹ Seen from this perspective, the current political polarization in the Netherlands stems from a 'progressive majority' opposing a 'minority seen as conservative-religious'.²² For scholars departing from this line of reasoning, 'cultural protectionism' or 'neoculturalism' is the distinctive ideology of the Fortuyn revolt. In their view, the rise of neoculturalist populism represents a 'progressive politics of exclusion' and is 'mistakenly analyzed as a shift toward conservatism'.²³

The idea of a purely conservative restoration comes up short because it ignores the innovative progressive incorporations (or appropriations, depending on one's

¹⁵ De Ruiter (2012, p. 10). See also: Riemen (2010).

¹⁶ De Beus (2006b).

¹⁷ De Beus (2006a, p. 237).

¹⁸ Schoo (2005). Tellingly, Schoo cited an unpublished version of the essay of De Beus who had personally sent it to him before its publication.

¹⁹ Schinkel (2012, p. 31).

²⁰ Duyvendak (2011, p. 87).

²¹ Duyvendak (2004, p. 11).

²² Houtman and Duyvendak (2009, p. 96).

²³ The authors define neoculturalists by their view of the world as 'divided into different, inimical cultures', and by their opposition to 'cultural relativism'. In practice, neoculturalists are seen to combine a progressive sexual discourse with an anti-Muslim and anti-immigration agenda. See: Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak (2014, p. 235).

perspective) that set the discourse of this conservative movement apart from more traditional conservative ideology. Like Joan Scott in her influential analysis of how French *laïcité* came to serve as a tool of exclusion, one could wonder to what degree these progressive stances are merely a veil to dress up an otherwise rather unsightly anti-immigrant agenda.²⁴ Important however, is that these incorporations address a reality on the ground. The long 1960s had profound effects in the Netherlands, and led to deep-seated progressive values in the realms of morality and sexuality, shared by a large majority of the Dutch population.²⁵ As Paul Mepschen has argued with respect to gay rights, the right-wing appropriation of this theme is not due to the implosion of the progressive consensus in sexual morals, but rather due to its normalization. 'It is the depoliticized character of Dutch gay identity, [...] that explains its entanglement with neo-nationalist and normative citizenship discourses.'²⁶ In fact, the embrace of progressive sexual values is considered to be an important precondition for the success of Dutch right-wing populism. Together with support for the US and Israel, Koen Vossen states, these are 'necessary ingredients to make a national populist programme in the Netherlands acceptable': 'By championing women's and gay rights, Wilders has managed to dissociate himself from mere narrow-minded xenophobia and resentment.'²⁷

Problematic about the progressive reading is that it employs a limited definition of progressiveness, which is confined to 'secularization and the resulting progressive views concerning homosexuality, gender, and family values'.²⁸ The same is true for Duyvendak's statement that 'the conservative position is not being politically articulated'.²⁹ Also conservatism is solely considered in terms of sexual morality. On the basis of this limited consensus, the thesis of a 'homogeneous progressive moral majority' is built. The emergence of right-wing populism is thus recast as progressive or secular intolerance towards religious minorities such as Muslims and orthodox Christians, a view that is quite common in the Dutch literature.³⁰ But ideologies such as progressivism and conservatism cover a much broader terrain than the contentious themes of sexual morality. On issues such as law and order, immigration, social security, the environment, cultural policy, internationalism, corporatism, the work ethic, development aid, terrorism, the Dutch backlash has been more classically conservative in orientation, and actively opposes – and campaigns to dislodge – progressive ideas. In a very successful manner, one might add, since the progressive agenda in almost all of these areas has had to sound a hasty retreat.

²⁴ Scott (2007).

²⁵ Righart (2006 [1995]).

²⁶ Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens (2010, p. 971).

²⁷ Vossen (2013, p. 187).

²⁸ Houtman and Duyvendak (2009, p. 4).

²⁹ Duyvendak (2004, p. 11).

³⁰ Van Bohemen, Kemmers and De Koster (2012).

The conservative moment

What this perspective omits is that the political breakthrough of Fortuyn was accompanied by – and formed part of – an impressive conservative intellectual resurgence. Around the turn of the millennium, the intellectuals of the conservative undercurrent came out of the closet and boisterously presented themselves on the stage of Dutch public opinion. In February 2001, a hotly debated essay appeared in the Dutch newspaper of note, *NRC Handelsblad*. It boldly declared that ‘the conservative moment’ had come, sparking a lively debate on Dutch conservatism that lasted well into 2006. The author was Joshua Livestro, at that moment the speechwriter of Frits Bolkestein, then European Commissioner and former leader of the right-wing liberal party (VVD). According to Livestro, the ‘ideological legacy of the 1960s’ had created a ‘superficial political correctness and a deeply felt crisis of old certainties’. The expansion of the welfare state since the 1960s and the resulting individualization had undermined ‘core institutions such as marriage, church, voluntary associations, the school and the universities’.³¹

Two months earlier, together with the Reformed conservative Bart Jan Spruyt, former VVD-intellectual Andreas Kinning and the lawyer Michiel Visser, Livestro had founded an influential conservative think tank: the Edmund Burke Foundation. This conservative think tank had close ties to the VVD and the CDA and was founded to promote the New Right agenda in these parties, through ‘a politics of ideas’.³² Prominent conservative Christian Democrat politicians such as former Prime Minister Dries van Agt (1977-1982), Finance Minister Onno Ruding (1982-1989) and Hans Hillen were trustees. Paul Cliteur became part of the recommending committee, together with his colleague at Leiden University, the Iranian *émigré* Afshin Ellian. Bart Jan Spruyt, then president of the Edmund Burke Foundation, authored the book *Lof van het Conservatisme* (In Praise of Conservatism) in 2003. In that same year, Spruyt published *Het Conservatief Manifest* (The Conservative Manifesto) with Michiel Visser. The manifesto commenced as follows:

The ‘Left’ has brought our country an endless array of problems and now it is time for the ‘Right’ to rediscover its roots to repair the damage. Only conservatism is capable of that. Conservatism is the archenemy of leftist, progressive thought. It rejects political correctness, multiculturalism, and the moral relativism that the 1960s have brought us.³³

³¹ Livestro (2001).

³² In September 2002, Edwin van de Haar and Joshua Livestro, members of both the VVD and the Edmund Burke Foundation, published the manifesto *Helder Liberaal en Duidelijk Rechts* (Markedly Liberal and Clearly on the Right). The manifesto pleaded for a New Right course, combining free market and conservative themes. The leadership of the VVD responded negatively to the report. See: Hippe, Lucardie and Voerman (2004, pp. 166-180). Similar exchanges with the Edmund Burke Foundation on conservative politics took place within the CDA. See: Jansen (2004). Spruyt's later association with the PVV came to overshadow these more mainstream affiliations of the Edmund Burke Foundation.

³³ “Links” heeft ons land oneindig veel problemen gebracht en nu is het tijd dat “Rechts” zijn wortels herontdekt om de schade te herstellen. Alleen het conservatisme is daartoe in staat. Het conservatisme is de aartsvijand van het linkse, progressieve denken. Het verwerpt de politieke correctheid, het multi-

The text contained the by now familiar New Right formula: the fusion of neoliberal and (neo)conservative views, the belief in social engineering, a strategy cantered on a politics of ideas and the indictment of a 'failing political and societal elite'. Echoing Frans Rutten's New Objectivity, Bolkestein's long-term Hayekian strategy and the Hayek-inspired VVD-report from 1989, Spruyt and Visser called for a minimal state that restricts itself to its 'core tasks': defence and law and order. According to the authors, the welfare state has made the Dutch people into 'weak, dependent herd animals'. Unemployment benefits sentenced people to 'a life of idleness', the minimum wage needed to be eliminated or lowered, taxes cut and the labour market flexibilized. This free market assault on the Dutch welfare state and the corporatist labour market is combined with a bold conservative agenda on crime and immigration. Relativism and the lack of conservative morality is identified as a principal source of the problem:

Conservatives choose for Dutch civilization as part of Western civilization, and refuse to capitulate for cultures with values that are fundamentally at odds with ours. Muslims residing here can make use of freedom of religion and the freedom of association that Western civilization, in contrast with Islamic culture, offers to its citizens. But they have to adjust to us, not the other way around. So no sharia in the Netherlands, no subordination of women and girls, no honour killings and blood feuds, no introduction of Islamic holidays.³⁴

It would be a mistake, however, to read the manifesto simply as a 'neoculturalist' or 'protectionist' defence of Dutch culture as is. Paradoxically, in the name of defending Dutch culture, the manifesto proposes a sweeping overhaul of Dutch society. A 'radical change of mentality' is needed to combat crime and integrate newcomers. Here the neoliberal and (neo)conservative agenda converge: by retrenching the welfare state, the Dutch will learn to be 'tougher and more mature, and in so doing offer better resistance to enemies'. Eliminating the social support of the state will mean a restoration of Dutch family values and community life. Similarly, when it comes to crime, the authors locate the ultimate source of the problem in the high divorce rate in the Netherlands and the 'crisis in the family' resulting in 'a series of social pathologies'. Similar conservative discontent can be found in the concluding paragraph, where the manifesto calls for undoing the 'one-sided upbringing focused on independence and self-assertion,

culturalisme en het waardenrelativisme die de jaren zestig ons hebben gebracht.' See: Spruyt and Visser (2003).

³⁴ 'Conservatieven kiezen voor de Nederlandse beschaving, als onderdeel van de westerse beschaving, en weigeren te capituleren voor culturen met waarden die haaks op de onze staan. Hier woonachtige moslims kunnen weliswaar gebruik maken van de godsdienstvrijheid en de vrijheid van vereniging die de westerse beschaving, anders dan de islamitische cultuur, haar burgers weet te bieden, maar moeten zich aanpassen aan ons en niet andersom. Dus geen sjaria in Nederland, geen achterstelling van vrouwen en meisjes, geen eerwraak en bloedvetes, geen invoering van islamitische feestdagen.' See: Spruyt and Visser (2003).

standing up for one's "own opinion", feelings and sentiments, the upbringing that is the legacy of the 1960s and 1970s'.³⁵

This ambiguity of the manifesto is typical for Dutch conservative discourse. The same paradox is present in the writings of Bolkestein and Fortuyn. If we scratch the mere surface of conservative appeals to defend Dutch culture, we discover a radical ambition to reform and do away with elements of that very same culture. Similarly, the accusation of cultural and moral relativism levelled at baby boomers should be taken with a grain of salt: the protest movements of the 1960s had a very clear conception of Dutch culture and Dutch morality.³⁶ It just happens to be an egalitarian perspective that Dutch conservatives do not agree with. Schoo for example, has written intelligently on what he considered the 'absolutist' egalitarian ethos of the 1960s and 1970s.³⁷ The debate on 'cultural relativism' is in reality a hegemonic conflict between different conceptions of Dutch culture. On one side there is a more cosmopolitan, egalitarian and progressive notion of Dutchness stemming from the 1960s and 1970s. On the other, a more nationalist, authoritarian and conservative idea of Dutchness gaining ground in the 1990s. Echoing a recent historical study on the US culture wars, it is a battle for the soul of Dutch culture.³⁸ It is important to always deconstruct the conservative appeal to culture in this manner. Defining conservative politics as 'cultural protectionism' seems to imply that the opponents of this politics are indeed 'cultural relativists'. In this way, scholars risk inadvertently lapsing into an embrace of the essentialist perspective on Dutch culture mobilized by conservative discourse.

High and low conservatism

There is a close and yet tense relationship between this conservative intellectual current and the right-wing populism of Fortuyn and Wilders. From the mid-1990s onwards, Fortuyn had embraced a comparable New Right fusionist agenda, combining neoliberal with neoconservative views. His 1995 book *De Verweesde Samenleving* (The Orphaned Society) was praised by Spruyt in no uncertain terms as 'the most conservative book since the early twentieth century'. Bart Jan Spruyt had regular personal contact with Fortuyn, and visited him at his home on the night that Fortuyn embarked on his political career.³⁹ Spruyt described Fortuyn as the 'originator of the conservative moment' and the Edmund Burke Foundation hailed Fortuyn as 'conservative of the year' in 2002. At the same time, Spruyt kept his distance from Fortuyn's more liberated views on popular morality in general and sexuality in particular. He saw Fortuyn's writing as 'an explosive blend of libertinism, liberalism and socialism'. Fortuyn's populism, Spruyt later commented, was a 'vulgarized' conservatism for the Dutch masses, and it would be a mistake to think that the resurgence of Dutch conservatism

³⁵ Spruyt and Visser (2003).

³⁶ See for instance Kees Schuyt's response to the manifesto, in which he argues that baby boomers were the very opposites of relativists, making them not unlike the 'conservative hotheads' who wrote the manifesto. See: Schuyt (2003).

³⁷ See: Schoo (2000).

³⁸ Hartman (2015).

³⁹ Valk (2006).

could derive from a similar source, filled with 'rancour and resentment'.⁴⁰ Schoo described his engagement with right-wing populism, referencing Leo Strauss, in terms of a tension between 'high' and 'low' conservatism.⁴¹

A similar tension existed between Bart Jan Spruyt and Geert Wilders. Wilders had contacted Spruyt after the publication of Spruyt's *Lof van het Conservatisme* (In Praise of Conservatism) and the two had met several times to discuss possible cooperation. Wilders referred in 2003 to Spruyt's conservative manifesto as a guideline for a more right-wing course for the VVD, leading ultimately to Wilders' collision with the leadership of the party and his breakaway in 2004.⁴² After concluding that the prospects for a conservative politics in the mainstream parties were limited, Spruyt became the ideologue and number two on the list of Geert Wilders' new party. It led to a huge crisis at the Edmund Burke Foundation, resulting in the departure of the Christian Democrat trustees. The conservative think tank never really recovered. Spruyt's hope was to create a fusionist conservative party inspired on the Republican Party in the US. When push came to shove, Wilders chose tactically for a more populist course. He decided to centre his programme on opposition to Islam and immigration, eliminating references to hierarchy and education while softening his socio-economic profile. In August 2006, Spruyt left the PVV 'heavily disappointed'. His hopes that the PVV could accommodate a broad conservative movement had been thwarted by Wilders' 'egomania'. Martin Bosma, another Dutch neoconservative, now became the principal ideologue and speechwriter of the PVV.⁴³

In short, the Fortuyn revolt formed part of a broader conservative resurgence. But it had a fundamentally ambivalent character. On the one hand, leading conservative critics blamed the progressive ideals of the 1960s and 1970s for the decline in authority, for political correctness, for failed immigration and integration policies and for the erosion of Dutch national identity. On the other hand, conservatives presented themselves as the only true defenders of the Dutch progressive legacy against the threat of Islam. Conservatives claimed these accomplishments as proof of Western civilizational superiority. Those disagreeing with that characterization were derided as cultural relativists. As *NRC*-journalist Sjoerd de Jong observed in a subtle analysis of the contradictions of the Dutch debate surrounding cultural relativism, a progressively framed critique of immigration and Islam became entangled with a conservative backlash against the progressive legacy of the 1960s and 1970s:

In the Netherlands, the disillusionment with the excessive individualism of the 1960s, and the need for a restoration of community, tradition and national identity, has become entangled with the anxiety surrounding immigration, and the visibility

⁴⁰ Spruyt (2003, pp. 9-10, pp. 205-208).

⁴¹ Spruyt (2006, p. 295, 286)

⁴² More precisely, Wilders referred to a report of the Edmund Burke Foundation, titled *De Crisis in Nederland en het Conservatieve Antwoord* (The Crisis in the Netherlands and the Conservative Response) (Spruyt and Visser, 2004). The conservative manifesto was a synthesis of that publication (Spruyt and Visser 2003). For Wilders' reference to this publication see the interview with *de Volkskrant*: De Boer and Koel  (2003).

⁴³ Valk (2006).

of Islam in society. After the assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, that reassessment of the 1960s at times turned into a regretful retaliation against the past: the once so populous leftist church of the 1970s was now indicted as a breeding ground of traitors.⁴⁴

The Fortuyn revolt cannot simply be portrayed as a conservative attempt to turn back time. Nor is it a singular defence of progressive Dutch culture from the perceived encroachment of conservative Islam, since it is partly a conservative attack on that same progressive culture. In this chapter, an alternative interpretation is proposed.

A complex backlash

The interpretation offered here is inspired to an important degree on Angela McRobbie's work on post-feminism, and elaborates on her thesis of a complex conservative backlash.⁴⁵ When the New Right emerged in the US, it took aim against the New Left, against the counterculture and the new social movements: the civil rights movement, the peace movement, the environmentalist movement and the gay rights movement. But above all, it took aim against feminism. It is therefore no coincidence that one of the more extensive analyses of the conservative countercurrent was developed on the terrain of women's rights. American feminist scholars formulated the 'backlash thesis',⁴⁶ defined by Susan Faludi as a 'concerted conservative response to challenge the achievements of feminism'. She derived the notion of 'backlash politics' from the political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset. He had used the term to identify a conservative anti-establishment politics, 'a reaction by groups which are declining in a felt sense of importance, influence and power, as a result of a secular endemic change in society', whereupon they 'seek to reverse or stem the direction of change through political means'.⁴⁷ A more contemporary and prominent account of this phenomenon is Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas*. It describes 'the Great Backlash' as a style of anti-establishment conservatism that manages to garner popular support for free market economics by foregrounding conservative cultural discontent.⁴⁸

Angela McRobbie has attempted to translate the idea of a conservative backlash to the European and British context, where the conservative countertendency bears to a lesser degree the stamp of a traditional, Christian conservatism. In her writing, McRobbie proposes a more dialectical understanding of the backlash, acknowledging its modernizing elements: the conservative countercurrent not only serves as a

⁴⁴ 'In Nederland is de kater over het doorgeschoten individualisme van de jaren zestig, en de behoefte aan herwaardering van gemeenschapszin, traditie en nationale cultuur, verknoopt geraakt met de onrust over immigratie en de zichtbaarheid van de islam in de samenleving. Na de moorden op Pim Fortuyn en Theo van Gogh veranderde die herbezinning op de jaren zestig bij vlagen in "spijtwraak" op het verleden: de ooit zo volle linkse kerk van de jaren zeventig werd nu aangeklaagd als een broeinest van landverraders.' See: De Jong (2008).

⁴⁵ McRobbie (2004, 2009).

⁴⁶ Duggan and Hunter (2006); Faludi (1991); Stacey (1983).

⁴⁷ Lipset and Raab (1970, p. 29).

⁴⁸ See: Frank (2004, p. 5).

resistance to feminism and is not simply oriented at turning back time. The conservative response provides its own synthesis, it incorporates the more moderate and generally accepted forms of women's emancipation, in order to be able to more effectively resist the broader claims of the feminist movement as outdated and defunct. Thus McRobbie puts forward 'a complexification of the backlash thesis'. The result of this backlash is what she calls post-feminism:

Post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force.⁴⁹

Post-feminism, McRobbie continues,

encompasses the existence of feminism as at some level transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated. The 'taken into accountness' permits all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal.⁵⁰

A good example is the statement on feminism from Margaret Thatcher in 1982: 'The battle for women's rights has been largely won. The days when they were demanded and discussed in strident tones should be gone forever.'⁵¹ Here, the affirmation of women's rights is used to attack feminism. My thesis is that a similar 'complex' conservative backlash has occurred in the Netherlands with respect to the progressive legacy of the 1960s and 1970s. The conservative embrace of progressive values in the Netherlands had the same paradoxical quality that McRobbie ascribes to post-feminism. Conservatives presented progressive values as self-evident and inseparable elements of Dutch culture. Something that could be taken into account. In so doing, progressive accomplishments were disconnected from the political movements that initiated and pushed for these changes. The movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the generation that took part in them, the baby boomers, found themselves, in McRobbie's words, 'fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated.' While progressive values were thus assimilated in a new conservative discourse, the ideal of progress itself was discarded. The idea of a fluctuating but persistent progression on the field of social equality and civil liberties has been replaced with cultural essentialism. The Netherlands, to the very core of its being, is enlightened, tolerant, and socially just. Progressive values are historicized and culturalized in conservative discourse, they are given a static quality, presented as inbuilt elements of Dutch culture, something that must be conserved and defended from threats from without. The Dutch emancipatory project is finished. The only ones still in need of emancipation are minorities, who have

⁴⁹ McRobbie (2009, pp. 11-12).

⁵⁰ McRobbie (2009, p. 12).

⁵¹ Blumenthal, Dant, Ingber, Mainland, Sinha and Taylor (2013).

to assimilate Dutch cultural norms and values, seeing that emancipation is inherent to Dutch culture, and can not be acquired through another cultural tradition.

A crucial element in the Dutch New Right discourse is the idea that emancipation is a done deal, that equality has been achieved. This extends both to the socio-economic and the socio-cultural domain. Fortuyn's plea for neoliberalism, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is not the classic Hayekian argument that real equality is unachievable (or leads to totalitarianism) and that inequality is a force of nature. To the contrary, Fortuyn argues in his inaugural lecture in 1991 that emancipation is complete: the citizen 'goes his own emancipated way' and no longer needs the welfare state. Fortuyn even references the 1970s slogan the 'political decolonization of the citizen', and proposes that the final hurdle in the project of emancipation is the liberation from welfare state paternalism.⁵² His 1992 book *Aan het Volk van Nederland* (To the People of the Netherlands) is a celebration of the emancipated citizen, who eagerly enters the era of the free market.⁵³ A similar appeal to achieved emancipation can be found in the reports of the VVD think tank. The VVD presented neoliberalism as following naturally from worker's emancipation:

The welfare state marks the citizen as weak and dependent. He moves in a climate of state paternalism and welfare patronage. The workers' movement and other emancipatory currents have always seen their historical task as transitory. The switch to a 'guarantor state' is now desirable.⁵⁴

At the same time, on the socio-cultural domain, the emancipation of women and gays was culturalized and historicized by Dutch conservatives. It was increasingly presented as a national achievement lying somewhere in the past, a core value of Dutch society. The single most important reference is Fortuyn's book *Tegen de Islamisering van Onze Cultuur* (Against the Islamisation of Our Culture). Here, Fortuyn engages in a passionate defence of the emancipation of women and homosexuals, as a 'cultural achievement' of the whole of Dutch society: 'It should be crystal clear that the equality of men and women, whatever their sexual orientation, is one of the core values of our society, which cannot be tampered with. We have fought hard enough to achieve it.'⁵⁵ The challenge that remained was to defend this cultural achievement against the threat of Islamisation.

This image of emancipation as a cultural achievement did not, in fact, fully concur with Dutch reality at the time. A sizable element of the Dutch population was still deeply uncomfortable with gay sexuality. And Dutch women were still significantly underrepresented in politics, business and culture. Moreover, many politicians on the right were reluctant to embrace progressive sexual morality at the moment of Fortuyn's intervention. Most significantly, the conservative wing of the VVD led by Bolkestein

⁵² Fortuyn (1991, pp. 14-15).

⁵³ Fortuyn (1992).

⁵⁴ Groenveld, Cliteur, Hansma, Kinneging and Van der List (1995).

⁵⁵ Fortuyn (1997).

opposed gay marriage in 1996 and 1997.⁵⁶ But after the spectacular success of Pim Fortuyn, both conservative Christian Democrats and the conservative wing of the VVD quickly embraced the discourse of achieved emancipation.

In 2003, the Christian Democrat Minister of Social Affairs De Geus declared the emancipation of white Dutch women to be complete. 'The emancipation of women is one of the most important achievements in the 20th century,' he said. 'The presence of women on almost all places in Dutch society is self-evident.'⁵⁷ An emancipation policy for Dutch women was no longer needed, De Geus stated, only minorities were in need of emancipation. The curious result of this politics was that the Dutch New Right now became the most ardent propagator of emancipation, exclusively for Muslim women. This position was epitomized by Ayaan Hirsi Ali's calls for a third wave of feminism.⁵⁸ Hirsi Ali framed emancipation as an ideological battle for the minds of Muslims, who needed to convert from Islam, leave their communities and choose for the West as free individuals. The result was that Muslim feminists were silenced in the public debate, since they were accused of being controlled by their men. At the same time, white Dutch feminists were told that compared with Saudi Arabia sexism in the Netherlands did not amount to much, and that their politics were outdated. In the years that followed, the New Right managed to almost seamlessly combine a discourse on the threat of feminisation to Dutch society with a patriotic national self-image of achieved emancipation.⁵⁹

On the one hand, there is an instrumental quality to this conservative embrace of progressive values. The conservative interest in progressive values such as women's emancipation and gay rights is seen by many as largely a function of their opposition to Muslim immigrants and does not seem to have much salience on its own. As Tjitske Akkermans argued, 'the paradoxical defence of liberalism is exclusively related to anti-immigration policies.'⁶⁰ Internationally, different authors have pointed to a similar political trend in which women's rights and gay rights have been instrumentalized for conservative and nationalist agenda's, a development that has been debated under terms such as sexual nationalism, homonationalism and femonationalism.⁶¹ On the other hand, the depth of the progressive wave of the 1960s and the absence of a convincing conservative reaction in the 1970s and 1980s has made such a contradictory politics almost a necessity for any conservative backlash. Furthermore, New Right figureheads such as Fortuyn were themselves very much a product of the 'cultural revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s.

Following McRobbie's notion of post-feminism, we could qualify the content of this hybrid conservative politics as post-progressivism. It suggests some lines of continuity and affinity with the progressive project, while at the same time, it implies a wide-

⁵⁶ Uitermark, Mepschen and Duyvendak (2014).

⁵⁷ *NRC Handelsblad* (2003).

⁵⁸ *Trouw* (2003).

⁵⁹ See Dick Pels on the machismo of the Dutch New Right: Pels (2005, p. 40).

⁶⁰ Akkerman (2006, p. 341).

⁶¹ Farris (2017); Mepschen and Duyvendak (2012); Puar (2007).

ranging rupture. This post-progressive politics can be reduced to two elements: first, a paradoxical incorporation of a select set of progressive values – mainly women’s rights, gay rights, secularism and individualism – that are subsequently culturalized and historicized as engrained in Dutch tradition; second, a concerted challenge to the progressive consensus on a series of other terrains, most prominently law and order, welfare policy, development aid, environmental policy, and cultural policy. Whether the label conservatism still applies when dealing with such a composite and contradictory form of conservatism is a legitimate question. To answer that question, we will need to consider more extensively the nature of conservatism.

4.2 A situational perspective on conservatism

In her book *Backlash*, Susan Faludi referred to Hofstadter’s use of the term ‘pseudoconservatives’ to distinguish modern American backlash movements from classic conservatives. Rather than defending a prevailing order, as conservatives are traditionally wont to do, these conservative anti-establishment movements ‘perceive themselves as social outcasts rather than guardians of the status quo’.⁶² There is a prominent school of interpretation of conservative thought, which argues that such a hybrid anti-establishment practice is not the exception within the conservative tradition, but rather the rule. This ‘situational’ interpretation of conservatism can be found in the work of Samuel Huntington, Karl Mannheim, Corey Robin, and the Dutch historians Hermann von der Dunk and Ernst Kossmann. The predominant sentiment of the conservative tradition, according to these authors, is not characterized by a stiff pursuit of conservation. Conservatism is seen as a contingent and innovative politics that annexes and appropriates the ideas of the progressive opponent at regular intervals. With a feeling for dialectics proper to a German *émigré*, Von der Dunk describes this as ‘the dual-aspect of any current of thought, which is always at the same time, continuation and negation of the current that it opposes’.⁶³ Conservatism, according to these authors, is quintessentially a backlash ideology, a philosophy of struggle.

The *locus classicus* of that argument is Karl Mannheim’s celebrated study of conservative thought. Mannheim studied German Romantic conservatism as an intellectual reaction to the perceived threat of the radical Enlightenment thought of the French Revolution. Mannheim made a helpful distinction between traditionalism and conservatism. Traditionalism is the universal psychological tendency to cling to familiar and existing modes of life. In a similar way, one can develop a psychological attachment to an old pair of jeans, or a piece of furniture: it is largely intuitive and does not have an elaborate logic to it. (In fact, the Dutch *Van Dale* dictionary defines conservatism as ‘the attachment to that what exists’, which in Mannheim’s terms would be traditionalism rather than conservatism.)

⁶² Faludi (1991, p. 243).

⁶³ Von der Dunk (1976, p. 89).

Conservatism, in contrast, represents a politicization of traditionalism. Conservatism is the product of a specific historic situation, the moment when a perceived threat arises to established ways of life. In the late eighteenth century, that threat is formed by the progressive, rationalist thought of the French Revolution and bourgeois capitalism. Old traditions among the nobility, the peasants and the petty bourgeois, are now taken up and inscribed on the banner of counter-revolutionary forces: community against society, family against contract, intuition against reason, spiritual against material experience. What was largely intuitive and submerged is now laid bare by reflection and fought for. 'Conservatism first becomes conscious and reflective when other ways of life and thought appear on the scene, against which it is compelled to take up arms in the ideological struggle,' Mannheim writes.⁶⁴ Paradoxically, in this process, Romantic conservatism developed from an inarticulate sentiment to a rationally elaborated doctrine. It became increasingly disconnected from its feudal, agrarian social origins, and developed over time into a modern, urban current of thought. Mannheim stresses the contradictory aspects of this counter-movement:

No antithesis escapes conditioning by the thesis it sets out to oppose, and Romanticism suffered the same paradoxical fate; its structure was fundamentally conditioned by the attitudes and methods of that very movement of Enlightenment in opposition to which it originally developed.⁶⁵

Crucial to Mannheim's argument is that conservative philosophy is a tactical style of thought, a response to a progressive threat that emerged in a specific historical situation, marked by a particular national and class constellation. The character of conservatism as an 'intellectual counter-revolution' against the Enlightenment, has given it certain ideological motifs that have endured over time. Enlightenment thought believed that man could be improved upon through science, education and social reform. Man could be emancipated and freed from superstition, irrationalism and religious dogma. In response, conservatism put forward a pessimist anthropology of man, described by the American conservative Viereck as the 'political secularization of original sin'.⁶⁶ Man inherently tends towards evil and is therefore in need of authority both in the public and the private realm. For some conservatives, this sceptical vision undergirds competition in the market, under the slogan 'private vices, public benefits'. For others, it results in appeals to law and order, and again for other conservatives it is a reason to plead for the benevolent effects of war. A second motif concerns epistemology. The Enlightenment thinkers departed from the idea that on the basis of Reason, universal principles could be formulated to organize society on a logical, efficient and socially just manner. Enlightenment thought challenged the irrational and repressive juridical and economic systems that derived from feudal times.

⁶⁴ Mannheim (1971, p. 173).

⁶⁵ Mannheim (1971, p. 147).

⁶⁶ Viereck (1962, p. 167).

Conservatism countered with a sceptical epistemology: knowledge is implicitly contained in tradition and intuition, and man's access to knowledge is limited. Finally, the universalism of Enlightenment thought was opposed by stressing the unique subjectivity of individuals and national cultures. Society, in the conservative view, is a complex organism, a product of gradual evolution; it cannot be captured in a rational order and is vulnerable to radical change.

Mannheim stresses the tactical nature of these stances. Conservatism, in this situational perspective, is a highly flexible ideology, defined more by what it opposes than by what it positively stands for. As the Dutch historian Kossmann notes, conservative philosophy is 'a search for the question with what kind of style and what kind of argument it [the French Revolution] can best be resisted'.⁶⁷ This tactical flexibility has allowed for a wide variety of responses to political challenges, ranging from prudent reform to counter-revolutionary agitation.

The conservative temperament

To elaborate on the different conservative responses to political challenges, we can build on Klaus Epstein's well-known distinction between three types of conservative temperaments.⁶⁸ First, there is the reform conservative who wishes to prevent revolutionary change and radical ruptures with the past through timely and moderate reforms. The reform conservative insists on continuity and aims to constrain progressive development to the framework of existing traditions and institutions. Edmund Burke whose classic *Reflections on the Revolution in France* counts as the foundational text of conservatism, is generally identified with this reformist current, often called Burkean conservatism. Reform conservatives are not opposed to change per se, as long as it is incremental change, with the motto: 'a state without the means of some change is without the means of its preservation.'⁶⁹

Second, there is the reactionary or restoration-conservative who desires to restore a past social order considered as natural and ideal. Burkean conservatism is an answer formulated from a specific position: that of the advanced British context of the late eighteenth century, a country that was able to keep its distance from revolutionary turmoil. In France, where the revolution had already occurred, the Burkean appeal to moderation made little sense. A reactionary conservatism developed, identified above all with the royalist aristocrat Joseph de Maistre, who sought to actively overthrow the revolutionary regime and undo the changes it brought. This tendency of reactionary conservatism is continued in the work of Maurice Barrès and Charles Maurras and eventually found itself on the doorstep of fascism.

Third, Epstein considers the status quo conservative, who accepts the existing order but is opposed to further change. I prefer to call this sceptical conservatism. German Romantic conservatism, as developed by Adam Müller and Friedrich Gentz, could be considered under this label. It was far more nostalgic than its Burkean counterpart, due

⁶⁷ Kossmann (1987, p. 16).

⁶⁸ Epstein (1966).

⁶⁹ Burke (2004 [1790], p. 106).

to its principled opposition to modernity and its romantic longing for a lost hierarchical order. But it emerged from a position of power, as the ideology of the Junker class, and did not have the militant, counter-revolutionary temperament of its French counterpart. In addition, conservatives who reject modern institutions but fail to engage in action due to their adherence to a sceptical and elitist vision of man and society, can be added to this category.

Expanding on Epstein's threefold distinction, we can organize prevailing conservative temperaments according to two principal characteristics. First, the attitude with regards to time: the wish to restore a past, idealized order, or to reform the existing one. And second, the attitude towards political action and existing institutions: there is the prudent conservative who either defends the status quo or passively laments its decay, and there is the militant conservative who believes radical action is needed to challenge and renew existing institutions.

	Moderate (Prudent)	Radical (Militant)
Reform	Reform conservatism	Radical conservatism
Restoration	Sceptical conservatism	Reactionary conservatism

Table 4.1 Four conservative temperaments

In so doing, a fourth type of conservatism appears, which we could call radical conservatism or backlash conservatism. In his anthology of conservative thought, the historian Jerry Muller describes 'radical conservatism' as 'a revolt against existing institutions in the name of the need for authority'.⁷⁰ Like reactionary conservatism, this is a conservative attitude that emerges when institutions are considered to be beyond saving, or seem to have been taken over by progressives. Where the reactionary seeks to restore the *ancien régime* wholesale, the radical conservative sees that as a lost cause. Radical conservatives, Muller argues, strive towards the 'reassertion of collective particularity (of the nation, the *Volk*, the race, or the community of the faithful) against a twofold threat'.⁷¹ There is the internal threat from institutions and ideas seen as corrosive to collective particularity and incapable of providing worthy goals for the

⁷⁰ Muller (1997, p. 28).

⁷¹ Muller (1997, p. 29).

collectivity; and an external threat from powerful foreign actors, looking to impose their ideas. In the process of mobilization, 'many recurrent conservative assumptions, arguments and themes are jettisoned by radical conservatives, or transformed into radically different directions.'⁷² In his appeal to collective particularity, Muller argues, the radical conservative departs from the existing situation, and seeks to resurrect parts of the conservative agenda on this terrain. Consequentially, radical conservatism has a heterogeneous and contradictory character, since it needs to incorporate parts of the progressive status quo to garner appeal in the first place.

While Muller relates this radical conservatism to the German *Konservative Revolution* current in the 1930s, the description is fitting and useful for the backlash conservatism of the British and American New Right. It was radical in the way that it confronted the existing establishment and the post-war consensus, while it sought to reform society rather than restore an idealized order of the past. More generally, American conservatism can be seen as the ideal type of this conservative attitude. From the very beginning, the US lacked a feudal, aristocratic past that conservatives could advocate a return to. The US was too deeply marked by a chronic lack of nostalgia and strongly characterized by the dynamism of technological innovation and economic growth.⁷³ In this context, following Seymour Martin Lipset's characterization of backlash politics, conservatives had 'to appeal to the populace in a framework of values which are themselves a source of right-wing discontent in the first place: anti-elitism, individualism and egalitarianism'.⁷⁴ That seems to be why American conservatism proved to be such an important reference point for Dutch conservatives, who had to operate in similar conditions, in a country similarly lacking in preconditions for a more traditional conservatism. Before we return to the Dutch context, let us shortly consider US neoconservatism within the Mannheimian framework of conservatism that we have just outlined.

The situational logic of US (neo)conservatism

As observed before, US neoconservatism is a heterogeneous movement that has changed significantly over time. With some degree of simplification, an early essay by Samuel Huntington, one of the foremost neoconservative thinkers, allows us to place it in relation to the Mannheimian analysis of conservative thought. In 1957 Huntington published the essay *Conservatism as an Ideology*. Writing in a time when the New Deal reigned supreme and the conservative movement was condemned to the margins of US political life, Huntington was brooding on a new conservative strategy. Building on Mannheim, Huntington defined conservatism as 'the ideology arising out of a distinct but recurring type of historical situation in which a fundamental challenge is directed at established institutions and in which the supporters of those institutions employ the conservative ideology in their defense'.⁷⁵ The author was not merely making a scholarly

⁷² Muller (1997).

⁷³ Drolet (2011); Steinfels (2013 [1979]).

⁷⁴ Lipset and Raab (1970, pp. 29-30).

⁷⁵ Huntington (1957, p. 455).

point. The essay contained a critique of the then emerging US conservative movement – ‘New Conservatism’ – for being too traditional and alienated from modern US institutions: ‘Their rejection of the existing American political and social system makes it impossible for them to be truly conservative,’ Huntington suggested.⁷⁶ In other words, they were sceptical conservatives, whose traditionalist elitism and opposition to modernity made their politics into a historical anachronism.

Because of the overwhelming political consensus of the 1950s, progressives could not be portrayed as a Mannheimian threat giving rise to a conservative politics. Huntington was convinced of ‘the sterility of a conservative defence of one segment of American society against another segment.’ Only an external threat would provide the conditions for a conservative rebirth: ‘The only threat extensive and deep enough to elicit a conservative response today is the challenge of communism and the Soviet Union to American society as a whole.’⁷⁷ Naming, accentuating and exaggerating this threat would make it possible for conservatives to appoint themselves as defenders and spokespersons for US society. For that to occur, it would be necessary for conservatives to embrace and defend progressive values, and vice versa:

As an island of plenty and freedom in a straitened world, America has much to defend. American institutions however, are liberal, popular and democratic. They can best be defended by those who believe in liberalism, popular control and democratic government. Just as aristocrats were the conservatives in Prussia in 1820 and slave-owners were the conservatives in the South in 1850, so the liberals must be the conservatives in America today.⁷⁸

Neoconservatism, following this argument, can best be described as the conservative defence of liberal institutions. For Huntington, this conservative defence of liberalism implies that liberalism in the American sense (progressivism in the European sense) must discontinue its emancipatory agenda, and become conservative, or what we might call ‘postprogressive’:

Historically, American liberals have been idealists, pressing forward toward the goals of greater freedom, social equality, and more meaningful democracy. The articulate exposition of a liberal ideology was necessary to convert others to liberal ideas and to reform existing institutions continuously along liberal lines. Today, however, the greatest need is not so much the creation of more liberal institutions as the successful defense of those which already exist. This defense requires American liberals to lay aside their liberal ideology and to accept the values of conservatism for the duration of the threat. [...] To continue to expound the

⁷⁶ Huntington (1957, p. 471).

⁷⁷ Huntington (1957, p. 472).

⁷⁸ Huntington (1957).

philosophy of liberalism simply gives the enemy a weapon with which to attack the society of liberalism.⁷⁹

Huntington concludes by stating that ‘current conflict, rather than ancient dogma, will yield a “New Conservatism” which is truly conservative’.⁸⁰ The essay is a powerful exposition of the particular political innovation that US neoconservatism presented with regard to traditional conservatism, all the while claiming to represent the ‘true’ spirit of conservatism. We should add that in the following decade, the New Left, the civil rights movement, feminism and the counterculture had emerged as a ‘domestic threat’ in addition to the ‘external threat’ of communism.

Also the godfather of neoconservatism, Irving Kristol, defined neoconservatism in these situational terms. He would famously characterize the movement as ‘liberals mugged by reality’. In his view, neoconservatism is an intellectual undercurrent that surfaces only intermittently, not an ideologically consistent movement but rather a conjunctural response to a specific historical situation. He presented it as an attempt at modernizing conservatism. In a retrospective essay from 2003 titled *The Neoconservative Persuasion*, Kristol defined the ‘historical task and political purpose of neoconservatism’ as the conversion of ‘the Republican party, and American conservatism in general, against their respective wills, into a new kind of conservative politics suitable to governing a modern democracy’. This conservatism was in ‘the American grain’: ‘hopeful not lugubrious; forward-looking, not nostalgic; and its general tone is cheerful, not grim or dyspeptic.’ Kristol added that there ‘is nothing like neoconservatism in Europe’, and that ‘Europeans think it absurd to look to the United States for lessons in political innovation’.⁸¹ On these last two points, Kristol was clearly mistaken.

4.3 A conservatism ‘in the Dutch grain’

Neoconservative inspirations were at the basis of a comparable strategy in the Netherlands, albeit in a rather diffused and chaotic manner. Dutch conservatives have appointed themselves as the militant defenders of progressive values and liberal Western civilization, portraying existing elites – hesitant to claim ‘the superiority of Western civilization’ and unable to identify its ‘core values’ – as incapable of defending themselves. Bart Jan Spruyt has formulated the argument for a conservative takeover of liberalism most clearly. In *De Toekomst van de Stad* (The Future of the City) an essay inspired on a book by Leo Strauss, Spruyt embraces the plea of the neoconservative Hillel Fradkin for a ‘newer and stronger liberalism’, able to protect liberal society from external and internal threats. Spruyt argued that liberalism is not able to generate a moral framework to defend itself. The ‘premodern’ contribution of conservatism is needed ‘to prevent liberalism from suicide’. While ‘liberalism has brought the world

⁷⁹ Huntington (1957, p. 472-473).

⁸⁰ Huntington (1957, p. 473).

⁸¹ Kristol (2003).

great achievements', while it 'is a dominant political current' and 'has provided our society an unambiguous consensus', a recourse to conservative principles is needed to safeguard it.⁸²

Dutch conservatives in the 1990s and 2000s were presented with a very similar predicament as the US conservatives in the 1950s and 1960s. To paraphrase the argument of Huntington: Dutch institutions are progressive, secular, and egalitarian. They can best be defended by those who believe in progressive values, secularism and egalitarianism. In the Netherlands, the conservative social democrat Jos de Beus forcefully presented this argument. De Beus criticized Dutch conservatives inspired by US neoconservatism – such as Spruyt and Kinneging – for not being American enough. They were still too traditional and sceptical in their views, too far removed from the dominant values of Dutch society. Their conservatism with its 'gloomy vision of man, its tragic philosophy of history, its sceptical approach to politics and human reason, its fear of the tyrannical state, its preference for a hierarchical society, held together as an organic community by religion, authority and discipline', could never succeed in the Netherlands. The 'optimism, commercialism and even democratic participation' of American conservatism were needed. De Beus insisted that Dutch conservatism 'could only gain ground in the Netherlands by discarding certain elements of European conservatism, and incorporating certain elements of American neoconservatism'.⁸³

Also other Dutch conservatives pointed to neoconservative inspirations as a way to modernize Dutch conservatism. Hendrik Jan Schoo, as editor-in-chief of the right-wing weekly *Elsevier* an important influence on Fortuyn's conservative turn in the mid-nineties, noted approvingly that the Fortuyn revolt in the Netherlands 'can well be compared with American neoconservatism'.⁸⁴ In both the US and the Dutch case, Schoo observed a modernized, adapted conservatism that resists the ideals of the 1960s, stresses the agency of ordinary people to determine their own fate without the welfare state, with the aim of introducing a renewed sense of morality into public life. In similar fashion, Paul Cliteur pointed out that in the Dutch 'post-revolutionary' context where progressive values were dominant, a traditional Burkean conservatism is rather unconvincing:

Burkean thought is at its most convincing when one can still avert impending catastrophe. It is a wholly different matter when one writes and thinks in a post-revolutionary phase in which the revolution has brought things that are not to be considered an improvement. In Europe, just like in the United States, we live in a post-revolutionary phase. May '68 is in power. [...] That is the context in which American neoconservatives such as Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, but also the Dutch Edmund Burke Foundation have had to operate. And this would mean we

⁸² Spruyt (2005, p. 73).

⁸³ De Beus (2006a, p. 236).

⁸⁴ Schoo (2008, p. 264).

have to go back beyond the revolution of May '68 to the true foundations of the democratic order.⁸⁵

The Dutch 'neoconservative revolution' after 9/11

These modernizing aspects of neoconservatism, as a radical form of conservatism, were prominently on display in the years after 9/11. Neoconservative ideas had been circulating among New Right intellectuals throughout the 1990s, but they gained dramatically in visibility in the 2000s. While politics in the Netherlands is traditionally considered dull and uneventful, this changed after 9/11. The attacks on the Twin Towers played a large role in providing the idea of an external threat to Dutch society, in addition to the internal threat posed by the Dutch elite culture of accommodation. A new Dutch conservatism emerged, that conformed to Muller's characterization of radical conservatism as a 'reassertion of collective particularity against a twofold threat'. As Bart Jan Spruyt argued: 'There is the outside threat of the anti-Western ideology of Islam and its political-theological effects. There is the paralyzing relativism that threatens us from within, and that always results in containment and accommodation.'⁸⁶ Pim Fortuyn, inspired to an important degree by neoconservative ideas, had declared a 'cold war against Islam' in the week before 9/11. 'The role of communism' in serving as a threat to Western norms and values, according to Fortuyn, had been 'taken over by Islam'.⁸⁷ After the 9/11 attacks, Fortuyn's electoral fortunes took flight and he successfully campaigned on a platform to forcefully assimilate Muslim immigrants.

During this period, neoconservatism attained influential adherents in the Dutch press. From 2001 till 2006, journalists Jaffe Vink and Chris Rutenfrans used a weekly opinion-section of the national newspaper *Trouw* to promote what they called 'the neoconservative revolution'. Vink described the neoconservatives as 'the revolutionaries of our time' who 'have taken over the banner of the progressives'.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, Paul Cliteur had developed into an influential commentator on television, and had a major impact with his critique of cultural relativism and Islam, in his 2002 book *Moderne Papoea's* (Modern Papua's). His colleague Afshin Ellian – and co-member of the Edmund Burke Foundation – started writing columns for *NRC Handelsblad*, where he popularized the neoconservative critique of Islam. Their befriended writer and columnist Leon de Winter published typically unsubtle neo-conservative pamphlets, such as *De Vijand: Een Opstel* (The Enemy: An Essay) in

⁸⁵ 'Het Burkiaans gedachtegoed is het meest overtuigend wanneer men naderend onheil nog kan áfwenden. Dat ligt heel anders wanneer men schrijft en denkt in een postrevolutionaire fase waarbij de revolutie dingen heeft gebracht die niet als een verbetering zijn te beschouwen. [W]ij, hier in Europa, net als in de Verenigde Staten, leven ook in een post-revolutionaire fase. Mei '68 zit op het pluche. [...] Dat is de context waarin Amerikaanse neoconservatives als Irving Kristol, Norman Podhoretz, maar ook de Nederlandse Burke Stichting heeft te opereren. En dit zou betekenen dat men over de revolutie van mei '68 heen terug moet naar de zuivere grondslagen van de democratische rechtsstaat.' (Cliteur cited in: Vogelaar, 2010, p. 46)

⁸⁶ Spruyt (2006, p. 294).

⁸⁷ Fortuyn (2001b). For a similar equation of communism and Islam, see: Wilders (2012).

⁸⁸ Vink (2005).

2004.⁸⁹ In this period, Schoo became first subeditor and then columnist at the social democrat leaning newspaper *de Volkskrant*. Following in his wake, an influential circle of conservative (former) social democrat journalists and intellectuals such as Martin Sommer, Herman Vuijsje, Hans Wansink, Jos de Beus and Paul Scheffer would take up neoconservative ideas. This diverse coalition of conservative intellectuals became a dominant influence on the public debate.

But without doubt the most influential figure in the months after 9/11, was the Somalian-born Islam critic Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She was catapulted in the public limelight, to become one of the most influential and controversial political figures of the decade. The ideas of Hirsi Ali – often ignored in the Netherlands or conflated with her personal history – were formed in the same circle of Dutch (neo)conservative intellectuals mentioned above. In her biography, Hirsi Ali calls Frits Bolkestein her ‘intellectual mentor’ and thanks Chris Rutenfrans, Afshin Ellian, Paul Cliteur and Jaffe Vink for their guidance. As shown in the following chapter, Hirsi Ali’s views on Islam are inspired on the work of the US neoconservative Orientalist Bernard Lewis. When Hirsi Ali switched from the PvdA to the VVD, and entered parliament in January 2003 with a huge preferential vote, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders campaigned together against Islam, smoothly adopting the clash of civilizations framework. In a 2003 opinion piece of Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders, they called for a ‘liberal jihad’: ‘To defend a tolerant and liberal Netherlands, elementary rights and laws have to be put aside to effectively handle those people that abuse them and want to eliminate them as the foundation of our society.’⁹⁰

With the dramatic assassinations of Fortuyn and Van Gogh, the political situation escalated. In May 2002, Fortuyn was assassinated by a Dutch animal rights activist, leading to a national outcry and a landslide election victory for his now leaderless party. When in 2004, the controversial filmmaker, columnist and Islam critic Theo Van Gogh was brutally killed by a Dutch-Moroccan jihadist, the Netherlands came to perceive itself as a frontline in the global War on Terror.⁹¹ In this context, the neoconservative message of an epic struggle against a civilizational enemy could count on a warm reception. Bart Jan Spruyt wrote on Carl Schmitt’s friend-enemy distinction and argued that the political assassinations had shown that ‘Western civilization now had an enemy’ in the Schmittian sense.⁹² In 2004, Spruyt accompanied Geert Wilders on a visit to neoconservative think tanks in the US and wrote his first party programmes and manifestoes.⁹³ When Bart Jan Spruyt left the PVV in 2006 he was replaced by another ideologue, Martin Bosma, who professed to neoconservative inspirations and went on to write a book with an explicit neoconservative orientation, referencing Norman Podhoretz, Leo Strauss and Irving Kristol.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ De Winter (2004).

⁹⁰ Wilders and Hirsi Ali (2003).

⁹¹ Buruma (2006).

⁹² Spruyt (2006).

⁹³ Vossen (2013).

⁹⁴ Bosma (2011).

Qualifying Dutch neoconservatism

There has been debate on how to define neoconservatism and whether the Dutch sympathizers with neoconservatism can be labelled as a full-blown Dutch neo-conservative current. Bart Jan Spruyt has put forward a list of people that can 'more or less be identified as Dutch neocons'. He includes Leon de Winter, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Paul Scheffer, Jos de Beus, Hans Achterhuis, Afshin Ellian, Hendrik Jan Schoo, Hans Wansink, Chris Rutenfrans and Jaffe Vink.⁹⁵ In his graduate thesis on Dutch neoconservatism, Maarten Vogelaar identified a 'core group' of Dutch neoconservatives (most of whom are mentioned above), based on how often they have been associated with the term in the Dutch public debate.⁹⁶ In another graduate thesis, Van Kesterars has made a convincing case that the PVV can be qualified as a neoconservative party. But again others have stressed the dissimilarities with US neoconservatism. Ferdi de Lange has argued the impossibility of a Dutch neoconservative politics and politely advised the members of the Edmund Burke Foundation to settle with the moderate nature of Dutch politics or consider moving to the US.⁹⁷ Koen Vossen acknowledged neoconservatism as a determining influence on Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV), while observing at the same time that neoconservatism was only a temporary phase. According to Vossen, the party has steadily moved away from neoconservatism since 2006. But that is because Vossen identifies neoconservatism rather exclusively with an interventionist American foreign policy agenda. The problem in this debate is that a Dutch neoconservative current would look rather different than the American original because the Netherlands is not a military power. Dutch neoconservatism needs to relate to a very dissimilar context and respond to different political challenges.

In particular, three important themes are worth highlighting. First, while US neoconservatism is a secular ideology, it considers religion to be an indispensable addition to liberalism and an important instrument for the spread of conservative values. Neoconservatives formed a coalition with the American religious right, and defended conservative sexual morality in the so-called culture wars. The Netherlands is to an overwhelming degree, a secular context, with a largely progressive sexual morality. Dutch neoconservatives therefore came to occupy a different position and defended Enlightenment values, gay rights and women's emancipation against the perceived threat of Islam. Some of the most prominent Dutch (neo)conservatives, such as Cliteur, Ellian and Hirsi Ali, are New Atheists.

Second, the focus of US neoconservative efforts, from the 1970s on, was foreign policy, and the fight with foreign 'enemies' identified as a moral evil. With regard to Islam, the US domestic context has been a less significant theme. Recent

⁹⁵ Of course, the members of the Edmund Burke Foundation need to be included too. Spruyt's list should be taken with a grain of salt however. Achterhuis is a moderate Burkean conservative who explicitly distanced himself from the Edmund Burke Foundation. Paul Scheffer cites many neoconservative authors in his book *Het Land van Aankomst* (Country of Arrival), but does not seem to identify himself fully with the current. See: Scheffer (2007).

⁹⁶ Vogelaar (2010, p. 50).

⁹⁷ De Lange (2006).

developments, such as Trump's Muslim ban, did not curry favour with neoconservatives. For US neoconservatives, the superiority of Western civilization and the universalism of Western values or human rights served as an argument legitimizing foreign intervention. The Netherlands lacks a powerful military, the primary concern for Dutch conservatives is domestic policy: the presence of Muslim immigrants. Neoconservative arguments concerning the superiority of western values are primarily used to argue for the assimilation (and subordination) of minorities, and a restrictive immigration policy.

Finally, the currency of choice of US neoconservatives largely consists of hard power, most famously through military intervention in Iraq. Huntington couched the clash of civilizations predominantly in military terms. Dutch (neo)conservatives have focused on combating Islam through soft power, in a war of ideas. Fortuyn's proposed a 'cold war' against Islam, taking the form of an 'ideological battle':

Before the attacks in the US I called for a cold war against Islam in my penultimate column for *Elsevier*. I meant just like the previous cold war against communism – a war with arguments and words; not a hot, armed conflict – an ideological battle with Islam, with the goal of convincing its adherents that they are better off when they loyally and royally embrace the core norms and values of modernity.⁹⁸

Bolkestein, Fortuyn, Cliteur and Hirsi Ali all framed the clash of civilizations in the Netherlands as a predominantly rhetorical battle for the hearts and minds of the Western Muslim population. Consequently, freedom of speech became one of the most important rallying cries of Dutch (neo)conservatives.

It is not merely these differences that make a satisfactory definition of Dutch neoconservatism so difficult. As we have seen, US neoconservatism is itself already a very heterogeneous phenomenon. And the Dutch sympathizers with neoconservatism are also an eclectic bunch, defying easy classification. Only within the confines of the Edmund Burke Foundation, there is a Cultural Christian current, a New Atheist current and a current that completely repudiates the Enlightenment, advocating a return to classical philosophy. A more fruitful approach, so it seems, is to follow Kristol's and Huntington's situational analysis and to approach the US neoconservative inspiration as part of an attempt to reformulate a modernized conservative politics 'in the Dutch grain'.

⁹⁸ 'Vóór de aanslagen in de VS heb ik in mijn voorlaatste column in *Elsevier* opgeroepen tot een koude oorlog tegen de islam. Ik bedoelde daarmee net als de voorgaande koude oorlog – dat is dus een oorlog met argumenten en in woorden, geen hete, gewapende oorlog – tegen het communisme, een ideologische strijd met de islam, met als doel de aanhangers daarvan ervan te overtuigen dat zij beter af zijn, indien zij loyaal en royaal de kernnormen en -waarden van de moderniteit omarmen.' (Fortuyn, 2001c, p. 9) In reality, the cold war was an armed conflict, taking place indirectly through proxy wars, but Fortuyn's meaning is clear.

Pim Fortuyn and the Dutch adaptation

The single most important difference with the US and the UK is that Dutch conservatives perceived the struggle to uphold traditional sexual and religious morality as a lost cause. The conservative law scholar Wim Couwenberg observed that conservatism in the Netherlands

had been undermined since the 1960s by left-libertarian influences, which have predominated for years, with far-reaching liberalization of public morals as a consequence, leading to sexual liberty, legalization of abortion, homosexuality, prostitution and euthanasia, the introduction of gay marriage, and a policy of toleration with regards to coffee shops and so on.⁹⁹

Leading empirical studies have characterized the value patterns of the Dutch population since the 1970s in terms of a 'prudent progressivism': a self-evident progressive morality regarding social issues and public authority, connected with a widespread belief in the necessity of redistribution of wealth. This prevailing progressive mentality is a clear challenge to any conservative politics in the Netherlands, as De Beus notes:

The progressive vision of man, society, government and history has apparently pervaded the common sense opinions of all sorts of sectors of the population so deeply, that conservatives in the CDA, VVD, LPF, ChristenUnie, SGP and possibly a new conservative formation, need to sustain a radical cultural politics that can only acquire broad popular support in the long term.¹⁰⁰

That is most likely what Cliteur referred to with his reference to a 'post-revolutionary phase'. 'In terms of conservatism, in the Netherlands it is not five to twelve but quarter past three in the night,' Spruyt argued.¹⁰¹ Progressive values are seen as engrained to such a degree, that Fortuyn described them as cultural sediments, and advised against overturning them. In light of this situation, different camps can be distinguished. There is the sceptical conservatism of Kinneging with his wholesale rejection of the Enlightenment and his turn to antiquity.¹⁰² There is a restoration conservatism oriented at combating progressive sediments. A good example is the Conservative Manifesto in

⁹⁹ 'Als ik beweer dat onze politieke cultuur meer neigt in conservatieve dan progressieve richting, doe ik dat wel met de restrictie dat conservatisme in formele zin hier een dynamische inslag heeft en in materiële zin sinds de jaren zestig ondergraven is door links-libertaire invloeden die jarenlang zelfs de overhand gekregen hebben met een vergaande liberalisering van de publieke moraal als uitvloeisel en resulterend in vrije seks, legalisering van abortus, homoseksualiteit, prostitutie en euthanasie en invoering van homohuwelijk, gedoogbeleid inzake coffeeshops en dergelijke.' See: Couwenberg (2011).

¹⁰⁰ 'Het progressieve beeld van mens, samenleving, overheid en geschiedenis is kennelijk zo ver doorgedrongen in de vooroordelen van allerlei lagen van de bevolking, dat conservatieven in CDA, LPF, ChristenUnie, SGP en een eventuele nieuwe partijformatie in 2006 een radicale cultuurpolitiek moeten volhouden, die pas op langere termijn massale steun zal verwerven.' (De Beus, 2006a, p. 224)

¹⁰¹ Spruyt (2006, pp. 292-293).

¹⁰² Kinneging (2005).

which Spruyt and Visser express the desire to ‘repair’ the effects of the 1960s.¹⁰³ And finally there is a backlash conservatism that has incorporated a select series of progressive values in the conservative project, a post progressive strand represented by people such as Paul Cliteur, Hirsi Ali, Geert Wilders and Pim Fortuyn. As Van Kesteren argues in his incisive overview of Dutch conservatism:

A new contemporary conservatism, like for example that of the PVV, in some of its views, has to base itself on what used to be seen as progressive values, and that now, having become engrained, can be seen as part of the dominant culture. This seems to be the only way in which a secular conservatism can achieve electoral success.¹⁰⁴

This current became dominant after the rise of Fortuyn. While more traditional conservatives such as Kinneking, Spruyt, Verbrugge and Livestro argued for the undoing of progressive morality, Fortuyn perceived this to be both impossible and undesirable. As a product of the 1960s, Fortuyn chose to integrate certain progressive values in his programme, creating a rather unique and ambiguous synthesis. After Bolkestein’s gradual isolation within the VVD, Fortuyn was the first to force an electoral breakthrough, achieving popular support for conservative ideas. Fortuyn articulated that strategy in a series of books and pamphlets.

In *De Verweesde Samenleving* (The Orphaned Society), published in 1995, neoconservative ideas start appearing in Fortuyn’s writing. While his previous book *Aan het Volk van Nederland* (To the People of the Netherlands) was a neoliberal tribute to the independent-minded, calculating and emancipated citizen who no longer needed the welfare state, *De Verweesde Samenleving* is introduced as a ‘religious-sociological treatise’, a plea for the reappraisal of authority. In the book, Fortuyn portrays the 1960s and 1970s as a generational rebellion against the symbolic fathers who established the law. The consequence of this progressive revolt, Fortuyn states in an echo of the neoconservative critique of the counterculture, is the erosion of ‘the pattern of norms and values’ that binds society.¹⁰⁵ The symbolic father ceases to exist and similarly, women’s emancipation leads to the decline of the attention-giving role of the symbolic mother. Emancipation and individualization have thus led to the corrosion of the integrity of the family.¹⁰⁶ Lacking authority figures establishing norms, lacking the old ideological certainties, decadence and relativism proliferate. Without mothers who give attention, children feel orphaned. The result is a young generation adrift who ‘lavish

¹⁰³ Spruyt and Visser (2003).

¹⁰⁴ ‘Het leidt tot de inzichtrijke stelling dat een nieuw eigentijds conservatisme, bijvoorbeeld binnen de PVV, in sommige van haar standpunten moet teruggaan op wat voorheen wel als progressivisme werd aangeduid en dat tegenwoordig, nu het diep is verankerd, als deel van de bovenliggende cultuur kan worden gezien. Dit lijkt de enige manier waarop een Nederlands seculier conservatisme electoraal succes kan verwerven.’ (Van Kesteren, 2012, p. 89)

¹⁰⁵ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 17).

¹⁰⁶ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 37).

their pleasure at house parties with XTC'.¹⁰⁷ So far, *De Verweesde Samenleving* can be seen as a traditional conservative cultural critique. Fortuyn goes on to state, however, that he does not want to go back to the old pillarized system, since this would be impossible and not fitting with the modern world. The author feels he has 'to contort himself, to not be relegated to the corner of neoconservatism'.¹⁰⁸

Fortuyn argues for the restoration of the family, for a renewed role of the Father who decrees the Law, and the Mother who gives attention, but disconnects these roles from their classic interpretation: 'Fruit of emancipation and individualization could be that the care-giving role of the mother, and the law-function of the father, do not have to be linked to the biological position of men and women.'¹⁰⁹ The symbolic father could very well be a woman or gay. It is a strange synthesis between the conservative appeal to a moral order founded on traditional family values, and progressive sexual norms popularized in the 1960s and 1970s. Fortuyn distances himself from the more traditional position of then VVD-leader Frits Bolkestein, claiming that his appeal to a *bezielend verband* (spiritual bond) consisting of Christian values would mean a return to an outdated system:

Such a badly considered recommendation, reminds us too much of the time that the minister and the priest kept the common believers quiet and the rich businessman kept them poor. In this case, a system of norms and values is no more than an instrument of discipline in the hands of the ruling elite. This is not only undesirable but, considering the degree of emancipation of ordinary citizens in western societies, also unrealistic. People have learned to think for themselves, to decide for themselves concerning their perspective on life, and will not be told what to do, not even by such a decent gentleman as Bolkestein.¹¹⁰

The response of Fortuyn is to identify an additional source of western culture, in addition to Bernard Lewis' Judaeo-Christian formula. Jewish culture is focused on the Law and the Father, writes Fortuyn. Christian culture adopts the Jewish Law, and adds community to it. And then there is humanist culture, a product of the Enlightenment, which emphasizes individual development, and self-realization. The problem is that modernity, in particular 'the industrial culture in which the entertainment and fashion industry are the decisive factors', has led to the idea that the individual can do without community and law. Fortuyn aims to restore this balance. Here Daniel Bell's analysis

¹⁰⁷ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 17).

¹⁰⁸ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 37).

¹⁰⁹ Fortuyn (2002 [1995]).

¹¹⁰ 'Een dergelijke, weinig doordachte aanbeveling doet te veel herinneren aan de tijd dat de dominee en de pastoor de eenvoudige gelovigen rustig hielden en de rijke ondernemende burger hen arm hield. Op dat moment is een normen- en waardensysteem niet meer dan een disciplineringsinstrument in de handen van de heersende elite. Dat is niet alleen onwenselijk, maar gezien de graad van emancipatie van de burgers van de westerse samenlevingen ook niet realiseerbaar. Mensen hebben geleerd zélf na te denken, zélf te beslissen over hun levensperspectief en laten zich de wet niet meer voorschrijven, zelfs niet door een nette burgerheer als Bolkestein'. (Fortuyn, 2002 [1995], p. 85)

comes to mind on the cultural contradictions of capitalism, where cultural elites are seen as corrosive of identity.¹¹¹

Also the welfare state critique of Fortuyn shows parallels to the neoconservative idea that the state, and welfare, needs to be used to promote and sustain the moral order. Not welfare subsidies as such are problematic, but bureaucracy and professionalization, leading to alienation on the part of both those dependent on it, and the citizens paying for welfare. This alienation concerns the fact that the communitarian ethic on which this system is founded, has been replaced by an anonymous technocracy. 'The mechanism taking care of the formulation, enforcement and adaptation of the underlying system of norms and values has been sidelined,' according to Fortuyn. As a result, 'the system is eroding at a fast pace'.¹¹² The core of Fortuyn's agenda, the return to the *menselijke maat* (the human scale, a critique of impersonal large-scale public sector infrastructure such as schools and hospitals) is taken from the programme and writings of the Christian Democrat party. But Fortuyn seeks a neoliberal solution, in the 'self-organizing capacity of citizens' and the pricing system that will grant 'the individual optimal freedom of choice'.¹¹³

Fortuyn does not want to go back to the past: 'society must be reinvented'.¹¹⁴ In a rather ambiguous moral restoration, Fortuyn argues for a renewed collective system of norms and values, suited for a society that has experienced an irrevocable individualization. It is not authority and hierarchy, but 'leadership' that is required now, since 'a community without leadership is in contradiction with itself'.¹¹⁵ Fortuyn argues for moral leadership in the media, education, and the arts to educate the people and spread his conception of Dutch norms and values. Crucial here is that Fortuyn has a social constructionist vision of Dutch identity. He shares that view with neoconservatives such as Strauss and Huntington in the US, and with Schoo, Scheffer and Spruyt in the Netherlands. Dutch identity is not something that is simply out there, something that needs to be conserved. Identity is a work in progress, it requires social engineering and needs to be actively constructed. This argument comes to full fruition in *Tegen de Islamisering van Onze Cultuur: Nederlandse Identiteit als Fundament* (Against the Islamisation of our Culture: Dutch Identity as Foundation):

What is past, is over and done with and cannot simply be recalled. The modern, open information society does not allow it, not counting the fact that no one wants to go back to that relatively closed and socially controlled society of the era of pillarization.¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 72).

¹¹² Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 79).

¹¹³ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 80).

¹¹⁴ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 206).

¹¹⁵ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 213).

¹¹⁶ 'Wat voorbij is, is voorbij en kan niet zomaar worden teruggeroepen. De moderne, open informatiemaatschappij staat dat trouwens niet toe, afgezien nog van het feit dat niemand meer terug wil en kan naar die relatief gesloten en sterk sociaal gecontroleerde maatschappij ten tijde van de verzuiling.' (Fortuyn, 1997, p. 56)

In a turbulent and globalizing cultural and economic world order, Fortuyn states,

[C]ollectively experienced norms and values, Dutch identity and history, the notion of the *maakbare samenleving* [untranslatable Dutch term, expressing the progressive belief that society can be shaped by politics], and the need to occupy ourselves more than ever with social engineering, meaning the design, creation and maintenance of social relations in which the 'human scale' is front and centre, will be of decisive importance.¹¹⁷

Important here is that neoconservatives have a social constructionist view of identity. As Samuel Huntington suggested in a famous passage in *The Clash of Civilizations*, identities and ethnicities can be reinvented: 'For peoples seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential, and the potentially most dangerous enmities occur across the fault lines between the world's major civilizations.'¹¹⁸ Neoconservatives conceive of political identities as relational, and enemy images are seen as a crucial resource for the reinvention of community. A case in point is Bart Jan Spruyt's essay from 2005, inspired on Strauss. In this slim little book, Spruyt wrote on Carl Schmitt's famous motto that the crucial distinction in politics is that between friend and enemy.¹¹⁹ While pointing to Islam and citing Carl Schmitt, Spruyt advised his readers that the relation to the enemy must be construed as 'irreconcilable'. It is the enemy that provides the answer to the identity crisis of the West. 'This enemy "is our own question as Gestalt". In battle with the enemy we learn who we are,' Spruyt noted hopefully.¹²⁰ More concretely: through confrontation with Islam, Dutch identity can be reinvented. Fortuyn adopts the same neoconservative approach in *Tegen de Islamisering van Onze Cultuur*.

The loss of the enemy, state socialism, leaves us behind like an emperor without clothes. Our own energy, positive attitude, and identity had become too closely intertwined with the image we had constructed of that country. We were everything they were not. It appears to be difficult, when that image disappears, to create an

¹¹⁷ 'Dat neemt niet weg dat het besef begint door te dringen dat vraagstukken als collectief beleefde normen en waarden, de Nederlandse identiteit en geschiedenis, de notie van de maakbare samenleving en de noodzaak ons meer dan ooit bezig te houden met social engineering, dat wil zeggen, het ontwerp, de creatie en het onderhoud van maatschappelijke verbanden waar de menselijke maat centraal staat, van doorslaggevend belang zullen zijn bij het vreedzaam en welvarend voortbestaan van de Nederlandse samenleving in een turbulente en zich sterk internationaliserende culturele en economische wereldorde.' (Fortuyn, 1997, p. 56)

¹¹⁸ Huntington (1996, p. 20).

¹¹⁹ Parts of Spruyt's 2005 essay appeared in the PVV's 2006 manifesto *Een Nieuw-Realistische Visie* (A Neo-Realist Vision; it is worth repeating here that 'realism' in the Dutch context often denotes conservatism). This philosophical manifesto of the PVV has clearly been written by Spruyt and contains quite explicit references to Leo Strauss, for example the passage on cannibalism and cultural relativism from *Natural Right and History*. See: PVV (2006b).

¹²⁰ Spruyt (2005, p. 59).

image of ourselves, in which we can articulate who we are in a positive and a negative sense, what we want, what drives us, and where we come from.¹²¹

The problem that Fortuyn starts his analysis with is not Islam; it is the West. We recognize Fukuyama's bleak portrait from *The End of History*: the Western citizen after the Cold War is condemned to a life without meaning, like Nietzsche's last man. Fukuyama criticized liberal democracy for producing 'men without chests', content with satisfying banal consumerist needs.

The end of history will be a very sad time. The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one's life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands.¹²²

Similarly, Fortuyn depicts life in capitalism after the collapse of communism as 'one big party, without tragedy, contemplation and ideals that surpass personal wellbeing'.¹²³ Emancipation and the lack of an ideological opponent had led to an amoral individualism. What is lacking is a collective bond, a shared set of consciously experienced norms and values. In this context, Islam fulfils a Western need. Fortuyn identifies Islam as a replacement for communism as the new enemy image, providing the West with renewed identity and purpose. Fortuyn praises Reagan's 'cultural definition' of the Soviet Union as 'the Great Satan'. And he calls it a 'very successful strategy which definitely bears repeating' with Islam. These social constructionist motivations of Fortuyn's campaign against Islam have received little attention. The most astute analysis of this strategy is by Dick Pels, who describes the idea of an inevitable clash of civilizations as a 'political myth in which the domestic *need* of an enemy is projected on a real but limited terrorist threat'.¹²⁴

For Fortuyn, the threat lies in Islam's inherent fundamentalism, which he defines as the idea that 'norms and values stemming from ideology or religious outlook, prescribe behaviour in the public domain'.¹²⁵ But Fortuyn writes that fundamentalism is not inherently bad. We can learn something from the fundamentalism inspired on Christian values (read: neoconservatism) found in the US, namely that secularization can lead to decadence and the denial of one's norms and values. In a context where networked

¹²¹ 'Het wegvallen van de vijand, het staatssocialisme, laat ons echter achter als een keizer zonder kleren. Onze eigen energie, positieve instelling en identiteit waren teveel verward geraakt met het beeld dat wij ons van het land hadden gevormd. Wij waren alles wat zij niet waren. Het blijkt moeilijk om, als dat beeld wegvalt, een beeld van onszelf op te bouwen, waarin wij in positieve en negatieve termen zeggen wie we zijn, wat we willen, wat ons drijft en waar we vandaan komen.' (Fortuyn, 1997, p. 10.)

¹²² Fukuyama (1989, p. 18).

¹²³ Fortuyn (2002 [1995], p. 12).

¹²⁴ Pels, (2005, p. 15).

¹²⁵ Fortuyn (1997, p. 32).

capitalism is eroding the social bond, making community more 'temporary' and 'fluid', a counterweight is needed. Fundamentalism can serve a positive function by providing a source of security, in response to the economic anxieties created by globalization:

Everywhere in the world one can observe a revival of fundamentalism. Partly it is caused by internationalization of the world in cultural and economic terms. That creates a large degree of freedom and a large expansion of choice, but also fears especially among those that do not stand to profit as much from globalization. Fundamentalism provides a medium to canalize these fears, a medium that is often theological-political in nature.¹²⁶

In this context, the meaning of the subtitle 'Dutch Identity as Foundation' becomes clear: Fortuyn is constructing a fundamentalist notion of Dutch identity that can canalize the fears of the Dutch 'losers of globalization'. Not for nothing, *De Verweesde Samenleving* was introduced as a 'religious-sociological treatise'. What Fortuyn proposes is an *ersatz* religion, a secular fundamentalism that can serve as a foundation for Dutch identity in opposition to Islam. Put differently, Fortuyn uses the term fundamentalism in the same way that Bolkestein and Cliteur appeal to a 'spiritual bond' or 'civil religion' in terms of a Straussian myth.

Contrary to the US neoconservatives however, Fortuyn places women's rights and gay rights at the centre of Dutch identity. He embraces the emancipatory legacy of the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s instead of opposing it. It is captured in the notion of the emancipated Judaeo-Christian-Humanist ideal described before. Again, this is not an accurate descriptive term indicating something that exists historically. Rather it is a performative appeal, a myth or civil religion in the Straussian sense, a 'spiritual bond' in the words of Bolkestein, or a 'cultural law' in the words of Cliteur. Does this mean that Fortuyn's core values, like Islamic fundamentalism, prescribe behaviour in the public domain? Not yet, or rather, not yet for the native Dutch population: 'At this point I do not wish to go so far as to demand that people conform to these essential values of our culture, but I make an exception for newcomers.'¹²⁷ Fortuyn ends the book with a call for an ideological campaign against Islam, which has 'irreconcilable' differences with the West. Yet he frames that struggle with Islam in a progressive manner, as a reiteration of Dutch secularization and emancipation.

Fortuyn's ideas constitute an at times eclectic, chaotic and inconsistent – but nevertheless hugely influential – attempt to reformulate a conservative position on a terrain marked by the dominance of progressive values. Seen from Huntington's situational definition of conservatism, it is Fortuyn who embodies the New

¹²⁶ 'Overal in de wereld kan men een herleving van het fundamentalisme vaststellen. Deels wordt die ingegeven en veroorzaakt door de internationalisering van de wereld in cultureel en economisch opzicht. Dat veroorzaakt naast een grote mate van vrijheid en een zeer aanzienlijke verruiming van keuzemogelijkheden, ook angsten met name onder hen die maar zeer ten dele de vruchten kunnen plukken van deze internationalisering van de wereld. Fundamentalisme biedt voor de kanalisering van deze angsten een bedding die veelal politiek-religieus van aard is.' (Fortuyn, 1997, p. 108)

¹²⁷ Fortuyn (1997, p. 109).

Conservatism, who channels the true conservative spirit. Other Dutch conservatives were simply too far removed from dominant Dutch social mores to be able to position themselves as credible defenders of Dutch institutions against internal and external threats. After the breakthrough of Fortuyn, Dutch conservatives would come around to champion women's rights and gay rights as an expression of Western civilizational superiority, as an inherent quality of the Judeo-Christian-Humanist tradition. In so doing, Dutch conservatives came to embrace progressive values.

4.4 Conclusion

While the Fortuyn revolt is commonly perceived as a turning point in Dutch political culture, the nature of this break remains contested. Some argue it should be seen as a conservative restoration, an attempt to turn back time. Others have stressed the progressive nature of the revolt, and have depicted it as an attempt to bolster Dutch progressive values with respect to conservative Muslim immigrants. In this chapter, an alternative interpretation has been put forward. I have described the Fortuyn revolt in terms of a 'complex' conservative backlash: a conservative countercurrent that has absorbed a select series of progressive attainments. At the same time, on a range of other terrains, the countercurrent has actively contested progressive values.

The contradictory character of this backlash politics is not exceptional in the conservative tradition. Seen from a situational perspective on conservative thought as developed by Karl Mannheim, it is a core element of conservatism. Conservative thought is known to be highly situational, fluid and tactical. From the very start, conservatives have tended to incorporate elements of the progressive currents they opposed. US neoconservatives have been particularly prone to stress the situational nature of their conservatism. They have defined their own politics in terms of a conservative defence of modern, liberal institutions from internal and external enemies. In their view, neoconservatism is a conjunctural phenomenon, an attempt to modernize and adapt conservative thought to a modern context marked by the dominance of progressive institutions. The relevance of US neoconservatism for Dutch conservatives resides in this particularity. Neoconservative ideas have guided Dutch conservatives in their paradoxical renewal of Dutch conservative politics, leading to a 'conservatism in the Dutch grain'. It has allowed Dutch conservatives to appoint themselves as the defenders of Dutch progressive institutions from both the internal threat of elite 'relativism' and the external threat of Muslim immigrants. Pim Fortuyn played a crucial role in the articulation of such a modern and contradictory conservative backlash politics.

This chapter concludes the section on the Dutch New Right backlash. The following two chapters will deal more extensively with two hugely significant and complicated topics within the New Right that require deeper exploration. The first is the New Right perspective on Islam. We will analyse the intellectual inspirations of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the most accomplished Dutch critic of Islam. The second is the online conservative counterculture that emerged on the Dutch blogosphere surrounding the weblog

GeenStijl. This last chapter connects the online counterculture to the Dutch intellectual tradition of nihilism and Romantic irony.

Chapter 5

Deconstructing Ayaan Hirsi Ali¹

Europe was thus dragged, kicking and struggling, into the middle of a propaganda war with very real and tragic consequences. The American neoconservatives promoting the grand narrative of a war on terror, and factions in the Middle East promoting a grand narrative of jihad through martyrdom – sought to use the old continent as their echo chamber.

Gilles Kepel²

I think that we are at war with Islam. And there's no middle ground in wars.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali³

The Somali-born Islam critic Ayaan Hirsi Ali has been one of the world's most influential voices in present debates on the role of Islam in Western societies. Her influence on the Dutch debate has been profound. This chapter offers an extensive critical engagement with her work and situates her writing in relation to two formative intellectual influences: Islamic fundamentalism and neoconservatism.

In *The Evidence of Experience*, a landmark essay by the historian Joan W. Scott, she questions the naturalness attributed to subjective experience. Experience as personal testimony is commonly conceived as authentic and true, and the authority granted to experience powerfully buttresses claims to knowledge. Emancipatory projects – whether centred on the identities of workers, minorities, feminists, or gays – have often relied on subjective experience to question dominant, 'objective' paradigms. But the appeal to experience, Scott contends, leaves aside 'questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured'.⁴ Therefore the 'evidence of experience' can end up essentialising identity and reproducing rather than contesting given ideological systems.

In the case of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, arguably those very qualities lend her writing its persuasive power and impressive popularity. A series of critical analyses has identified

¹ An earlier version of this text was published as: Oudenampsen (2016d).

² Kepel (2008, pp. 254-255).

³ Van Bakel (2007).

⁴ Scott (1991, p. 777).

Hirsi Ali's work as an example of the political efficacy of autobiographical writing in reinforcing dominant stereotypes through an appeal to authenticity and personal experience.⁵ Kiran Grewal, for instance, has described Hirsi Ali's work as a falsification of the emancipatory function often attributed to autobiographical writing, offering instead 'a reinforcement of the dominant order through the "authentic" voice of the victim'.⁶ Due to the personal nature of her writing, Hirsi Ali's biographical narrative is immediately imbued with an authority that other forms of non-fiction writing would need to prove through argument, leaving them open to criticism. As a result, Hirsi Ali's writing seduces readers and scholars alike in the belief that her views on Islam are an expression of her personal experiences. Saba Mahmood has commented on the uncritical popularity with which Hirsi Ali's work has been received in some American university departments.⁷ Similarly, Adam Yaghi points to the growing appeal of Hirsi Ali's work in academia 'where her serial autobiographies are treated as honest and reliable testimonies'.⁸

In the Netherlands, this seduction has been particularly salient. An important factor herein has been the climate of intimidation surrounding Hirsi Ali, in particular the death threats she received from Muslim extremists. Her status as an endangered feminist public intellectual paved the way for her broad appeal, with prominent progressive Dutch politicians, intellectuals and feminists justifiably rallying to her defence. This heated political situation has made a critical reception of Hirsi Ali's work more difficult in the Netherlands. Referring to Hirsi Ali's first book *De Zoontjesfabriek* (The Factory of Little Sons, published in 2002, partly translated and included in *The Caged Virgin*), the influential feminist and journalist Elsbeth Etty wrote in 2006: 'who takes another look at that volume – this many years after its first appearance – will note how nuanced Hirsi Ali's position is with regards to Islam as a religion'.⁹ In Dutch academia, in particular among feminist scholars, the response has been more critical. These scholars have made the case that Hirsi Ali's critique of the position of women in Islam certainly has merit, but her sweeping generalizations regarding Islam have brought her in conflict with the very Muslim women she claimed to advocate for. The benefits of highlighting women's oppression have been more than offset, they claim, by the wholesale stigmatization of Muslim immigrants, making her critique of Islam counterproductive.¹⁰

The analysis here extends on the work of these more critical Dutch (and Flemish) voices and follows up on recent calls for more critical scholarly engagement with Hirsi Ali's work by international authors such as Grewal, Mahmood and Yaghi. This chapter tries to take the study of her views one step further by offering an in-depth critical

⁵ See: Bosch (2008); Gana (2008); Kumar (2012); Mahmood (2009); Sheehi (2001); Yaghi (2016).

⁶ Grewal (2012, p. 582).

⁷ Mahmood (2009, p. 195).

⁸ Yaghi (2016, p. 84).

⁹ Etty (2006).

¹⁰ Botman, Jouwe and Wekker (2001); Bracke (2004); De Leeuw and Van Wichelen (2005); Ghorashi (2003); Wekker and Braidotti (1996).

engagement with the content of Hirsi Ali's autobiography *Infidel*.¹¹ The analysis combines both immanent critique and the Mannheimian critique 'from without'. The immanent critique aims to demonstrate the discord between Hirsi Ali's views on Islam and her personal experiences as described in her autobiography.¹² The critique 'from without' uses Olivier Roy's and Gilles Kepel's work on Islamic fundamentalism as an interpretive lens to put forward an alternative interpretation of Hirsi Ali's life story than the one offered by herself. The overarching aim is to deconstruct Hirsi Ali's biographical narrative, situating her writing in relation to two formative and interacting ideological influences: Sunni fundamentalism and US neoconservatism.

What follows is an attempt at exposition in five sections: the first introduces Ayaan Hirsi Ali's relation to Islamic fundamentalism and neoconservatism as described in *Infidel* and lays out the basic argument, the second looks at Sayyid Qutb's Islamism, the third describes US neoconservatism and the clash of civilizations paradigm, the fourth section explores the genesis of Hirsi Ali's views on Islam, and the final section uses the preceding to contrast these views with her autobiography, *Infidel*.

5.1 The double life of Ayaan Hirsi Ali

After the fall of the Berlin wall, Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Veronique* poetically portrayed a deeper, underlying unity connecting East and West, divided for almost half a century by the Iron Curtain. In Kieślowski's film, this connection is symbolized by the deep, unconscious bond between two female figures with identical appearance, whose trajectories cross only for a fleeting moment: Weronika in Poland and Véronique in France. The double life of Hirsi Ali epitomizes a more troubling similitude between East and West, in a time when the so-called clash of civilizations came to replace the divisions of the Cold War. In her personal history, Ayaan Hirsi Ali embodies the oppositions of this new era and the remarkable parallels between the two ideological currents that positioned themselves at the forefront of that conflict, seen by both as a civilizational clash. As in Kieślowski's film, the two lives of Ayaan Hirsi Ali hide a deeper underlying unity, even though the parallel is ultimately one of confrontation, not reconciliation.

Two political movements came to play a leading role in the life of Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Islamic fundamentalism and neoconservatism. The two currents are remarkably co-joined in the personal history of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, as chronicled in her bestselling autobiography *Infidel*, which is divided in two parts, echoing the divisions in her personal trajectory: 'My Childhood' and 'My Freedom'.¹³ In the first section is recounted how Hirsi Ali's family, a prominent clan in Somalia, fled the country in 1976 during the dictatorship of Siad Barré, before the ensuing civil war. The first place of refuge was Saudi Arabia, followed by sojourns in Ethiopia and finally Kenya, where she

¹¹ While all of Hirsi Ali's writing is to some extent autobiographical, *Infidel* is widely seen as the single most encompassing account of her life. See: Hirsi Ali (2007).

¹² Grewal (2012, pp. 580-587).

¹³ Hirsi Ali (2007). The Dutch edition appeared as *Mijn Vrijheid* (My Freedom) in 2006.

would stay for twelve years. There, Hirsi Ali came in contact with the *Sahwa*, the puritan religious revival that emanated from the Muslim Brotherhood and Saudi Wahhabism, onto the broader domain of Sunni Islam. Hirsi Ali describes how she became part of this movement through the religious education she received at the age of sixteen in Kenya, given by a certain 'Sister Aziza'. Hirsi Ali recounts her subsequent conversion, how she started to veil herself in a hijab, and read Islamist texts with a community of like-minded believers.

In the process of escaping from an arranged marriage and coming to the Netherlands as a political refugee in 1992, Hirsi Ali slowly started repudiating her Islamic belief. She describes the day of her arrival as her 'real birthday': 'the birth of me as a person, making decisions about my life on my own.'¹⁴ From 1995 to 2000, Hirsi Ali studied political science in Leiden. Amongst others, she was taught by Paul Cliteur, a prominent New Atheist inspired by US neoconservatism. Cliteur was part of a circle of Dutch intellectuals who devoted themselves to the propagation of a Dutch clash of civilizations theory, while critiquing religion in general and Islam in specific. After her studies, Hirsi Ali joined the think tank of the Dutch social democrats (PvdA), the Wiarda Beckman Stichting (WBS), where she started writing on Islam and immigration. As we will see, Hirsi Ali's writing at the WBS was inspired on the work of the neoconservative Orientalist Bernard Lewis. In the months after 9/11, Hirsi Ali's critique of Islam could count on a receptive audience. While still working at the WBS, Hirsi Ali was adopted as their protégé by the neoconservative intellectual circle surrounding Cliteur. The group is described in her autobiography as the 'Gent's Club': the journalists Chris Rutenfrans, Jaffe Vink, Hans Wansink, the columnist Sylvain Ephimenco, the writer Leon de Winter and the New Atheist professors Herman Philipse and Paul Cliteur. She refers to Frits Bolkestein, the former leader of the conservative liberal party (VVD) and arguably the most prominent Dutch exponent of neo-conservatism, as her 'intellectual mentor' in the acknowledgements.¹⁵

After calling Islam a 'backward religion' on Dutch public television in September 2002, on the occasion of the anniversary of 9/11 and only months after the assassination of Fortuyn, Hirsi Ali started receiving death threats. She became an instant celebrity in the heated debate on freedom of speech, women's emancipation and Islam that followed. After a short period hiding from the threats in the US, Hirsi Ali exchanged the social democrat think tank for a position as parliament member for the VVD. In the following years, she engaged in a spectacular, contentious and short-lived political career. After a huge political controversy surrounding her reception as a refugee in the Netherlands, Hirsi Ali moved to the US in 2006 where she started working for the American Enterprise Institute, a prominent neoconservative think tank. She subsequently married the neoconservative author Niall Ferguson.

With this remarkable course of life, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is one of the few people to have been part of both the Islamic fundamentalist and the neoconservative movement. In

¹⁴ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 188).

¹⁵ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 352).

this itinerary of contrasting conversions and opposing allegiances, the strategic use of enemy images and essentialism that is inherent to both currents, provides a connecting thread. In his book *War for Muslim Minds: Islam and the West*, the French Middle East scholar Gilles Kepel described the ascendancy of these movements and famously argued that both are to a certain degree each other's mirror image, feeding and reinforcing each other.¹⁶ 'You're either with us, or against us,' would become a shared mantra of both George W. Bush and Osama Bin Laden. Both movements are seen to derive strength and legitimacy from an aggressive opponent. Both movements share an essentialist view of Islam, in which the fundamentalist perspective is seen as the true nature of Islam. *Infidel* is a remarkable account of this confluence.

In her autobiography, Hirsi Ali has sought to consciously transpose the fundamentalist image of Islam, known to her from her teenage years, onto the Islamic world as a whole. This fundamentalist image – defined by a literalist approach to Koran and Hadith; the idea of the timelessness of Islam; the stress on Islam's inherent hostility to modernity and the West; and the view of Islam as an all-embracing societal system – bears a striking resemblance to the perspective on Islam in the 'Islam criticism' developed by neoconservatives, which has its roots in the Western tradition of Orientalism. As the Middle East scholar Olivier Roy writes: 'Critics of Islam and Muslim fundamentalists are mirrors of each other, and each corroborates the other in the view of Islam that they share, merely with the signs reversed.'¹⁷

Hirsi Ali has made ample use of these analytical tools of Western Orientalism. Following Edward Said, the principal dogmas of Orientalism, a long tradition of partisan Western scholarship regarding Islam and the Orient – can be reduced to four themes. First, 'the absolute and systemic difference between the West, which is rational developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior.' Second, 'abstractions about the orient', particularly those based on texts representing a classical Oriental civilization, are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities. Third, 'the Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself.' Four, 'the Orient is at bottom something either to be feared [...] or to be controlled.'¹⁸ Alternately, Olivier Roy summarizes Orientalism succinctly as the view that a timeless and pervasive 'Islamic culture', structuring the whole of society from politics to law and architecture, is the major obstacle prohibiting access to political modernity.¹⁹ As we will see, these Orientalist themes characterize Ayaan Hirsi Ali's views on Islam. An observation that is not surprising if we consider that her views are largely inspired on the work of the Orientalist Bernard Lewis, a principle target of Said's

¹⁶ Kepel (2004).

¹⁷ Roy (2007, p. 43).

¹⁸ Said (1978, p. 300). Important to note here is that in the Netherlands, Edward Said's work has had a rather negative reception. A recent revision of important books by the leading progressive weekly in the Netherlands, *De Groene Amsterdammer*, included a typically hostile review of Orientalism, written by the weekly's editor-in-chief. After extensively citing Bernard Lewis' critique of Said's work, the review concluded that Said 'departed from a preconceived frame, selecting his material in such a way that it seamlessly fits the framework'. See: Schutte (2014).

¹⁹ Roy (2007, p. 7).

critique. Hirsi Ali fits the category of the 'native informant', a term used by Edward Said to describe a Middle-Eastern scholar sitting 'at the feet of American Orientalists', who uses her Western training 'to feel superior to [her] own people', because she 'is able to "manage" the Orientalist system'.²⁰ Orientalism, according to Said, has a theatrical quality, and he describes that learned system of viewing the Orient as a 'stage on which the whole East is confined':

On this stage will appear figures whose role it is to represent the larger whole from which they emanate. The Orient then seems to be, not an unlimited extension beyond the familiar European world, but rather a closed field, a theatrical stage affixed to Europe.²¹

Ayaan Hirsi Ali can be seen as an actor on that theatrical stage, representing the Orient to a Western audience. What is specific to Hirsi Ali is that she uses the Orientalist paradigm, not so much to study Islam or her society of origin, but to make sense of her own personal story, and to adapt that experience so as to fit into the public role she has crafted for herself on the confined space of the stage. In other words, she is a 'native informant' with regards to her own life. Hirsi Ali has offered her personal story as an illustration of the clash of civilizations thesis developed by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, referring to her life as 'a personal journey through the clash of civilizations'.²² In *Brown Skin, White Masks*, the Iranian scholar Hamid Dabashi writes fiercely of critics of Islam such as Ibn Warraq and Hirsi Ali. He describes them as 'native informers who at once inhabit and target, personify and alienate, the hated abstraction they wish to exorcise from the moral psychosis that has posited them as aliens'. For Dabashi, the particularity of Ayaan Hirsi Ali is that her aversion 'for her own collective identity remains abstract and hidden within the stories that she keeps weaving about her life'.²³ By retracing the intellectual 'double life' of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, this text aims to deconstruct the staged persona she has created, thus revealing and making concrete what has remained hidden and abstract.

5.2 Qutb and political Islam

The Sunni Islamist part of the story has its crystallization point in the figure of Sayyid Qutb. Born in 1906 in a traditional rural context in Egypt, Qutb first became a teacher, then a prominent intellectual, and finally the most important voice of modern Sunni Islamism.²⁴ The Sunni Islamist movement has its origins in the 1930s. Hasna al-Banna, the Egyptian founder of the Muslim Brotherhood and Abul-Ala Maududi, the

²⁰ Said (1978, pp. 323-324).

²¹ Said (1978, p. 63).

²² Hirsi Ali (2010a).

²³ Dabashi (2011, p. 92).

²⁴ For reasons of brevity, the focus of this chapter is restricted to the Sunnite tradition, which has been central to Hirsi Ali's development. While the Shiite tradition is of equal political significance in general terms, it occupies a more marginal role in the life and writings of Hirsi Ali.

leader of the Indian-Pakistani Jamaat-i-Islami party, founded a new political movement that aimed to reinvent Islam as a political order. Qutb would build on the work of al-Banna and Maudadi, with the goal of developing Islam into a holistic alternative for modern twentieth century ideologies. The leading Middle East scholar Olivier Roy – whose interpretation I will follow here, with the aid of John Calvert’s probing intellectual biography of Qutb – defines this movement as Islamism or political Islam, because it redefines Islam as a political ideology.²⁵ This attempt at modernizing Islam was paradoxically given legitimacy by presenting it as a restoration, a return to the source, to the original texts and the original inspirations of the first community of believers under the Prophet Mohammed. Islamism, Roy argues, is a movement that denies its own historicity.

The core proposition in Olivier Roy’s work is that Islamism both sociologically and intellectually, is a product of modernity, a result of the rapid modernization process in the Muslim world. Like Qutb himself, the vanguard of adherents and disseminators of political Islam did not originate from traditional Islamic clergy (the *ulamas*). They did not write in the ancient Arabic, the learned language of the Koran, but in national popular languages. The Islamists ‘are a product of the modern education system’, Roy writes, ‘where they took classes together with militant Marxists, whose concepts they used, and translated in the terminology of Koran.’²⁶ Special attention was devoted to organizational form, reminiscent of Leninist vanguard parties on the one hand and the Sufi brotherhoods on the other.²⁷

Like other Muslim intellectuals of his generation, Sayyid Qutb searched for a formula to modernize Islam, in such a way that Western technological and scientific knowledge could be assimilated without the accompanying liberal values. For that to occur, Islam had to be developed into a fundamentalist and all-embracing societal ‘ideology’ (*fikra*), a term derived from European progressive thought. For Qutb, a reinvented Islamic ideology had to function as an alternative to Third World nationalism, communism, capitalism, and liberal democracy. The titles of Qutb’s most popular books, published around 1950, are a good indication of the worldly character of his religious thought: *Social Justice in Islam* (1949), *The Battle between Capitalism and Islam* (1951), and *Islam and World Peace* (1951). The central idea in these books is holism: Qutb describes Islam as *nizam*, an integrated order that encapsulates economy, society and politics.²⁸ This fundamentalist vision needed to be realized by the creation of an Islamic state, starting at the national level. This was an important innovation. In traditional Islam, Roy writes, ‘[t]he state is never considered in terms of a territorialized nation-state: the ideal is to have a power that would rule over the entirety of the *umma*, the community of the faithful, while actual power is exercised over a segment of the *umma* whose borders are contingent, provisional, and incomplete.’²⁹

²⁵ Calvert (2011).

²⁶ Roy (1994, p. 40).

²⁷ Roy (1994, p. 3).

²⁸ Calvert (2011, p. 130).

²⁹ Roy (1994, p. 13).

The term *nizam* is also a modern invention, and is not to be found in the Koran.³⁰ The break with Islamic tradition is that the idea of divine unity (*tawhid*) is now applied on society, while before it only referred to God. Society needs to be a reflection of God's unity. But where God's unity is natural, in society it will have to be created. A holistic society does not tolerate intrinsic segmentation, be it social, ethnic, or tribal, or national, or a political order that claims autonomy from divine order.³¹ Therein lies the fundamentalist aspect of Islamism. Before the twentieth century, Islam was used as a verb describing a practice of personal belief and dedication. Only after the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood by Hasan al-Banna, does the word attain the meaning that Qutb bestows upon it: an integrated societal system.³²

Following the military coup of Nasser and the Free Officers in 1953, Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood and became the intellectual leader of the movement. The Brotherhood saw Nasser's regime as an opportunity to implement their ardently desired Islamic state in Egypt. But Nasser decided on a path of secular modernization and relations with the Brotherhood turned sour. After an attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood to overthrow the Nasser government, the regime decided to eliminate the Brotherhood and arrests hundreds of its most prominent members. Qutb was among them. In the years of imprisonment that followed, Qutb was tortured and his views radicalized. His writings in prison were oriented at formulating an Islamic doctrine that would legitimate a revolt against sovereign power (as in Christian faith, obedience to God-given authority is required in Islam). Qutb does that, on the one hand, by placing divine authority (*hakimiyya*, again a term that does not exist in the Koran) above state sovereignty and popular sovereignty. And on the other, by stating that Muslim societies in which this godly sovereignty is not recognized, in which there is no attempt to implement divine law (*sharia*) are in reality in a state of unbelief. Under Western influence, a form of bad faith had developed amongst the political elites of Muslim countries, as in society more broadly. Qutb called this *jahiliyya* (a state of unbelief), a Koranic concept that refers to the situation in the Arabic world before the arrival of Islam. For Qutb, obedience to secular authorities implied disobedience to divine authority:

God (limitless is He in His glory) says that this whole issue is one of faith or unfaith, Islam and non-Islam, Divine law or human prejudice. No compromise or reconciliation can be worked out between these two sets of values. Those who judge on the basis of the law God has revealed, enforcing all parts of it and substituting nothing else for it, are the believers. By contrast, those who do not make the law

³⁰ Calvert (2011, p. 130).

³¹ Roy (1994, pp. 40-41).

³² Calvert (2011, p. 130).

God has revealed the basis of their judgement, are unbelievers, wrongdoers and transgressors.³³

Qutb's views form a mirror image to the friend-enemy distinction employed by the neoconservatives, as we shall see later on. Qutb makes a black and white distinction between true Islam and the enemies of Islam, compounded by essentialist views of Jews, communists, westernised elites, Orientalists and other opponents of true Islam. In spite of the fact that Qutb saw his modernized version of Islam as relying on 'Western ways of thought', he portrayed Western thinking as especially hostile to Islam, due to the fact that Western science had developed historically in opposition to (Christian) religion:

The Western ways of thought and all the sciences started on the foundation of these poisonous influences with an enmity towards all religions, and in particular with greater hostility towards Islam. This enmity towards Islam is especially pronounced and many times is the result of a well thought out scheme, the object of which is first to shake the foundations of Islamic beliefs and then gradually to demolish the structure of Muslim society.³⁴

In the eyes of Qutb, belief and religion are the only dignified and legitimate bonds that can keep people together. Jihad is for Qutb an offensive expansionist struggle in the name of a universal Islamic revolution, not unlike the universal American hegemony that neoconservatives aimed for. Qutb took aim against those that defined jihad as a spiritual struggle or a defensive practice, arguing that it went against Islam's universal mission.³⁵ Qutb's revolution involved an existential struggle between good and evil that needed to be prepared by a professional revolutionary vanguard (*tali'a*), able to extract itself from the false consciousness of depraved *jahili* culture. Qutb attributed to conflict and strife an important formative role, leading to a deeper consciousness of one's values.

An important contradiction in the thought of Qutb is the conviction that it is possible to have unmediated access to divine teachings. Islam, according to Qutb, is a doctrine that exists outside of human consciousness, as objective truth. Interpretation must be avoided as much as possible, so that human ignorance, individual desire, or group interests will not contaminate the purity of the doctrine. When confronted with an explicit text in the Koran or the Hadith, there is no space for *ijtihad* (personal appraisal).³⁶ In the case of uncertainty, interpretation only serves to ascertain divine truth. A scenario in which several interpretations come to coexist, a normal situation

³³ Cited in: Calvert (2011, p. 216). Qutb stopped short of calling individual Muslims unbelievers (kafirs): 'Whereas the kafir is a person who intentionally disbelieves in God, the jahili individual sees himself as a believer yet dismisses Islam's prerogative to govern all aspects of life.' See: Calvert (2011, p. 220).

³⁴ Qutb (2006 [1964], p. 128).

³⁵ Calvert (2011, p 222).

³⁶ Qutb (2006 [1964], p. 43).

given the diversity of Islamic jurisprudence, is not deemed possible; there is only right and wrong. Since the assessment of clarity already requires human judgement, and there is no basis for assessing the correctness of an interpretation in the case of uncertainty, that vision is tautological. Ultimately, Qutb's method requires a personal (and political) decision on the interpretation of divine truth, a decision that remains veiled behind the appeal to unmediated access. But the advantage of this approach is that it allowed Qutb and the Islamist movement to marginalize the traditional Islamic clergy such as the Egyptian Al-Azhar University. The islamists contested their monopoly on interpreting the religious texts and criticized the clergy's loyalty to existing political regimes.

Qutb interpreted and innovated to an important degree, by introducing new concepts, or by giving new meaning to existing terms. Denying the innovative aspects of his approach allowed Qutb to articulate a political programme in the name of Islam, while cementing his vision in an appeal to divine truth. When Qutb is released from prison in 1964, members of the Muslim Brotherhood are working on the creation of an underground military organization. Qutb takes personal charge of the operation. When the organization is discovered, the Nasser regime decides to round up the Muslim Brotherhood, and to sentence Qutb to death.

Qutb would go down in history as a martyr. The Muslim Brotherhood distanced itself from the more radical aspects of his legacy, rejecting the revolutionary *jahiliyya* doctrine. The vanguardist strategy of catastrophic revolution was abandoned for reformism and missionary work from the ground up. Only God has the authority to judge the veracity of the belief of other Muslims, Hudaybi argued, then Brotherhood leader. This continues to be the majority position in the Sunni world: failures in practice, be they crimes or omissions of worship, do not exclude a person from the community of believers, only the confession of the faith matters. Nonetheless, in the following years, Qutbism inspired radicals all over the world of Sunni Islam. From that moment on, the Sunni Islamist movement is seen as divided between a reformist and a revolutionary pole.³⁷

The reformist pole is exemplified by Mohammed Qutb, the brother of Sayyid Qutb. He was invited by the Saudi monarchy – and with him many other Muslim Brothers – to integrate Islamism with the Saudi tradition of Wahhabism, an ultra conservative, fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. At the time, the Saudi Monarchy saw the Muslim Brotherhood as an appropriate tool to form an international counterweight to the appeal of secular pan-Arabism, and from 1979 on, revolutionary Shiism from Iran. On a domestic level, it was inspired by strategic concerns to limit the influence of Wahhabi clerics on Saudi society, by providing them with a competing doctrine. As a result, the kingdom of Saudi Arabia became a site of refuge for the radical religious movements that arose in opposition to secular Arab regimes, often aligned with the Soviet Union. This development was actively encouraged by the US as part of its Cold War strategy. Large amounts of Saudi oil-dollars were invested to facilitate this new

³⁷ Roy (1994, p. 24).

religious movement. From the convergence of the activist impulse of the Muslim Brotherhood and the literalist, strict and puritanical approach of the Wahhabi tradition, also described as Salafism, the *Sahwa* (the awakening) emerged.³⁸ Both Islamists and Salafists can be described as fundamentalist, although they differ in the nature of their fundamentalism, with Islamists more prone to challenge the political status quo and Salafists more focused on personal piety. This movement became very prominent in the 1980s and would take up the young Hirsi Ali in its sweep.³⁹

One of the younger Muslim Brothers, and a scion of the Egyptian elite, Ayman al-Zawahiri, continued the revolutionary tradition of Islamism, and radicalized the ideas of Qutb further. He became part of the group Islamic Jihad that assassinated Sadat in 1981, basing themselves on the revolutionary ideas Qutb had formulated. Heavy repression followed, and when Zawahiri was released from prison, he continued his activities as part of the Afghan Mujahideen, where he met Bin Laden. Here, Salafist and Islamist radicals successfully mingled, as the guerrilla fighters were trying to live their lives (and fight) according to a very literal interpretation of scripture. After the success of the guerrilla war against the Soviet Union, Zawahiri took up the plan to take aim, not at the corrupt Arabic regimes (the nearby enemy), but directly at the puppet player itself: the United States (the faraway enemy). He became the mentor of Bin Laden and the second in command of Al Qaeda.

Finally, Mohammed Bouyeri, the Dutch-Moroccan killer of Theo van Gogh who also threatened Hirsi Ali, belonged to this latter revolutionary pole. Together with a group of friends and acquaintances, dubbed the *Hofstadgroep* by Dutch police (*Hofstad* is a nickname for The Hague, but the group ultimately turned out to be based in Amsterdam), Bouyeri had become radicalized by reading and translating radical Islamist texts downloaded from the internet. They became acquainted with this tradition through the former Syrian army officer Abu Khaled, who spoke at informal meetings throughout Europe. Abu Khaled introduced groups of Muslims to the thought of the founding fathers of Islamic radicalism, in particular Sayyid Qutb and Al Maududi. As described by Rudolph Peters in his account of Bouyeri's political radicalization, Qutb's ideas were a crucial reference point: 'An inventory of the documents found on his and other computers shows that he and the group were ideologically heavily indebted to the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb and the Indian/Pakistani Aba al-A la al-Mawdudi.'⁴⁰

5.3 Neoconservatism and the clash of civilizations

The history of Islamism is intertwined in a peculiar fashion with that of US neoconservatism: Al Qaeda and the rise of the broader Salafist movement are a product of American Cold War policies, a Frankenstein monster that has turned against its benefactor. As noted in previous chapters, the neoconservatives, like the Islamists,

³⁸ While all Wahhabists are Salafists, not all Salafists are Wahhabists, which is the Saudi current in Salafism.

³⁹ Calvert (2011, p. 276).

⁴⁰ Peeters (2008, p. 119).

have championed an image of the world as divided by a dramatic conflict of starkly contrasted forces of good and evil. The philosophy of Leo Strauss provided an important theoretical reference point. Strauss, a Jewish refugee from the Nazi regime, rose to prominence at the University of Chicago in the 1950s, and would spawn a Straussian school of philosophy. From his interpretations of Greek philosophy, Strauss extracted a conservative philosophy for which he claimed a universal and timeless validity. Amongst the Straussians were many neoconservatives who would later acquire positions of power in government, in military and foreign policy circles, and in neoconservative think tanks.⁴¹ Elaborating on the thesis of the German jurist Carl Schmitt that friend-enemy distinctions form the essence of politics, Strauss saw the struggle against an enemy – portrayed as a moral evil – as a necessary condition for the construction and maintenance of a healthy and hierarchical political community. Strauss defined and defended such sentiments as ‘patriotism’. ‘The most potent opinion regarding justice,’ Strauss argued in *The City and Man*,

is the opinion according to which justice means public-spiritedness or concern with the common good, full dedication to one’s city as a particular city which as such is potentially the enemy of other cities, or patriotism. Justice thus understood consists indeed in helping one’s friends, i.e. one’s fellow citizens, and in hating one’s enemies, i.e. the foreigners.⁴²

In a personal letter to Carl Schmitt, Strauss expressed this philosophy thusly:

The ultimate foundation of the Right is the principle of the natural evil of man; because man is by nature evil, he therefore needs *dominion*. But dominion can be established, that is man can be unified, only in a unity *against* – against other man. Every association of men is *necessarily* a separation from other men. The *tendency* to separate (and therewith the grouping of humanity into friends and enemies) is given with human nature; it is in this sense destiny, period.⁴³

The clear identification of enemies in the Schmittian sense of the word became a hallmark of US neoconservatism. As Irving Kristol argued: ‘statesmen should, above all, have the ability to distinguish friends from enemies.’⁴⁴ A new conservative politics, Samuel Huntington would argue at the end of the 1950s, could only succeed if there was a credible external threat that allowed conservatives to take up a position as defenders of US institutions. That enemy was first identified as communism.⁴⁵ Naming, accentuating and exaggerating this threat would make it possible for neoconservatives to appoint themselves as defenders of American institutions. For that

⁴¹ Drury (1988); Norton (2005).

⁴² Strauss (1964, p. 79).

⁴³ Meier (1995, p. 125).

⁴⁴ Kristol (2003).

⁴⁵ Huntington (1957, p. 472).

to occur, the détente in the Cold War that came into being in the 1960s, had to be undone. The pragmatist outlook of foreign policy 'realists' like Kissinger and especially the CIA provided the biggest obstruction. They had little reason, given the available information on Soviet military expenditures, to see the Soviet Union as an existential threat. The neoconservative movement, aligned with foreign policy hawks and organized around organizations such as the *Committee for a Democratic Majority* and the bipartisan *Committee on the Present Danger*, moved to marginalize the realist tendency.

Neoconservatives and hawks such as Paul Wolfowitz, Albert Wholstetter and Richard Perle, aided by the California governor Ronald Reagan, managed to circumvent the CIA by lobbying for an independent revision of the confidential CIA assessment of the Soviet threat. The recently appointed CIA director Bush senior complied in 1976 against the advice of his own staff. Bush created a commission of three separate teams of analysts – all lavishly staffed by neoconservatives and hawks – which became known as TEAM B. Richard Pipes, a neoconservative Harvard professor, led the most famous of the three. The TEAM B commissions created a range of reports in which a very exaggerated and threatening image was presented of the military power and intentions of the Soviet Union. Strategic leaks to the media were instrumental in fomenting a culture of anxiety amongst the wider US population, resulting in popular support for an expanded military budget and a more aggressive foreign policy. Trying to accommodate the hawks, President Carter appointed Samuel Huntington to author a report and revise government policy. Although somewhat more moderate, Huntington presented an equally intimidating portrait of the military threat of the Soviet Union in 1977. Like the TEAM B reports, these assessments were later found to be deliberately exaggerated.⁴⁶

In July 1979, Carter approved a large CIA operation funding the Mujahideen revolt in Afghanistan. It helped to provoke the Soviet intervention in December that year, in what is commonly seen as a decisive escalation of the Cold War. The Soviet invasion turned US popular opinion and emboldened hawks and neoconservatives. In the elections of 1980, many neoconservatives joined the victorious Reagan campaign, resulting in a large neoconservative presence among the Reagan staff. Reagan's election victory led to an intensification of the Cold War and the accompanying arms race. In subsequent years, the CIA campaign to fund the Mujahideen became the largest covert operation in American history. An important leader among the Mujahideen was the Saudi prince Osama Bin Laden, whose network geared to funding and recruiting jihadists to fight in Afghanistan, went on to become Al Qaida.

Neoconservative foreign policy think tanks played an important role in expanding Carter's intervention in Afghanistan into a new foreign policy tenet called the Reagan doctrine. Replacing the old strategy of containment, the new doctrine advocated rollback: the active undermining of Soviet supported regimes by funding anti-communist insurgent movements. In the Middle East, the US either supported or

⁴⁶ Cahn (1998); Gervasi (1986).

acquiesced in the rapid growth of the Islamic right. In Egypt, the US-backed dictator Anwar Sadat brought the Muslim Brotherhood back to Egypt. In Syria, the US, Israel, and Jordan supported the Muslim Brotherhood in a civil war against Syria. Finally, Israel backed the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank and Gaza, as a strategy to undermine the authority of the secular-leftist PLO, leading to the establishment of Hamas. Thus the neoconservative ascendancy to political power under Reagan, coincided with the rise of right-wing Islamic movements.

The clash of civilizations

In the beginning of 1990s, after the fall of the Berlin wall, many in the US establishment were convinced that a new rationale for conflict – and therefore a new enemy – needed to be identified. As noted before, the initial impetus in that effort was given by the Princeton-based Orientalist Bernard Lewis.⁴⁷ In 1990, a month after the beginning of the First Gulf War, Lewis published the essay *The Roots of Muslim Rage* in *The Atlantic*. It was not Western intervention in Muslim countries, or Western support for dictatorial regimes that lead to virulent anti-Americanism in the Middle East. The hatred of Muslims against the West, Lewis wrote,

goes beyond hostility to specific interests or actions or policies or even countries and becomes a rejection of Western civilization as such, not only what it does but what it is, and the principles and values that it practices and professes. These are indeed seen as innate evil, and those who promote them or accept them as the ‘enemies of God’.⁴⁸

The author came to this startling conclusion by presenting Islamic fundamentalism as an authentic return to ‘the classic Islamic view’. Lewis tactically embraced the fundamentalist definition of Islam and turned it against Islamic religion as a whole. By thus projecting enmity on the entire religion of Islam, Lewis employed a friend-enemy distinction of his own. The hawks in the US foreign policy establishment eventually embraced Lewis’ thesis as a notion that could serve as a guide for future conflict. After 9/11, Bernard Lewis (together with the Lebanese scholar and ‘native informant’ Fouad Ajami) became the Bush administration’s preferred academic expert on the Middle East, visiting Washington six times in the weeks after 9/11.⁴⁹ Lewis’ thesis became an important mantra of the Bush administration after 9/11: ‘Why do they hate us? [...] They hate our freedoms.’⁵⁰

Samuel Huntington took up Lewis’ thesis in a groundbreaking essay titled *The Clash of Civilizations?*, published in 1993 in the journal of the US diplomatic and military

⁴⁷ Qureshi and Sells (2003).

⁴⁸ Lewis (1990, p. 48).

⁴⁹ See Nicholas Lemann’s extended profile of the Bush foreign policy team for the *New Yorker*: Lemann (2002).

⁵⁰ Speech George W. Bush (2001, September 20).

establishment, *Foreign Affairs*.⁵¹ Since the end of the Cold War, Huntington suggested, people defined their identity increasingly in ethnic and religious terms, making them prone to observe an us-versus-them opposition between themselves and members from another ethnicity or religion. Secular ideology was losing ground, and elites would now attempt to garner support by appealing to the religion and cultural identity of their particular civilization. In the opening pages of his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Huntington did not mince words:

One grim *Weltanschauung* for this new era was well expressed by the Venetian nationalist demagogue in Michael Dibdin's novel, *Dead Lagoon*: 'There can be no true friends without true enemies. Unless we hate what we are not, we cannot love what we are. These are the old truths we are painfully rediscovering after a century and more of sentimental cant. Those who deny them deny their family, their heritage, their culture, their birthright, their very selves! They will not lightly be forgiven.' The unfortunate truth in these old truths cannot be ignored by statesmen and scholars. For peoples seeking identity and reinventing ethnicity, enemies are essential, and the potentially most dangerous enmities occur across the fault lines between the world's major civilizations.⁵²

To the attentive reader, Huntington's clear-cut prose provides an artful blend of what is and what ought to be. Written in a style of sober factual description, it equally serves as political and strategic prescription: Huntington is instructing elites on how to use religious and cultural identity as an *instrumentum regni*.⁵³ After reading the book and going over the above passage several times, it becomes clear that this is not a message of caution, but one of instruction or even recommendation. Huntington pointed especially towards Islam as a possible source of enmity for the West and a touchstone for reinventing Western identity. Carl Schmitt's definition of the political as the distinction between friend and enemy looms large in Huntington's writing:

It is human to hate. For self-definition and motivation people need enemies: competitors in business, rivals in achievement, opponents in politics. They naturally

⁵¹ Huntington (1993).

⁵² Huntington (1996, p. 20). Notable scholars, such as the political theorist Etienne Balibar, have pointed to the eerie similarities between the basic framework of *The Clash of Civilizations* and the work of Carl Schmitt, in particular *Nomos of the Earth*. Writing about Huntington's notion of irreducible civilizational conflict, Balibar concludes: 'This ideas clearly derives from the geopolitical notions that were theorized around World War II by the German (pro-Nazi) jurist and philosopher Carl Schmitt, who explained that every political institution was based on the absolute primacy of the "friend versus foe" divide and sought to transfer this notion to the new "spatial distribution of power" (*Nomos of the Earth*) emerging after the Second World War.' See: Balibar (2004, p. 231).

⁵³ It is significant that the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr is one of Huntington's declared intellectual inspirations. As Noam Chomsky wrote in a classic book on the subject: 'Niebuhr argued that "rationality belongs to the cool observers," while "the proletariat" follows not reason but faith, based upon a crucial element of "necessary illusion." Without such illusion, the ordinary person will descend to "inertia."' See: Chomsky (1989, p. 17).

distrust and see as threats those who are different and have the capability to harm them. The resolution of one conflict and the disappearance of one enemy generate personal, social, and political forces that give rise to new ones. 'The "us" versus "them" tendency is,' as Ali Mazrui said, 'in the political arena, almost universal.' In the contemporary world the 'them' is more and more likely to be people from a different civilization.⁵⁴

Controversially, Huntington defined Islam (and secondarily China, or the Confucianist civilization) as the primary source of civilizational conflict for the West. The 'centuries-old military interaction between the West and Islam is unlikely to decline. It could become more virulent,' Huntington suggestively proposed. As Gilles Kepel observed, Cold War enmity towards the Soviet Union was now transposed onto Islamic civilization as a whole.

[T]he comparison was misleading since it suggested that the world of Islam is as centralized as the Soviet bloc once was (Chinese dissidence notwithstanding) and the Mecca really constitutes the Moscow of Islam. But the Muslim world is neither monolithic nor homogeneous. It has many centers, all of which compete for hegemony over political and religious values. Islam's relation to the West, and to the modernity the West invents and disseminates, is more complex, historically fraught, and intimate than the clear-cut ideological and military antagonism that prevailed between the United States and the USSR.⁵⁵

Saudi Arabia for instance, a prominent US ally, has been engaged in a longstanding geopolitical power struggle with Iran. The 1990s offer a startling similarity to the neoconservative campaign for intensification of the Cold War in the 1970s. In 1996, the neoconservatives Bill Kristol and Robert Kagan published an article in *Foreign Affairs*, 'Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy'. It argued for a massive investment in advanced weaponry, allowing Washington, now the sole superpower, to aggressively pursue a 'benevolent' world hegemony in defiance of rogue states: a *Pax Americana*. The principal focus of that policy would be the Middle East. While existing 'realist' US foreign policy focused on regional stability and guaranteeing the continuity of the oil supply, neoconservatives argued for a complete reshuffling of the deck. The article signalled the beginning of a larger campaign. In this, the neoconservatives were sustained by the powerful organized interests of the American defence industry. An influential neoconservative think tank was founded one year later, the Project for a New American Century (PNAC), to pressure the Clinton Administration. Among the signers of the PNAC petitions were besides neoconservative intellectuals such as Francis Fukuyama and Norman Podhoretz, future Vice-President Dick Cheney, future Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, future assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz,

⁵⁴ Huntington (1996, p. 130).

⁵⁵ See: Kepel (2004, p. 60).

future Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith and future Department of Defense Policy Board Chairman Richard Perle, famously referred to by colleagues as 'the prince of darkness'.⁵⁶ In 1998, the PNAC published an open letter to Bill Clinton, calling for pre-emptively 'removing Saddam Hussein and his regime from power.'⁵⁷ But it wasn't until the attacks on 9/11 that the neocons would be given *carte blanche* by the Bush administration.

The manipulated evidence of weapons of mass destruction that led to the Iraq War is a faithful copy of the imaginative portrait painted by neoconservatives of the Soviet threat in the 1970s. The problem was again, the scepticism of the CIA and foreign policy realists like Colin Powell, unconvinced of the ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, or the acuteness of the threat posed by Saddam's regime. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz created the Office of Special Plans, headed by Abram Shulsky, a scholarly expert on the work of Leo Strauss. 'Special Plans was created', as investigative journalist Seymour Hersh would later write, basing himself on anonymous Pentagon sources, 'in order to find evidence of what Wolfowitz and his boss, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, believed to be true – that Saddam Hussein had close ties to Al Qaeda, and that Iraq had an enormous arsenal of chemical, biological, and possibly even nuclear weapons that threatened the region and, potentially, the United States.'⁵⁸ There were also other, more personal lines of continuity. George W. Bush, the son of Bush senior (who as CIA-director had an important role in facilitating TEAM B) was now in charge. Daniel Pipes, the son of TEAM B president Richard Pipes, became one of the most important anti-Islam hawks. In 2003, Bush appointed him to the board of the US Institute of Peace, a euphemistically titled foreign policy think tank originally founded under Reagan. Richard Pipes also became one of the most important inspirations and fundraising conduits for the Dutch anti-Islamic politician Geert Wilders.⁵⁹

This formed the background for the development of a neoconservative tradition of Islam criticism. Neoconservative Islam critics such as Daniel Pipes and Bernard Lewis used the fundamentalist myth of a return to a pure Islam, in order to equate the religion as such with fundamentalism, describing it as the 'true nature' of Islam. In so doing, neoconservatives and fundamentalists came to share the same perspective on Islam, only with the signs reversed. Both fundamentalists and neoconservative Islam critics argue that there is such a thing as a pure Islam, an unchanging and timeless system of thought, which can be traced back to the founding of Islam in the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Both view only the Koran and the Sunna (hadith) as the expression of this true nature of Islam and ignore the variegated body of religious

⁵⁶ Kepel (2004, p. 61).

⁵⁷ Kepel (2004, p. 67).

⁵⁸ Hersh (2003).

⁵⁹ For a Dutch court case against Wilders on the grounds of inciting hatred, Daniel Pipes asserted to have raised an amount of six numbers: 'Another American support pillar for Wilders, the conservative de Daniel Pipes of the pro-Israel Middle East Forum, had a year income of 235,000 dollar. Pipes, who is set against a Palestinian state and campaigns for a military attack on Iran, says that in the past year he has collected "an amount of six numbers" for Wilders in the US.' See: Meeus and Valk (2010).

opinions, practices and traditions that has developed since. Both believe in the possibility of a literal reading of the primary texts, and accrue no space to diverging interpretations. Both deny the separation of religion and state in Islam. Both ignore the religious ideas and practices from the Ottoman period (with a degree of division of religion and state, a more equal position for women and a more open interpretation of the sacred texts) that fundamentalists view as un-Islamic and corrupted by Greek philosophy. Both portray Islam as an ideology, a totalizing and all-embracing societal system. Both are convinced that true Muslims have a duty to wage jihad against unbelievers. That most Muslims are not in the least convinced of such a thing, is attributed to the fact that they are not informed about the 'real nature' of their religion. Both parties, in short, have an essentialist perspective on Islam, that is politically explosive and not without its strategic use. For the Islamists and Salafists it lends authority to their movement. For the neoconservatives it supplies an enemy image that can be deployed to attain popular support for an aggressive foreign policy. The neoconservative perspective on Islam retraces fundamentalist radicalism to the problems of Islam as a civilization. Ayaan Hirsi Ali became one of the most prominent exponents of that perspective.

5.4 Deconstructing Ayaan

The task of reconstructing the personal intellectual history of Hirsi Ali is complicated by the fact that her very first articles are already the finished product of an intellectual conversion whose precise origin and nature are withheld from us in her writing. A commonly held opinion is that Hirsi Ali's ideas have developed and radicalized gradually over time in reaction to real life occurrences such as 9/11, the death threats she received, her switch to the VVD and the brutal assassination of her collaborator on the film *Submission*, Theo van Gogh. That is also how Hirsi Ali has presented her political trajectory in her writing. In *Infidel*, she depicts her views on Islam as formed in response to 9/11, an event described as a moment of political awakening: 'the little shutter at the back of my mind, where I pushed all my dissonant thoughts, snapped open after the 9/11 attacks, and it refused to close again.'⁶⁰ She retrospectively portrays herself in the weeks after the attacks as a deeply confused Muslim:

War had been declared in the name of Islam, my religion, and now I had to make a choice. Which side was I on? I found I couldn't avoid the question. Was this really Islam? Did Islam permit, even call for, this kind of slaughter? Did I, as a Muslim, approve of the attack? And if I didn't, where did I stand on Islam? I walked around with these questions for weeks; I couldn't get them out of my head.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 272).

⁶¹ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 269).

None of that confusion is apparent, however, in those very same first weeks after 9/11, when Hirsi Ali's first published article appeared. It was published in the monthly journal of the think tank of the social democrat party where she then worked as a researcher, bearing the title *In Between Confrontation and Reconciliation: The Netherlands and Islam*.⁶² The short essay analyses the Dutch debate on Islam in the wake of 9/11, a discussion between those proposing a more confrontational approach and those advocating tolerance. After some deliberation, Hirsi Ali sides with those opting for a more confrontational approach, in order to 'force Muslims to debate Islam'.⁶³ That force is necessary because 'in the perception of a Muslim, the Koran contains the truth and this truth is of all times and places. That makes it impossible for moderate Muslims to express doubts about the religion'.

Especially regarding three Islamic dogmas there is no substantive discussion possible, not between Muslims, nor between Muslims and non-Muslims. First, in Islam, 'the individual and the community are inextricably bound up with each other. The will of Allah, as revealed in the Koran, determines ideology, politics, law, individual identity and his relation to the community.' Second, 'the loyalty of a Muslim to other Muslims is obligatory: in a conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims, sympathy and support will always go to Muslims first. Who violates this rule is a traitor and, according to the Koran, worse than unbelievers.' The demand towards Muslims to 'clearly distance themselves from acts of terror and radical Islam again and again faces the opposition of this loyalty principle'. 'Finally, there is the significance of the hereafter. Life on earth only counts as a passage towards eternal life after death [...] When one doubts the unity of God or his words in the Koran, then you spoil your chances on a place in the hereafter.'⁶⁴ Muslims are not allowed to doubt or ask questions concerning their faith, Hirsi Ali concludes.

In fact, these are not empirical observations about the reality of Muslim life; they are statements that primarily serve a political purpose. To take only the most obvious example: in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the attacks were widely and explicitly denounced by leading Muslim organizations around the world, including even Islamist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas. On September 11, the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest grassroots American Muslim civil rights and advocacy group in the US, distributed the following statement:

We condemn in the strongest terms possible what are apparently vicious and cowardly acts of terrorism against innocent civilians. We join with all Americans in calling for the swift apprehension and punishment of the perpetrators. No cause could ever be assisted by such immoral acts. All members of the Muslim

⁶² The article originally appeared in the journal of the Dutch social democrat think tank WBS (Hirsi Ali, 2001). It was published on October 10, 2001, and included in *De Zoontjesfabriek* (The Factory of Little Sons), Hirsi Ali's first book from 2002, but it has not been translated in English and published in *The Caged Virgin*.

⁶³ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 451).

⁶⁴ Hirsi Ali (2007, pp. 450-551).

community are asked to offer whatever help they can to the victims and their families.⁶⁵

The logical consequence of Hirsi Ali's propositions on Islam is that of implicitly tying together Al Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks with the whole of Islam, seeing that all Muslims are divinely ordained to be loyal to one another. She thus divides the world in two monolithic blocs, Islam versus the West, and questions the loyalty of Muslim immigrants in the West, who are pressed to choose sides – as individuals – against their own communities. In a typical case of textual determinism, Hirsi Ali reduces the everyday reality of contemporary Muslim life to the Koran, depicted as a body of closed norms, beyond discussion, governing all aspects of life. Olivier Roy aptly characterized this type of Western criticism of Islam:

[T]o define Islam as a body of closed norms and Muslims as making up a community excluding membership in any other group is precisely to adopt the fundamentalists' definition of Islam. This is a reference to an imaginary Islam, not to the real Muslim world, and the fundamentalists are made into authentic representatives of Islam, even if this means speaking with benevolent condescension about the poor [Muslim] liberals who cannot make themselves heard.⁶⁶

In that same very first article, Hirsi Ali writes how 'moderate, benevolent Muslims' are hopelessly uninformed about the true nature of their religion. The goal of the Western 'dialogue' with moderate Muslim immigrants, the aim of forcing them to debate Islam, is to make Muslims more informed about the inherent radicalism and violence of their religion.⁶⁷ Only by secularizing their faith – accepting scripture as man-made and Mohammed as a human, fallible figure – and only by extracting themselves from their communities can Muslims become acceptable to the West. This is the binary vision that Ayaan Hirsi Ali started out with, inspired on the views of Bernard Lewis. And it is this vision that she would consistently continue to defend right up to her latest book, *Heretic*, where the ideas of Bernard Lewis again figure prominently.⁶⁸

Hirsi Ali's writing, right from the very beginning, is a well thought-out version of the clash of civilizations theory, drawing on Dutch New Atheists inspired by neo-conservatism, such as Paul Cliteur and Herman Philipse on the one hand, and Orientalist authors such as Bernard Lewis and Lewis Pryce-Jones on the other. Put differently, Ayaan Hirsi Ali's ideas on Islam are of decidedly Western extraction, and these ideas are – at times – in open contradiction with Hirsi Ali's own life story, as we shall soon see. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact moment of her adoption of

⁶⁵ CAIR, (2015).

⁶⁶ Roy (2007, p. 42).

⁶⁷ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 451).

⁶⁸ Hirsi Ali (2014).

these Western ideas, it is likely that Hirsi Ali had taken up these inspirations long before 9/11, in the period that she was taught by Paul Cliteur at Leiden University.

Her first public contact with the wider circle of Dutch neoconservatives is in November 2001. The editors of the neoconservative opinion section of *Trouw*, Jaffe Vink and Chris Rutenfrans, had organized a debate with the appropriate Manichean title 'The West or Islam: who needs a Voltaire?' in the Amsterdam debating centre De Balie. In *Infidel*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali describes how she intervened from the stand exclaiming: 'Allow us a Voltaire, because we are truly living in the Dark Ages.'⁶⁹ At this occasion Hirsi Ali met Afshin Ellian, the Iranian refugee who had become one of the country's fiercest Islam critics. Hirsi Ali described him as a Dutch version of Salman Rushdie.⁷⁰ Vink and Rutenfrans invited her to write her first opinion piece on the theme of her intervention at De Balie. From that point on, Jaffe Vink claimed Hirsi Ali as his discovery and protégé, publishing a series of Hirsi Ali's opinion pieces in *Trouw*.⁷¹ Rutenfrans and Vink were the editors of Hirsi Ali's first book, *De Zoontjesfabriek* (The Factory of Little Sons), published in 2002, launching Hirsi Ali's career as one of the most influential and controversial Dutch public figures of the decade.⁷²

The Orientalist view

The role of Orientalist authors in forming Hirsi Ali's view of Islam can be deduced from her first more elaborate and theoretical text, published in the yearbook of the social democrat think tank in the autumn of 2002 and translated and reprinted in *The Caged Virgin*. In the article *What Went Wrong? A Modern Clash of Cultures*, titled after the well-known book by Bernard Lewis, Hirsi Ali lays out her ideas on Islamic culture.⁷³ Basing herself on Lewis and Pryce Jones, Hirsi Ali argues that 'the religious-cultural identity' of Muslims is characterized by:

- A hierarchical-authoritarian mentality: 'The boss is almighty; others can only obey.'
- Group identity: 'The group always comes before the individual'; if you do not belong to the clan/tribe you will be treated with suspicion or, at best, not be taken seriously.
- A patriarchal mentality and a culture of shame: The woman has a reproductive function and must obey the male members of her family; failure to do so brings shame on the family.⁷⁴

Here we find the classic Orientalist theme of timelessness, abstraction and uniformity. From the skyscrapers in Istanbul and Teheran to the villages in rural Pakistan and Somalia, from the Indonesian archipelago to Muslim immigrants on the European mainland: there is a single, unchanging Islamic 'religious-cultural identity' that can be

⁶⁹ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 275).

⁷⁰ 'Very few Muslims are actually capable of looking at their faith critically. Critical minds like those of Afshin Ellian in the Netherlands and Salman Rushdie in England are exceptions.' (Hirsi Ali, 2006b, p. 32)

⁷¹ Oostveen (2002).

⁷² Hirsi Ali (2002).

⁷³ Lewis (2002).

⁷⁴ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 46).

known in the abstract. 'The Islamic identity (view of mankind and the world),' Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes, 'is based on groups, and its central concepts are honour and disgrace, or shame.'⁷⁵ The principal group is the family and then the clan. Describing the whole of Islam as a 'premodern mentality', Hirsi Ali states that it closely resembles the General Human Pattern (GHP), an ideal type of premodern societies as formulated by the Dutch historian Jan Romein. 'The GHP mind,' she writes, 'thinks in a particular way: concrete rather than abstract: it resorts to images rather than concepts.'⁷⁶ For this type of person, conscious organization and planning play a much less important role than in modern societies. In the GHP-mind, power and authority are absolute and unassailable. Anyone who opposes the authorities is punished. Finally we learn that work is not perceived as a blessing but as a curse and an imposition. Rephrasing the above in a more blunt manner, Hirsi Ali argues that Muslims are by their very nature primitive, unintelligent, submissive, uncritical and lethargic. As Said observed decades before in *Orientalism*, whereas it is no longer possible to write these types of learned disquisitions on 'the Negro mind' or the 'Jewish personality', with regard to Muslims, such preconceptions are still oddly acceptable.⁷⁷

A further problem arises in the eyes of Hirsi Ali, since the values of traditional Islam collide with the principal norms and values of Dutch society. Not assimilating to the values of the receiving society, clinging to the norms of the culture of origin, would explain 'for a large part' the socio-economic backwardness that Muslims in the Netherlands suffer from. Hirsi Ali frames integration as essentially a socio-cultural problem, a view that came to dominate the Dutch integration debate. The 'cultural expressions of the majority of Muslims' in the Netherlands, we learn, 'are still at a premodern stage of development'.⁷⁸ Hirsi Ali then applies the Orientalist scheme of Lewis and Pryce-Jones to Dutch Muslims, whose culture she similarly defines in terms of hierarchy, group loyalty and patriarchy. Of course, it is one thing to argue that the norms and values of a Muslim immigrant coming from a village in the countryside of Turkey or Morocco are traditional. It is another thing altogether, however, to argue that Muslims are traditional by nature, due to their timeless 'religious-cultural identity'. By retracing traditionalism to an unchanging Koran that even affects the culture of non-practicing Muslims, Hirsi Ali casts Muslims as inherently backward and inferior. Culture here is no longer a dynamic process; it acquires a static quality, similar to racial stereotypes.

Drawing on Pryce-Jones, Hirsi Ali's reasoning concerning the inherent 'backwardness' and traditionalism of Islam revolves around its connection with tribal norms. The argument is as follows: the Koran consists of a set of rules that are adopted from tribal customs, specifically designed to organize the tribes in a coherent tribal system. Warring tribes were convinced to accept laws assuaging them to direct their animosity to unbelievers, leading to Islam's inherently expansionist character and its hostility to

⁷⁵ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 47).

⁷⁶ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 48-49).

⁷⁷ Said (1978, p. 262).

⁷⁸ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 56).

the West. Tribal values are thus ingrained in the Koran, reproducing premodern practices, even in modern urban societies: 'the ideas and traditions of Muhammad's tribal society are adopted straight into the industrial and urban society of today.'⁷⁹

Is there any way out of this vicious circle for Muslims? Hirsi Ali wavers between Lewis and Pryce-Jones. She is appreciative of Lewis' argument that either the lack of secularism or the patriarchal nature of Arab societies is responsible for their backwardness. Muslims can undertake the painful process of modernization once they 'relinquish their most substantial values'.⁸⁰ Pryce-Jones on the other hand, believes that secularism and other Western developments cannot be truly understood by people living in an eternal tribal society. Ayaan Hirsi Ali chose Lewis' vision, critiquing the Islamist idea of emancipation and equating emancipation with the escape from religious community:

[E]mancipation doesn't mean the liberation of the community of the faithful or its safeguarding from the power of evil outside forces, such as colonialism, capitalism, the Jews and the Americans. It means the liberation of the individual from that same community of the faithful.⁸¹

Finally, she concludes her article in the yearbook of the social democrat think tank by proposing to 'interpret the concept of "integration" as a process of civilization for groups of Muslim immigrants living in Western societies', and so 'render superfluous the pseudo-debate about the equality of cultures'.⁸² Here, the colonial 'civilizing mission' is turned inwardly, towards the immigrants in the West. Considering integration to be a process of civilization is also good for the immigrants themselves since it allows them to 'develop an awareness of their level of achievement in relation to others', and to 'see that in order to progress they need to behave according to the values and standards of their newly adopted home country'.⁸³ Making immigrants aware of their inferiority and backwardness will make them happier to adjust.

Stark contradictions

Tactically choosing to adopt the Orientalist imaginary of Islam, instead of describing modern-day Muslim reality, Ayaan Hirsi Ali had to work around a set of stark contradictions from the outset. In the essay *Why Can't We Take a Critical Look at Ourselves?*, published in the neoconservative opinion section of newspaper *Trouw* in March 2002, Ayaan Hirsi Ali uses the father of Mohammed Atta, the lead organizer of the 9/11 attacks, as a metaphor for the state of the Islamic world. Confronted with the terrible acts of his son, the father enters a state of denial, blaming everyone – the Jews, the CIA – but his son. That father, Hirsi Ali argues, is like Islam: his offspring is Islamic

⁷⁹ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 52).

⁸⁰ Hirsi Ali (2006b, pp. 52-53).

⁸¹ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 32).

⁸² Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 56).

⁸³ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 56).

radicalism, but he denies his responsibility. Like the father of Mohammed Atta who was wholly unaware of the dark streak in his son, Muslims refuse to see the dark and violent side of their religion. At this point the reader stumbles on a large contradiction. If Islam is really a deeply communal, patriarchal and authoritarian culture where loyalty to one's family and clan comes first, then Mohammed Atta not only rebelled against his father, the patriarch of the family; he rebelled against Islam. If power and authority are absolute and unassailable for the 'primitive' minds of Muslims, as Hirsi Ali has written before, then what explains the revolt of Islamic fundamentalism against the Islamic status quo, sidelining the clerics, killing Sadat and denouncing the Saudi monarchy?

Another important contradiction concerns Muslims' lack of knowledge about the Koran. How can contemporary Muslim life be completely determined by the Koran, when the average Muslim 'does little with his faith', and 'knows little of the Koran'?⁸⁴ According to Hirsi Ali 'most Muslims never delve into theology', and 'rarely read the Koran'; 'it is taught in Arabic, which most Muslims can't speak.'⁸⁵ Here, Hirsi Ali wrestles with what Said has described as the second dogma of Orientalism: the notion that abstractions about the orient based on ancient texts, are preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern realities. She resolves that problem by introducing a tautology: 'for many non-practicing Muslims, the essence of their identity and the system of values and morals by which they live remain Islamic.'⁸⁶ Moroccan and Turkish immigrants have somehow assimilated the seventh-century tribal values embedded in the Koran, which are 'adopted straight into the industrial and urban society of today', without ever having had contact with the text itself.

The most delicate question however, is whether Hirsi Ali also used these Oriental motifs to frame the story of her own brutal and traditionalist upbringing. Critics have suggested that there is a tendency in her writing to 'exoticise and Islamicise' her Somalian background.⁸⁷ Accusations of lies and deceit regarding an earlier fake story she concocted to enter the Netherlands as a refugee, continue to haunt her later writing as well. Most notably, a Dutch television documentary raised a series of doubts concerning her life story.⁸⁸ First of all, did Hirsi Ali really escape to the Netherlands because of a forced marriage and the fear of an honour killing by her family, as Hirsi Ali had told the Dutch public? The people Ayaan Hirsi Ali had stayed with in the

⁸⁴ Hirsi Ali, (2007, p. 450).

⁸⁵ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 272).

⁸⁶ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 44).

⁸⁷ Bosch (2008, p. 143).

⁸⁸ The documentary attempted to fact-check the story that Hirsi Ali had told of her flight to the Netherlands, leading to a famous incident around the fake name and story that Hirsi Ali invented to enter the Netherlands as a political refugee. When her officially reported name was shown as false in a Dutch documentary, it became the reason for the hard-line Minister of Immigration Rita Verdonk to revoke Hirsi Ali's Dutch passport. Since Ayaan Hirsi Ali was at the time MP of the same party as Verdonk, the right-wing liberal party VVD, it led to a political crisis and the fall of the second Balkenende cabinet in 2006. Ayaan Hirsi Ali became a victim of the anti-immigrant agenda of the party she herself had been MP of, resulting in her departure to the US. For our purposes here, this affair is not that significant. Ayaan Hirsi Ali had been quite open about the fact that she had lied about her name and country of provenance in her asylum procedure, and she had understandable reasons to do so.

Netherlands during her asylum procedure raise legitimate doubts; her family and Somalian acquaintances have denied knowledge of the entire practice of honour killings. Second, on a Dutch television programme, Ayaan Hirsi Ali explained that she was absent during her own wedding, because a woman's presence was not required in Islam. Confronted with opposite testimonies from her family in the documentary claiming she was present, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is shown in the documentary rejecting these as lies, part of what she called the Islamic honour-shame complex. Not long after, however, Hirsi Ali quietly changed her story and in the narrative of her autobiography *Infidel* she is present at her wedding.⁸⁹

Third, in her writing, Ayaan Hirsi Ali depicts her mother as a deeply traditional and religious figure, who 'flourished' in Saudi Arabia, 'a country with such a strict religious climate' and did not want her and her sister to attend school: 'we were going to be married off in a few years anyway, so what good would all that knowledge be to us?'⁹⁰ In the documentary, the very opposite is told by her brother: her mother did not want her to marry too early, before finishing her university education. A university-educated woman would be more independent in case of a divorce. The documentary shows how Hirsi Ali was sent to one of the best schools in Kenya, and her brother was sent to a Christian school, because the education was better there. The mother's purported concern about divorce is understandable, since she divorced Hirsi Ali's father when Hirsi Ali was twelve, because of his long absences. This, of course, in clear violation of the religious culture sketched by Hirsi Ali: 'To maximize their potential as producers of sons, girls are taught from early on always to conform – to God, to their father and brothers, to the family, to the clan. The better a woman seems at this, the more virtuous she is thought to be. You should always be patient, even when your husband demands the most dreadful things of you. You will be rewarded for this in the hereafter.'⁹¹ Which is all the more surprising, considering that these codes were supposedly strictly observed by Hirsi Ali's family: 'Islam dominated the lives of our family and relations down to the smallest detail. It was our ideology, our political conviction, our moral standard, our law, and our identity. We were first and foremost Muslim and only then Somali.'⁹²

The motivation to raise these issues is not to challenge or downplay the seriousness of the mistreatment Ayaan Hirsi Ali is said to have experienced. The pertinent question here is how much of her experiences can be explained by the Orientalist ideas that Hirsi Ali has used to frame her history. Hirsi Ali seems to consciously confound traditional habits of Somali tribal culture with Islam as a religion. And it is unclear to what degree her life story conforms to either. Having grown up with divorced parents, and considering her father's relatively modern ideas in some areas at least, her personal life seems far more complex, multilayered and contradictory than her representation of it.

⁸⁹ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 176).

⁹⁰ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 137).

⁹¹ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 74).

⁹² Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. ix).

To quote the remarks of the Dutch feminist scholar Bosch in her sharp analysis of *Infidel*:

Did she not choose herself to wear the hijab and to attend meetings of the Muslim Brotherhood, even though one of her housemates regarded her mode of dress as ‘a complete joke’ and fellow students avoided her as a ‘religious freak in a black tent’? Did she not have a whole line of boyfriends in spite of this, including an imam she used to kiss in secret after prayers? And how many self-confident and independent aunts and female cousins are not featured in the book, who – like her mother in fact – first build up independent lives of their own, marry, get divorced on their own initiative, and sometimes remarry and sometimes not. Even her relationship with her father and brother is not unequivocal, and her account certainly does not give the impression that they tried hard to restrict her freedom.⁹³

5.5 A close reading of *Infidel*

These contradictions come to a head in *Infidel*, where Hirsi Ali’s personal experiences openly contradict the views she adopted from Bernard Lewis. The paradoxical nature of fundamentalist Islam, as described by Roy, a modernizing break with tradition that represents itself as a return to tradition, is also to be found in Hirsi Ali’s autobiography:

A new kind of Islam was on the march. It was much deeper, much clearer and stronger – much closer to the source of the religion – than the old kind of Islam my grandmother believed in, along with her spirit ancestors and djinns. It was not like the Islam in the mosques, where imams mostly recited by memory old sermons written by long-dead scholars, in an Arabic that barely anyone could understand. It was not a passive, mostly ignorant, acceptance of the rules: Insh’Allah, ‘God wills it.’ It was about studying the Koran, really learning about it, getting to the heart of the nature of the Prophet’s message. It was a huge evangelical sect backed massively by Saudi Arabian oil wealth and Iranian martyr propaganda. It was militant, and it was growing. And I was becoming a very small part of it.⁹⁴

Of course, the very notion of a ‘new’ kind of Islam, contradicts her earlier Orientalist statement that Islam is ‘an unchanging, fossilized culture’.⁹⁵ In *Infidel*, Hirsi Ali inadvertently stresses the innovative, modernizing aspects of fundamentalist Islam, the break with old traditions and existing forms of religiosity: ‘Traditional ways of practicing Islam had become corrupted, diluted with ancient beliefs that should no longer have currency.’⁹⁶ Fundamentalist Islam represents a break with the quietist passivity of mainstream Islam:

⁹³ Bosch (2008, p. 143).

⁹⁴ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 88).

⁹⁵ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 153).

⁹⁶ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 215).

We were not like the passive old school, for whom Islam meant a few rules and more or less devoutly observed rituals, and who interlaced their Koran with tribal customs and magical beliefs in amulets and spirits. We were God's shock troops.⁹⁷

She writes about her immersion in political Islam:

We read Hasan al-Banna, who set up the Society of Muslim Brothers to oppose the rise of Western ideas in the lands of Islam and promote a return to the Islam of the Prophet. We read Sayyid Qutb, another Egyptian, who said preaching was not enough, that we must stage a catastrophic revolution to establish the kingdom of God on Earth. We thrilled to new movements called Akhwan (Brotherhood) and Tawheed (the Straight Path); they were small groups of true believers, as we felt ourselves to be. This was the True Islam, this harking back to the purity of the Prophet⁹⁸

Many of Olivier Roy's observations concerning the modern character – in the sociological sense – of political Islam can also be found in Hirsi Ali's writing. The we-form that Ayaan Hirsi Ali employs in the quotations above refers to an Islamic debating group in a local neighbourhood centre in Nairobi that Hirsi Ali joins in her late teens. The group consists mostly of highly educated urban Pakistani and Somalian youth, dressed in western clothing. They were 'dissatisfied with the intellectual level of the teaching at the madrassahs', and Hirsi Ali portrays them as 'very bright, deeply committed older students'. Whereas in the mosque, sermons were often just a recitation of old texts in Arabic, here the debates were in English, they 'were lively, and often clever, as well as much more relevant to our lives than the mosque'.⁹⁹ An image that raises questions about Hirsi Ali's earlier claim that Muslims are not allowed to debate their religion. It corresponds with how Roy describes the religious revival in the 1970s and 1980s, the emergence of which is a consequence of the disembedding of Islam from the local, traditional culture.¹⁰⁰

Hirsi Ali writes disparagingly of the local Islamic traditions of believers who 'interlaced their Koran with tribal customs' and points to the 'universal character' of the Brotherhood: 'In contrast to the clan warfare of Somalia, the Brotherhood seemed to have a more universal character because it included people of every clan.'¹⁰¹ Here the Brotherhood's Islamism seems to go against the very clan culture that Hirsi Ali has argued to be quintessential to Islam. It is in line with Roy's argument, that Islamist radicals are westernized youth who now see the Islam as a universal and global phenomenon, decoupled from local traditions. The loss of cultural identity – 'the old

⁹⁷ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 220).

⁹⁸ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 108).

⁹⁹ Hirsi Ali (2007).

¹⁰⁰ Roy (2007, p. vi).

¹⁰¹ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 136).

Islam my grandmother believed in,' in the words of Hirsi Ali – is the condition for the rise of new forms of fundamentalism.

The modern aspects – on an intellectual level – of the Islamism of Sayyid Qutb and the Muslim Brotherhood are also present in the writing of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. There is the dismissal of the authority of the mosques and existing Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), described as 'old sermons written by long-dead scholars'. There is the aversion to Arabic and the idea of studying the Koran independently in modern languages: 'I bought my own English edition of the Koran and read it so I could understand it better.'¹⁰² There is the notion of 'a catastrophic revolution', alien to the Islamic tradition, and closer to Lenin than Mohammed. There is the ideal of Islam as a universal government, to be realized not by God, but by the movement itself: 'Our goal was a global Islamic government, for everyone.' There is the idea of a revolutionary vanguard, which we see expressed in terms like 'small groups of true believers' and 'God's shock troops', and finally there's the radical Islamist distinction between 'active' and 'passive' Muslims and the 'true' and 'untrue' faith, when she describes their intention 'to awaken passive Muslims to the call of the true, pure belief'.¹⁰³

At the same time, Hirsi Ali stays true to the theme of the return to the source, the notion of a pure Islam. In her autobiography, Sister Aziza tells the teenager Hirsi Ali that it is 'not permitted for one second to imagine that perhaps the Koran's words could be adapted to a modern era. The Koran had been written by God, not by men.' Surprisingly, Hirsi Ali seems to agree with this statement. At times, a more sceptical tone is present in the text. When Hirsi Ali for example writes how 'the Muslim Brotherhood believed that there was a pure, original Islam to which we all should return'.¹⁰⁴ Or when she describes how 'the Islam that we were imbibing stemmed from the hard, essentialist beliefs of thinkers seeking to revive the original Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and His disciples in the seventh century'.¹⁰⁵ Her scepticism is even more explicit in *The Caged Virgin*, where she writes of 'a return to a largely imaginary past as occurred in the Iranian Revolution and in other fundamentalist movements and regimes in Muslim countries'.¹⁰⁶ In these passages, Hirsi Ali seems to be conscious of the fact that the appeal to a return to a true, pure Islam, needs be taken with a few grains of salt.

Nothing of that scepticism remains, however, when Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes about her response to 9/11 in a later chapter of *Infidel*. It is the assault on the Twin Towers, we learn, that gave the decisive impetus for her break with her belief. The attacks on the World Trade Center took place in the period that Hirsi Ali worked at the Wiarda Beckman Foundation, the think tank of the Dutch social democrats (PvdA). She recounts how she exits the train, on the morning of the attacks, heading for the office. En route, she encounters Ruud Koole, then party chairman, who asks her why

¹⁰² Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 104).

¹⁰³ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 109).

¹⁰⁴ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 105).

¹⁰⁵ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 108).

¹⁰⁶ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 51).

everybody seems to connect Islam with the attacks, when it is nothing but a 'lunatic fringe'.¹⁰⁷ Ayaan Hirsi Ali answers: 'This is Islam' and recounts her thoughts, walking into the office as having 'to wake these people up'.¹⁰⁸ When she describes the letter from Mohammed Atta with the instructions to the hijackers, how they are to die as good Muslims, she recognizes it as originating in the fundamentalist movement she herself had been part of. She concludes: 'This was not just Islam, this was the core of Islam.'¹⁰⁹

Hirsi Ali ties the attacks to fundamentalist Islam, and proceeds to present that as 'genuine' Islam: 'Every devout Muslim who aspired to practice genuine Islam – the Muslim Brotherhood Islam, the Islam of the Medina Koran schools – even if they did not actively support the attacks, they must at least have approved of them.'¹¹⁰ The former is not only untrue, for someone like Hirsi Ali, familiar with the Muslim Brotherhood, it should be easy to corroborate. On the fourteenth of September 2001, the following communiqué was published. Its signatories included leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Sudan, Syria and Jordan, Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami, Palestine's Hamas movement, Tunisia's Nahda movement, Malaysia's PAS, Indonesia's PKS, Morocco's PJD, and scholars from al-Azhar University:

The undersigned, leaders of Islamic movements, are horrified by the events of Tuesday 11 September 2001 in the United States which resulted in massive killing, destruction and attack on innocent lives. We express our deepest sympathies and sorrow. We condemn, in the strongest terms, the incidents, which are against all human and Islamic norms. This is grounded in the Noble Laws of Islam which forbid all forms of attacks on innocents. God Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an: 'No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another' (Surah al-Isra 17:15).¹¹¹

But Hirsi Ali goes even further: it is scripture and not Bin Laden that is responsible for the attacks: 'The Prophet Muhammad was the moral guide, not Bin Laden, and it was the Prophet's guidance that should be evaluated.'¹¹² She mentions seeing interviews with Bin Laden, and she is impressed by his references to the Koran, such as 'You who believe, do not take the Jews and Christians as friends; they are allies only to each other. Anyone who takes them as an ally becomes one of them.'¹¹³ She then describes finding these quotations in the Koran: 'I didn't want to do it, but I had to: I picked up the Koran and the Hadith and started looking through them, to check. I hated to do it, because I knew that I would find Bin Laden's quotations in there, and I didn't want to question God's word.'¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 268).

¹⁰⁸ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 268).

¹⁰⁹ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 269).

¹¹⁰ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 270).

¹¹¹ Cited in: Wiktorowicz and Kaltner (2003, p. 77).

¹¹² Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 271).

¹¹³ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 271).

¹¹⁴ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 271).

The problem is that the interpretation of the Koran does not function like that. It is not like the Bible or the Gospels, it does not tell a readily understandable story of a person or a people. While the Koran alludes to stories, events and situations that occurred during the time of its inception in Mecca and Medina, it does not provide that context to its readers.¹¹⁵ To understand the meaning of a verse in the Koran, it is necessary to understand what particular historical situation statements in the Koran refer to. The verse cited above by Bin Laden, for example, refers to a religious conflict in Mohammed's time, in which some Muslims in Medina were considering siding with Jewish tribes. Only when Bin Laden can make clear that the present situation is comparable to that of Medina during the time of Mohammed, does the above quote have relevance. And that is widely contested by other Muslim scholars. It is very unlikely that Hirsi Ali, having studied the Koran herself, is unfamiliar with that basic exegetic logic.

Yet, in her biography she seems convinced that quotations from the Koran can be taken literally: 'All these statements that Bin Laden and his people quote from the Koran to justify the attacks – I looked them up; they are there. If the Koran is timeless, then it applies to every Muslim today.'¹¹⁶ 'Did the 9/11 attacks stem from true belief in true Islam?', Hirsi Ali asks rhetorically.¹¹⁷ The answer is clearly confirmative. It is difficult not to wonder whether she *really* believes that. In other parts of her writing she criticizes the people who 'interpret the holy texts' in a 'literal vein', blaming the number of Islamic 'word-Nazis' for the sad state of women in Islam. She associates the literalist reading with fundamentalist Islam.¹¹⁸ One can only guess that to retaliate against Islam, she has decided to become a 'word-Nazi' too, and pretend the fundamentalists are right and that it is possible to take the Koran literally.

The consequence of Hirsi Ali's assumed literalist position is that she opposes any reform of Islam that centres on interpretation. Edward Said described this paradox succinctly: 'If Islam is flawed from the start by virtue of its permanent disabilities, the Orientalist will find himself opposing any Islamic attempts to reform Islam, because, according to his views, reform is a betrayal of Islam.'¹¹⁹ Likewise, Hirsi Ali has voiced her opposition to a reform of the interpretation of Islam: 'I have read books written by Muslim "feminists" who seek to reinterpret the Koran... Yet the works of these so-called moderate interpreters of the Muslim faith are not helpful in their attempt to present a moderate Islam.'¹²⁰ She pleads to finally reject the idea that scripture is sacred, and take out entire parts of the text, since the literal text itself is the real culprit:

What is striking about this tortuous struggle to reinterpret Muslim scripture is that none of these intelligent and well-meaning men and women reformers can live with

¹¹⁵ Mourad (2014).

¹¹⁶ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 273).

¹¹⁷ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 271).

¹¹⁸ Hirsi Ali (2006b, p. 160, p. 171).

¹¹⁹ Said (1978, p. 106).

¹²⁰ Hirsi Ali (2010a, p. 196).

the idea of rejecting altogether the troublesome parts of scripture. Thus, in their hands, Allah becomes a God of ambiguity rather than of clarity.¹²¹

In reality, the Koran is full of ambiguities, like any religious text. Clarity resides in the mind of the fundamentalists. Ayaan Hirsi Ali unambiguously sides with the fundamentalist interpretation of Islam:

Fundamentalists do not take kindly to these attempts to reshape the Holy Koran into a modern document; to them, this is a clear degradation of God and Muhammad. And here, I believe, the fundamentalists win, because they are not suffering from what psychologists call cognitive dissonance.¹²²

In a prominent debate on Swedish television with the Swiss Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan, grandchild of Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, Hirsi Ali responds in a similar manner to his proposal that the Prophet Mohammad should not be followed to the letter:

In order not to be fundamentalist, that would require the Muslims living in Europe, or anywhere else, that the prophet should not be followed to the letter today. That is in the ideal reformed Islam. Let's say Ramadan's dream. To me, that is a picture of wishful thinking. It is Islam as it should be. Islam as we want it to be. Or dreaming it to be. But then there is Islam as it is today.¹²³

The recurring essentialist qualifications in Hirsi Ali's autobiography *Infidel* – true Islam, the core of Islam, pure Islam, genuine Islam, timeless Islam, the source of the Islam, the essence of Islam, the real Islam – are deeply significant. Take the following passage:

I first encountered the *full strength* of Islam as a young child in Saudi Arabia. It was very different from the *diluted* religion of my grandmother, which was mixed with magical practices and pre-Islamic beliefs. Saudi Arabia is the *source* of Islam and its *quintessence*. It is the place where the Muslim religion is practiced in its *purest* form, and it is the *origin* of much of the fundamentalist vision that has, in my lifetime, spread far beyond its borders.¹²⁴

Hirsi Ali is aware that these fundamentalist views originate from the *Sahwa* mentioned before, the religious revival in the 1970s and 1980s that she became part of, a combination of Islamism and Wahhabism. She presents the fundamentalist perspective as the timeless essence of the entire Islamic religion. Here it is useful to return to Olivier Roy's remark that Islamic fundamentalism is a movement that denies its own

¹²¹ Hirsi Ali (2010a).

¹²² Hirsi Ali (2010a, p. 197).

¹²³ From the debate organized by Forum Axaess, aired on Swedish television in 2006. See: *Global Axaess* (2013).

¹²⁴ Hirsi Ali (2007, pp. 675-676). Italics mine.

historicity. Hirsi Ali uses that myth of timelessness as a weapon against her former religion.

The curious result of sticking to the idea of a literalist interpretation is that Hirsi Ali in all of her writing, rarely ever mentions religious authorities that *have* delved into theology and *have* read the Koran. In the Netherlands, a remarkable culture of amateur Koran study has emerged, of which right-wing figures such as Geert Wilders, Hans Jansen and Ayaan Hirsi Ali serve as the standard-bearers. For a serious study of Islamic religion, the literal reading has to be rejected. The only way to understand the Koran is by ascertaining how it has been interpreted by Muslim scholars throughout history. If we look at the contemporary situation, it becomes clear that while Islam as a massive, diverse and complex world religion is not necessarily peaceful and tolerant, the generalizations of Ayaan Hirsi Ali are untenable.

In 1982, Jad al-Haq, then sheik of the theological university Al-Azhar (the highest religious authority of Egypt), declared a fatwa against the radical Islamists and more importantly, the notion that unbelievers could be killed. It derived from a bad interpretation of the Koran. Al-Qaradawi, an important Egyptian cleric and Al Jazeera television figure with strong links to the Muslim Brotherhood, has rejected the attacks on 9/11 and the aggressive stance against Christians and Jews amongst radical Islamists. To be clear, Al-Qaradawi is no apostle of peace. He condones suicide attacks against Israel, since Israel is deemed not to have a civilian population, seeing that every citizen is a reservist that can be called upon to serve in the military. Al-Qaradawi quotes verse 8:62 from the Koran: 'But if they incline to peace, you also incline to it, and (put your) trust in Allah.' The most important religious authority of Saudi Arabia at the time, Great Mufti 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn 'Abd Allah Ibn Baz condemned the 9/11 attacks as 'a form of injustice that cannot be tolerated by Islam, which views them as gross crimes and sinful acts'. And he rejected what he called the 'innovations' (*bida*) of Qutb, derived from a lack of knowledge concerning religious jurisprudence and interpretation of the Koran.¹²⁵ Even if Qutb's radical ideas still inspire sizable numbers of Muslims today, few are convinced that even his most radical ideas allow the methods of Al Qaida and IS. The killing of innocents, for example, is not allowed according to Qutb's interpretation of the Koran.¹²⁶

Hirsi Ali follows in the footsteps of Bernard Lewis, by describing the friend-enemy logic employed by jihadists, and by subsequently equating Islamic jihadism with scripture as such. In this way, she portrays the whole of Islam as an enemy that needs to be vanquished. 'The greatest advantage of Huntington's civilizational model of international relations is that it reflects the world as it is – not as we wish it to be,' Hirsi Ali wrote in 2010 in an opinion piece in the *Wall Street Journal*.¹²⁷ 'It allows us to distinguish friends from enemies,' she added. The Schmittian friend-enemy distinction employed by Hirsi Ali closely mirrors the worldview of the 9/11 hijackers she had

¹²⁵ Calvert (2011, p. 287).

¹²⁶ Calvert (2011, p. 292).

¹²⁷ Hirsi Ali (2010b).

described in *Infidel*. 'Their world is divided between "Us" and "Them" – if you don't accept Islam you should perish.'¹²⁸

5.6 Conclusion

'She is black, but she thinks white,' the Dutch-Iranian scholar Halleh Ghorashi once wrote of Hirsi Ali, evoking Dabashi's argument in *Brown Skin, White Masks*. Ghorashi remarked that it 'wasn't the colour of her skin, but the colour of her arguments that mattered'.¹²⁹ In the spirit of Ghorashi's remarks, this chapter has sought to question an all too common perception of Hirsi Ali's writing, in which her views on Islam are seen as a direct expression of her personal experiences. In line with Mannheim's proposition that we never think in isolation, this chapter has sought to break with the seduction of 'the evidence of experience', by tracing Hirsi Ali's views to a broader ideological framework. Concretely, the chapter has offered a critical revision of her arguments by situating her views in relation to the two formative influences: the modern Islamist movement and US neoconservatism.

Hirsi Ali has described her life as a journey along the clash of civilizations. That journey is both physical and intellectual. There is a dramatized, staged quality to her life story, presented to us in stark contrasts between the modern, enlightened West and traditional, backward Islam. Her perspective on Islam rests on views adopted from the tradition of Western Orientalism, which leads to contradictions with her own life story as recounted in *Infidel*. The manifest similarities between the Western Orientalist and the Islamic fundamentalist perspective on Islam has allowed her to present the latter as the validation of the former. The work of Olivier Roy allows us to extract a markedly different perspective from Hirsi Ali's biography, in which the modernity that Islam supposedly lacks, is exactly the precondition for the rise of fundamentalist movements. Finally, Hirsi Ali's political views are shaped by the concerns of neoconservatism, and her writing can be seen as a biographical variant of Huntington's clash of civilizations theory, relying on a Schmittian friend-enemy distinction. Since Hirsi Ali's work is predicated on a necessarily hostile – and incompatible – relation between the West and Islam, she has little to offer in terms of solutions.

¹²⁸ Hirsi Ali (2007, p. 272).

¹²⁹ Ghorashi (2005).

Chapter 6

***GeenStijl* and the dawn of a conservative counterculture**

This was unlike the culture wars of the 60s or the 90s, in which a typically older age cohort of moral and cultural conservatives fought against a tide of cultural secularization and liberalism among the young. This online backlash was able to mobilize a strange vanguard of teenage gamers, pseudonymous swastika-posting anime lovers, ironic South-Park conservatives, anti-feminist pranksters, nerdish harassers and meme-making trolls whose dark humour and love of transgression for its own sake made it hard to know what political views were genuinely held and what were merely, as they used to say, for the lulz. What seemed to hold them all together in their obscurity was a love of mocking the earnestness and moral self-flattery of what felt like a tired liberal intellectual conformity.

Angela Nagle¹

The basis of *GeenStijl* remains lol.

Johnny Quid²

No analysis of the rightward turn in Dutch society can be complete without considering the effervescent movement of ‘keyboard warriors’ populating the internet. The wave of anti-establishment sentiment that brought Pim Fortuyn to political stardom happened to coincide with the emergence of the internet as a prominent factor in shaping public opinion. The Dutch blogosphere became the natural habitat of a peculiar conservative counterculture that took the country by storm in the decade to come. A key role in that development was reserved for a controversial weblog called *GeenStijl* (literally: No Style). It quickly developed into the flagship of the Dutch right-wing blogosphere and continues to be influential today. Its editors combine irony with derisive attacks on the Dutch political and media establishment, amid a flurry of sexist and racist jokes, all with the professed larger aim of mocking Dutch decency and political correctness. With between half and one-and-a-half million of unique visits a month, the internet juggernaut serves a significant part of the Dutch population of seventeen million. It can claim the downfall of a minister, the establishment of its own public television

¹ Nagle (2017, p. 10).

² Quid (2012).

franchise, and a successful campaign for a national political referendum on an association treaty between the EU and the Ukraine. All in all, no minor feats.

From an international viewpoint, *GeenStijl* is perhaps best described as a Dutch forerunner to the American alt-right. This radical-right online movement quickly acquired international fame due to its prominent role in Donald Trump's campaign in the 2016 elections. As outlined in Angela Nagle's *Kill All Normies*, the American alt-right is known for its online jargon, its weaponisation of irony, its love of transgression for its own sake and its peculiar relation to the counterculture of the 1960s.³ As we will see, the online subculture surrounding the weblog *GeenStijl* contains many striking similarities to the American alt-right. Yet there are also significant differences. *GeenStijl* emerged more than a decade earlier, in a very different context. Its political orientation is arguably more mainstream than its American counterpart, which contains, by its own admission, openly extreme right and neo-Nazi strands. *GeenStijl* prefers to ridicule the Dutch extreme right as *kaalkopjes* (baldies).

Two dominant frames have served to explain the emergence of *GeenStijl* and the Dutch online counterculture. On the one hand, there is the more technological determinist view, which maintains that the medium is the message. It sees phenomenon like *GeenStijl* as a logical expression of a new generation formed by the conventions of the internet. The nihilism and cynicism of *GeenStijl*, in this perspective, is 'a cultural spin-off from blogging software' and the 'techno-mentality of users'.⁴ On the other hand, there is the cultural pessimist view that portrays *GeenStijl* as part of a broader societal trend of declining manners and increasing impudence. Drawing on a larger tradition of mass culture theory, this explanation focuses on the declining confidence of Dutch elites and the crisis in morality caused by consumer capitalism.

Both of these perspectives fail to see an important fact: *GeenStijl*'s powerful and effective countercultural assault on the *Gutmensch* draws on a prominent and long-established Dutch intellectual and literary tradition.⁵ The cultural critique popularized by *GeenStijl* cannot be properly understood if we assume that it simply oozed out of the 'digital underbelly'.⁶ Instead, the argument put forward in this chapter is that the cultural critique of *GeenStijl* cannot be reduced to the impact of technology, nor does it derive from the moral degeneration of the lower classes. Rather, it stems from the upper strata: its origins lie in the very cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s that *GeenStijl* so effectively vilifies. What follows is an attempt to situate the phenomenon of *GeenStijl* in this larger intellectual *Umfeld*. In so doing, the analysis serves to illustrate the complex backlash thesis and the broader argument concerning the manifold, often contradictory manifestations of anti-establishment conservatism.

³ Quid (2012). See also: Wilson (2017).

⁴ Lovink (2007, pp. 12-13).

⁵ *Gutmensch* is a sarcastic insult referring to someone who dogmatically seeks to impose morality on others. As shown by the Austrian political scientist Katrin Auer, the term *Gutmensch* – often traced back to the philosophy of Nietzsche – emerged in the 1990s in Germany and Austria as part of the larger radical right opposition to 'political correctness'. There is no apparent equivalent in the American debates and the English language. See: Auer (2002).

⁶ For the Dutch debate on the *Gutmensch*, see: De Vries (2008); Kleinpaste (2015); Kraak (2015).

6.1 *GeenStijl*: Tendentious, unfounded and needlessly offensive

Before turning to *GeenStijl* proper, it is necessary to highlight the polarized context in which the weblog was first established. While optimistic views concerning the democratizing potential of digital technology resonated loudly in the 1990s, following the events of 9/11, a darker strain of online culture came to the fore. The digital domain, due to its accessibility, anonymity and libertarian ethos, turned out to be an ideal refuge for extremist and violent views. After the assassination of Fortuyn in 2002, the internet functioned as an outlet for pent up emotions and antagonism. Extremist views concerning Islam, minorities and asylum-seekers were vented online by various shades of right-wing populists, extremists and neo-nationalists. At the other end, a number of Muslim immigrant youth radicalized on the internet: an Amsterdam circle of jihadists organized online, translating texts, sharing video's and calls for jihad. As the sociologist Albert Benschop noted in a report for the multicultural foundation *Forum*, the internet played a vital role in the political polarization that resulted in the murder of the Dutch polemical columnist, filmmaker and *enfant terrible* Theo van Gogh in November 2004:

The rise of populist Fortuynism in the Netherlands went hand in hand with a strong hardening of the political debate and a coarsening in the style of discussion. It was difficult not to notice that many people who make use of the internet contributed to this polarized hardening. Many discussion forums have degenerated into refuges for people who deeply insult and slander each other, and even threaten each other with death.⁷

Around the same time, Theo van Gogh had set up his own website, *De Gezonde Roker* (The Healthy Smoker). Van Gogh prided himself on insulting as many people as possible, reserving particular scorn for Muslim immigrants. He perceived the internet as the only place where he could speak without censorship altogether. Unlike many other online authors however, Theo van Gogh did not write anonymously and quickly became the target of online hatred. In April 2004, four months before his assassination, Van Gogh was threatened with death on a forum site visited by Moroccan youth.⁸ Not for nothing, Benschop's report bears the title *Chronicle of a Political Murder Foretold*.

In this turbulent and polarized context, *GeenStijl* was born. The website's humble beginnings can be traced back to 2003, when it started out as a hobby project of Dominique Weesie, a journalist originally born in Rotterdam in a family of Christian entrepreneurs. At that point in time, Weesie still worked at the largest Dutch newspaper: the popular, lowbrow and right-leaning *Telegraaf*. The website *GeenStijl* first achieved prominence as a digital sinkhole, publishing news, videos and opinions that were deemed too controversial or simply unseemly by the conventions of ordinary journalism. Its initial popularity was built on reporting on leaked nude photos, small-

⁷ Cited in: Lovink (2007, p. xvi).

⁸ Lovink (2007, p. xvii).

town scandals, security footage of burglaries, celebrity gossip or personal videos of fighting couples, drunk students or a soccer player being anally pleased by his girlfriend. Anyone doing anything wildly embarrassing on video could end up on *GeenStijl*. A particular popular subject was small-time crime and public misbehaviour, more so when committed by non-white perpetrators. The weblog was no exception to a more general trend of the online world starting to function as both free state and virtual pillory.⁹

At the same time, *GeenStijl*'s peculiar style and rhetoric stood out from the beginning. The website became notorious for its ironical, cynical, hyperbolic and abusive language. Not for nothing, the motto of the blog, still prominently displayed on the site banner, reads: 'Tendentious, unfounded and needlessly offensive.' Over the years, *GeenStijl* developed its own political subculture, a special vernacular by now part of the cultural mainstream. Some of the internet slang coined by *GeenStijl* entered into common usage and eventually found its way to Dutch dictionaries. Another prominent element were the thousands of committed supporters of the website, described as *reaguurders* (a Dutch neologism, roughly equivalent to an internet troll), or *toetsenbordkrijgers* (keyboard warriors). They present the editors with scoops, help to manipulate internet polls, assist in digital investigations of theft and robberies, and more importantly: bombard the comment sections, Twitter accounts or contact forms of political opponents with remarks, insults and in the worst case, death threats. In some prominent cases, the *GeenStijl* editors published addresses and telephone numbers of the people they happened to disagree with, a technique known as doxxing, seen by many as a way of intimidating and silencing opponents.

Politically, both the editors of the website and its community of readers and commenters were deeply marked by the assassinations of Pim Fortuyn and especially that of Theo Van Gogh. As Dominique Weesie later explained in a prominent newspaper interview, *GeenStijl* functioned as a refuge of sorts for all those who were rendered politically homeless by the murders of Fortuyn and Van Gogh:

I don't want to be identified with anyone. But I don't deny that around Fortuyn something happened and that *GeenStijl* came to function as a sort of refuge. The murder of Theo van Gogh... that impacted me a lot. The comments on the site were so serious, at the time everybody was out of their minds for a while. We have had to close down the site for a period of time.¹⁰

Conspicuously absent from this personal account is the fact that Dominique Weesie had played a prominent role in this dynamic himself, calling for violence in the week after the murder of Van Gogh, under his digital alter ego Fleischbaum: 'No dialogue, it

⁹ Haberman (2016).

¹⁰ 'Ik wil met niemand worden vereenzelvigd. Ik ontken niet dat er rond Fortuyn iets is gebeurd, en dat *GeenStijl* daarin een soort opvangtehuis is geweest. De moord op Theo van Gogh... dat vond ik zo heftig. De reacties op de site waren zo ernstig, toen was iedereen even ontoerekeningsvatbaar. We hebben de site zelfs op slot moeten doen.' See: Heijmans (2011).

is time to avenge violence with violence. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!¹¹ After reopening the site, the editors adopted a policy of disassociating themselves both from (calls to) violence and from the Dutch extreme right, ridiculing Dutch neo-Nazis as 'baldies'. *GeenStijl* hired staff with the specific task of deleting comments that were deemed too violent or right-wing extremist.

As noted before, *GeenStijl* always had a community of followers populating the comment section of the site with their raucous remarks. But it is fair to say that after the assassination of Theo van Gogh, the website and its followers could increasingly be described in terms of a social movement. In short opinionated pieces and video reports, the editors campaigned on familiar Fortuynistic themes such as the threat of Islam, the problems of multiculturalism, the hypocrisy of Dutch political elites, the laxness of authorities and the need for law and order, the redundancy of what it called the 'reserve' of 'dead-tree' newspaper media and the incestuous nature of Dutch public broadcasting. For their online video-reports, *GeenStijl* perfected the technique of the ambush-interview. Its notoriously insolent reporters aimed to provoke, tease and embarrass. Following a couple of successful *GeenStijl* ambushes that grew out to become PR-disasters, Dutch politicians started receiving special training on how to deal with *GeenStijl*'s reporters, responding to provocations with a smile. Despite its cultivated style of unpredictability and irreverence, *GeenStijl* was soon seen as the voice of the Fortuyn revolt.

The weblog became the flagship of a rapidly growing armada of right-wing blogs in the Netherlands, and a central node in a tightly networked online conservative counterculture. The rallying cry of the movement was not *a las barricadas!*, but rather: 'to the comment sections!' In this way, *GeenStijl* managed to unlock the potential of a right-leaning segment of the electorate historically known for its political passivity. A demographic that never had been prone to demonstrate or engage in traditional forms of political activity. As newspapers increasingly took their content online, journalists who had never had a large audience talking back to them, were suddenly confronted with a virtual people in the comment sections. And an angry people at that: a vast audience of overwhelmingly right-wing commenters, voicing the by now familiar Fortuynistic talking points. In this way, the online world had a prominent role in contributing to the alarming sentiment that Dutch politics and media were hopelessly out of touch after the Fortuyn revolt, setting the scene for a broad rightward shift in public opinion in the years that followed.

Mirroring political developments, in particular the accommodation of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV), institutionalization of *GeenStijl* set in after 2010. *GeenStijl* had successfully campaigned for programming slots on Dutch public television, and some of its most successful columnists went on to write for national newspapers, or started their own opinion sites. In 2016, *GeenStijl* entered yet a new phase, launching and finally winning a controversial national referendum on an EU association treaty with Ukraine. What was once a marginal and rebellious boys club,

¹¹ Benschop (2005).

now became an established part of the opinion landscape. In the words of cultural studies godfather Raymond Williams, we could say that *GeenStijl* is an indispensable element of the 'structure of feeling' of the last decade.¹²

Technological determinism and cultural pessimism

To proceed with the analysis, a broader understanding is needed of the relationship between communication technology, cultural form and social change. The development of such a conception has been central to cultural studies and more specifically, the writing of Raymond Williams. It can be said that Raymond Williams and British cultural studies more generally, underwent a parallel development in relation to Marxism in the 1960s and 1970s as Mannheim's sociology of knowledge had in the 1930s. While underlining the relative autonomy of the cultural field, Williams analysed cultural artefacts by situating them in a larger historical, societal and economic context. Additionally, Raymond Williams had an extensive engagement with popular culture and new cultural forms mediated by technology.

His 1972 book *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* marked a seminal debate on the subject.¹³ Williams contrasted his approach to the technological determinism of McLuhan, who argued that the intrinsic formal properties of media such as type, print, radio and television were in and of themselves responsible for their social effects. At the same time, Williams distanced himself from cultural pessimism: the dismissive and often panick-ridden attitude of traditional cultural elites towards emerging technologies. In the mind of the pessimist, new technologies such as radio, television, and later the internet, were associated with the advent of mass man and mass culture, threatening both political stability and the established cultural forms administered by traditional intellectuals. In cultural studies, this perspective became known as the 'mass culture thesis'; it has been criticized for its one-dimensional conception of both 'the masses' and the effects of technology on the audience.¹⁴

The relevance of harkening back to Williams here is that technological determinism and cultural pessimism are the dominant frames in the Dutch debate on *GeenStijl*. Technological determinism expresses itself in the mainstream view that *GeenStijl* is somehow a natural expression of a new internet-savvy generation, commonly dubbed the '*GeenStijl*-generation'.¹⁵ It is expressed more poignantly by the well-known Dutch media theorist Geert Lovink, who describes *GeenStijl* as a logical result of blogging as a 'techno-social condition' leading to a 'nihilist impulse'.¹⁶ Cultural pessimism is to be found in the way prudent-progressive thinkers such as Dick Pels or Bas van Stokkum analyse *GeenStijl* as the quintessential form of so-called *verhuftering* (literally: boorification), a modern variation on the timeless intellectual theme of the moral

¹² The term 'structure of feeling' is inspired on Gramsci's concept of hegemony. It refers to a dominant formation of thought in a particular time and place that is dynamic, fragmented and not yet fully articulated, emerging in the gap between official policy documents and cultural texts. See: Williams (1977).

¹³ Williams (1990 [1974]).

¹⁴ Strinati (2004).

¹⁵ Sitalsing (2008).

¹⁶ Lovink (2012).

decline of the masses.¹⁷ According to Dick Pels, ‘the vitriolic tone of internet-trolls’ should be seen in connection with the ‘discontent of those left behind by society’, with ‘boorishness in traffic, and indecency in public space’.¹⁸ I will shortly expand on these two frames.

In his book *Zero Comments*, Lovink develops a helpful typology of blogging as technological form. It corresponds in his view to a period of massification of the internet at the end of the 1990s, made possible by automated software with user-friendly interfaces. A blog is defined as a frequent chronological publication of personal opinions and web links, often in response to the mainstream media. Bloggers position themselves on the borders of the news industry, framing and commenting on news rather than fully adopting the role of journalists themselves. In this way, Lovink argues convincingly, blogging transforms news from a lecture into a conversation and incorporates rumour and gossip, mixing the logic of public and private realms. *GeenStijl* is characterized by Lovink as the epitome of a radical subgenre of the blog, namely the ‘shocklog’ that ‘use shock and slander to sling mud at current affairs, public individuals and institutions’.¹⁹

For Lovink, the character of blogs is determined by a combination of software functionalities and the attitudes of the generation of early adopters, who go on to dominate the politics and aesthetics of a particular communication medium for decades after its emergence. Consequently the cynical and/or nihilist character of shocklogs such as *GeenStijl* is a logical outcome of blogging as a ‘techno-social condition’ described by Lovink in exceedingly McLuhanesque terms:

What is important to note is the *Zeitgeist* into which blogging as a mass practice emerged. Internet cynicism in this case is a cultural spin-off of blogging software, hardwired in a specific era; it is the result of procedures such as login, link, edit, create, browse, read, submit, tag and reply.²⁰

Proceeding to compare bloggers to the characters in Michel Houellenbecq’s work, who project their coldness and loneliness to the world, Lovink sees bloggers as driven by a ‘nihilist impulse’. There is the awareness that the hegemonic truths presented by the mainstream media have increasingly been undermined. Yet the revolution promised by new communication technology has never been fully realized. The certainty that the old, top-down media paradigm will be overthrown has dissipated, leading to nihilism. Lovink ends his analysis with a passionate defence of blogging: ‘As a micro-heroic, Nietzschean act of the pyjama people, blogging grows out of a nihilism of strength, not of out of the weakness of pessimism.’²¹

¹⁷ Van Stokkum (2010).

¹⁸ Pels (2009).

¹⁹ Lovink (2012, pp. 94-95).

²⁰ Lovink (2007, pp. 12-13).

²¹ Lovink (2007, p. 17).

Interesting enough, Lovink's analysis chimes with how *GeenStijl* went on to identify itself at a later point in time, as the expression of the 'cynicism' and 'modern nihilism' of the 'network generation'. In a 2012 column written by Van Rossem, the online moniker of *GeenStijl* editor Bart Nijman, he argued that the baby-boom generation had betrayed its own cultural revolution by wresting itself free from the Calvinistic mores of their parents, only to impose their own (failed) ideals on the generations after them. (Here we recognize the basic thesis of Herman Vuijsje's book *Correct*.) The transparency of the internet has burst the bubble of baby-boomer idealism, a generation whose high aspirations ended with prosaic concerns about lining their own pockets, culminating in cynicism. While the tendentious journalism of *GeenStijl* is described by the mainstream as 'aggressive' and 'indecent', and some discard it as 'modern nihilism', Nijman sees that as preferable to the baby-boomer's denial of reality. The older generations can blame the young for their lack of idealism and their failure to take to the streets in defence of a cause, but the network-generation has discovered that 'banners and mass demonstrations are powerless in the digital age':

The real protest is to be found on the internet, where boorish precision bombardments destroy the sacred totems called 'decency' and 'respect'. Only when these are fully obliterated, something new can arise from the ashes. The network-generation demonstrates, and does so non-violently, with verbal and digital cynicism.²²

This notion of a nihilist and cynical 'network-generation' fits seamlessly into how political change is commonly conceptualized in the Dutch consensual tradition: not as the uncertain outcome of a struggle for dominance between opposing ideological camps, but rather as a historical succession of generations, who somehow apolitically and spontaneously incarnate the *Zeitgeist* into which they are born and raised. There is no better way to advocate a certain political agenda in the Netherlands, than to give out that your politics is that of an entire young generation who embody the future. This generational narrative of *GeenStijl* is a self-aggrandizing origin myth, as any social movement is wont to manufacture. As we will see, the nihilism and cynicism of *GeenStijl* is neither principally a generational nor a technological phenomenon, but derives from an older, rather bookish tradition. Like any powerful politics, *GeenStijl* cleverly channels and reworks crucial aspects of Dutch post-war national myths and self-understanding.

Cultural pessimism: Boorification

A very different interpretation of *GeenStijl* is to be found among the cultural pessimists. According to this broad current of opinion, the shockblog is merely the most visible

²² 'Het echte protest vind je op internet, waar met hufterige precisiebombardementen heilige huisjes die "fatsoen" en "respect" heten worden gesloopt. Pas als die te gronde zijn gericht, kan er uit de as iets nieuws verrijzen. De netwerkgeneratie demonstreert dus wel, en bovendien gewelddoos, met verbaal en digitaal cynisme.' See: Van Rossem (2012).

exponent of a much larger societal trend. In the eyes of sociologist Dick Pels, the 'abusive language of internet trolls' should be seen in connection with the 'malaise of the societal discontents' and the 'boorishness in traffic and indecency in public space'.²³ The basic thesis in Dick Pels' 2009 manifesto against 'boorification', is that the excessive success of the individualistic and democratic ideals of the 1960s have led to an absence of social norms, a rampant egoism facilitated by commercialization and consumerism. This provided the breeding ground for the right-wing populist revolt. For Dick Pels, *GeenStijl* serves as illustration of the fact that the emancipation of the popular classes has simply gone too far:

In the Netherlands, a group of licentious and assertive citizens has emerged that think they have a right to everything, while they have little sense of solidarity, easily blame others for their own anxieties and failures, and overload the government with their demands, even though at the same time they deeply mistrust it. These new individualists with their 'big ego's' and 'mouthiness' comport themselves as citizen-kings whose opinions and desires simply need to be heard by politicians.²⁴

In an intriguing reversal of roles, Dick Pels, a card-carrying member of the Dutch left who served as the director of the think tank of the GreenLeft party, opposes emancipation and defends authority and moral order. While the right, in a rather unusual historical conjunction, becomes the voice of the disenfranchised, 'pseudo-conservatives' in Hofstadter's words, fighting against the established moral order. This role reversal can be explained by two different developments: on the one hand, the growing embourgeoisement of Dutch progressive politics since the 'cultural revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s, which contained from the very beginning a strong antipopular sentiment.²⁵ The central reference is Herbert Marcuse's portrait of the worker as a 'one-dimensional man', corrupted by consumerism.²⁶ In the Netherlands, Marcuse's analysis was taken up by the famous leftist writer Harry Mulisch in his novel *De Rattenkoning* (The King of the Rats).²⁷ It also inspired the activist Roel van Duijn, leader of the Provo's – the rebellious youth movement of the 1960s – and founder of the Dutch Greens. Both Mulisch and Van Duijn used the term *klootjesvolk* (± hoi polloi). The term was originally coined by the nineteenth century romantic poet Willem Kloos to signify the lower classes, those deemed merely suitable for reproducing themselves. Next to the paternalistic and conservative Dutch elites, the *klootjesvolk* was the main

²³ Pels (2009).

²⁴ 'Er is in Nederland een groep van vrijgevochten en assertieve burgers ontstaan die recht meent te hebben op alles, weinig gevoel heeft voor solidariteit buiten eigen huis en haard, anderen gemakkelijk de schuld geeft van eigen onvrede en falen, en de overheid overlaadt met eisen maar haar tegelijkertijd diep wantrouwt. Deze nieuwe individualisten met hun dikke ikken en grote monden gedragen zich als burgerkoningen naar wier meningen en wensen de politiek slechts heeft te luisteren.' (Pels, 2011a, p. 42)

²⁵ There was also an opposite tendency of 'workerism', as some leftist students, under the influence of Maoism for example, went to work in the factories to meet workers, with the ostensible aim of partaking in their revolutionary consciousness.

²⁶ Marcuse (1991 [1964]).

²⁷ Mulisch (1966).

bone of contention of the progressive youth revolt of the 1960s. It referred to the materialistic, hardworking, authoritarian and boring petty bourgeoisie. In the words of Roel van Duijn: 'the masses who we can't and barely want to convince.'²⁸

In a short period of time, the young radicals of the 1960s and 1970s were absorbed and accommodated by Dutch institutions, a strategy famously described as 'repressive tolerance'. Many of the student radicals soon became part of the establishment and changed their thinking accordingly, mixing a progressive outlook with more traditional, conservative ideas on 'prudence' and 'moderation'. This is the 'prudent progressive' synthesis, the 'Burkean progressivism' represented by intellectuals such as Bas van Stokkom and Dick Pels. The other development is the birth of a conservative anti-establishment politics, a backlash against the institutional sediments of the 1960s and 1970s. *GeenStijl* is no exception to the observation that this backlash is at the same time a revolt and an echo. Indeed, *GeenStijl* has been described as a contemporary, right wing incarnation of the Provo youth movement, with its tactics of teasing and provoking the established authorities.²⁹

This provocative tactic was prominently on display when *GeenStijl* began to actively intervene in the discussion on *verhuftering*. The occasion was the publication in 2010 of a book by the sociologist and philosopher Bas van Stokkom titled *Wat een Hufter!* (What a Boor!). Politically, the book's publication coincided with the dramatic electoral breakthrough of Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV). The party of Wilders went from nine to twenty-four seats (16 percent of the vote) in Dutch parliament. Wilders was given a powerful supporting role in the hard right first Rutte cabinet (2010-2012). Van Stokkom's book linked this populist breakthrough with a more general narrative of moral decline, sparking a national debate on *verhuftering*.

According to Bas van Stokkom, whose analysis was grounded on the writings of a series of other prominent Dutch social scientists, the country suffered from a severe moral crisis. The cause was particularly Dutch and could be traced back to the country's history of pillarization. Emancipation and depillarization in the 1960s had cast suspicion on elite authority and attempts to edify of the masses. In the 1990s a second, even more sizeable wave of emancipation from paternalism occurred, as the commercialization of the media took hold. From this point on, Dutch elites gave up on the ambition to enlighten the larger populace, turning inwardly, retreating into their own lofty subculture. Only when cosmopolitan elites once again engaged in a civilizing offensive, could the rightward shift in Dutch society be halted, to make way for a 'prudent progressive spirit'.³⁰ Van Stokkom did not single out the lower classes or the electorate of the PVV as the main culprit. He presented Dutch decline as a more generalized phenomenon. But he did, in passing, criticize the shockblog *GeenStijl* for 'its abundance of loveless and disdainful comments', and its nihilism. For him, the

²⁸ Cited in: *Trouw* (2004).

²⁹ Brendel (2013).

³⁰ Van Stokkom (2011).

'impetuous use of freedom of expression' and the 'destructive, abusive online language' were symbolic of the larger moral crisis.³¹

In a confrontation that has achieved somewhat of a cult status, *GeenStijl* visited Bas van Stokkom for a surprise interview at an event where he presented his book *What a Boor!* After being prodded for examples illustrating his criticism of *GeenStijl*, the philosopher came up empty and had to guiltily admit that he had not really studied the website very thoroughly. When Van Stokkom, visibly uncomfortable and embarrassed, walked away in the middle of the interview with the pretext that he needed to go and present his book, the *GeenStijl* interviewer reprimanded him: 'We do give each other a hand, don't we?' After the handshake, the interviewer finished the job by subtly calling Van Stokkom a *hufter*. No Dutch scholar had ever been humbled in this way by the media. From that moment on, *GeenStijl* took a lively interest in the matter. It eagerly devoted a series of blogposts to their favourite 'fake scientist' and decided to appropriate the term *hufter* as a positive nickname for their movement. A month after the interview, *GeenStijl* published the *Hufter Manifest* (Boor Manifesto) that embraced and redefined boorishness as a form of transparency and progression (more on the manifesto shortly). Dick Pels responded to the manifesto in an article describing Geert Wilders from the PVV as 'the boss of the boors':

The old Provo Roel van Duijn is right: 'With Wilders the *klootjesvolk* has seized power.' Modern populism is the rebellion of the boors, and Wilders is their boss. Always aggressive, always angry, always indignant, always teasing, nagging, pulling, barking, pestering and intimidating. Always blowing things out of proportion, screaming as loudly as possible. Wilders is the perfect embodiment of the 'Hufter Manifesto' of *GeenStijl* that praises verbal extremism as an expression of brave recalcitrance, while calling decency the 'cancer of society'.³²

GeenStijl fired back by stating that the 'GreenLeft-nerd' had not properly understood the manifesto and advised Pels (born in 1948) to ask his mother 'what her generation thought about the 1960s, when his generation served as the boors'.³³ Here, *GeenStijl* positioned itself as the rightful heir of the 1960s and 1970s rebellion. Originally, the term Provo was coined by the conservative criminologist Wouter Buikhuisen in 1965, to describe a growing current of anti-authoritarian youths, driving around on scooters, hanging out in public space, listening to rock and roll and harassing passers-by. The abovementioned Roel van Duijn subsequently appropriated the word with the intention of politicizing the youth, which he aimed to magically transform into the 'revolutionary

³¹ Van Stokkom (2010, pp. 14-15).

³² 'De oude provo Roel van Duijn heeft gelijk: "Met Wilders is het klootjesvolk aan de macht gekomen." Het moderne populisme is de opstand der hufters, en Wilders is hun hoofdman. Altijd agressief, altijd verontwaardigd, altijd verongelijkt, altijd maar jennen, zuigen, trekken, blaffen, pesten en intimideren. Altijd alles uitvergroten, schreeuwen op de hoogst mogelijke toon. Wilders is daarmee de perfecte uitvoerder van het "Huftermanifest" van *GeenStijl*, dat verbaal extremisme aanprijst als een uiting van dappere tegendraadsheid en fatsoen "de kanker van de samenleving" noemt.' See: Pels (2011b).

³³ Quid, (2011a).

provotariat'. Van Stokkom and Dick Pels, both former members of the 1960s and 1970s student generation, now found themselves in the position of Buikhuisen, defending established authority against youth rebellion. It allowed *GeenStijl* to proverbially take on the mantle of Roel van Duijn and appropriate the word *hufter* as a point of pride. A similar provocative tactic had been pursued when newspaper *de Volkskrant* condemned *GeenStijl* in 2008 for its effect on youth culture. A prominent journalist connected *GeenStijl* with the increased amount of death threats to politicians. 'A big supplier of the rapidly grown amount of threats that Ministers and MP's receive, is the high school circuit of the uninhibited *GeenStijl*-generation, accustomed to react in primordial fashion to anything that is unwelcome.'³⁴ *GeenStijl* responded in style by filing a complaint at the Dutch Press Council, ironically accusing *de Volkskrant* of being 'tendentious, unfounded and needlessly offensive', while dismissing the Press Council at the same time as 'a club of windbags without real authority'.³⁵

6.2 The rhetoric and textuality of *GeenStijl*

There is a degree of truth to both the cultural pessimist frame (*GeenStijl* as epitome of a larger moral crisis) and the technological determinist frame (*GeenStijl* as the logical product of uninhibited cynicism of the network-generation). Pels and Van Stokkom are right to stress the continuities and causal connections between *GeenStijl* and the anti-authoritarian protest movements of the 1960s. And as Benschop argued, technological form did play a role in facilitating an almost unconditional and absolutist notion of freedom of speech. Communication on the internet is more uninhibited, due to the fact that one can publish anonymously, and ordinary forms of social control are void. At the same time, these frames simplify and distort our understanding, and preclude a more substantive engagement with the peculiar discourse of *GeenStijl*.

In contrast to technological determinism, Raymond Williams stressed that 'the moment of any new technology is a moment of choice'. Of course technological form has specific effects, but 'the reality of determination is the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures, within which variable social practices are profoundly affected but never necessarily controlled'.³⁶ There is no such thing as a culture that is 'hardwired' into technological form. Rather, soft and malleable forces such as the intentions of the broadcaster, institutional practices and power dynamics decide how a technology is put to use. Communication technology is not a mere transmission belt for a pre-existing culture that is already somehow out there; it is a creative and social constructionist force. In order to understand and make use of its power, Williams argued, it is indispensable to analyse the rhetoric and textuality of new cultural forms. In contrast to the cultural pessimists, Raymond Williams stated that one 'cannot be satisfied with the older formula: enlightened minority, degraded mass'.³⁷ Black-and-white distinctions

³⁴ Sitalsing (2008).

³⁵ *NRC Handelsblad* (2008).

³⁶ Williams (1990 [1974], p. 133).

³⁷ Cited in: Storey (1997, p. 49).

between elite and mass culture fail to do justice to the versatility of culture. Williams insisted that the intellectual and literary tradition is a common inheritance, and not the product of any single class or sector. The importance of Williams' approach is that it gives room for cultural and political agency, and does not draw too decisive a boundary between high and popular culture.

What is missed by both of the interpretative frames that we have analysed is the fact that the cultural critique championed by *GeenStijl* is derived from what is generally understood as 'high culture'. When looking more closely at the writings on the website of *GeenStijl*, two strongly intertwined elements stand out. First, the blog is characterized by a nihilist orientation that is Nietzschean in inspiration. Second, the use of satire and ironic humour by *GeenStijl* draws on the provocative use of irony in the Romantic literary tradition. These elements have not been concocted or even assembled by *GeenStijl* itself. They are derived from a larger nihilist and ironic tradition in the Netherlands, that runs from literary luminaries such as W.F. Hermans and Gerard Reve to Theo van Gogh, Theodor Holman, the literary journal *Propria Cures* and finally *GeenStijl*.

Nietzsche for the (digital) masses

GeenStijl's Nietzschean inspiration is most clearly expressed in the *Hufter Manifest* that has by now acquired the status of a programmatic statement. In this ironically written text, an epic battle is sketched between the 'boors' and the 'decency terrorists', in which the boors are the heroes and the moral censors represent the evil to be vanquished: 'Boors create transparency and progress. It's the decency terrorists who are the true anti-socials, by trying to contain the Netherlands in their status quo.' According to the manifesto, boors are people that dare to ask controversial questions, who are not afraid to think for themselves and tread outside of given conventions. When we think of boors, we should think of scientists like Copernicus and Darwin who have made progress possible by ignoring the religious 'decency terrorists'. According to the editors of *GeenStijl*, the boorification described by Pels and Van Stokkom is a positive trend, to be heartily embraced. 'Being a boor is disregarding the critique or complements of others. Being a boor is a road trip to the land of unlimited possibilities. Being a boor is discovering, demonstrating and constantly doubting the foundations of one's world.'³⁸

The attentive reader is by now becoming suspicious. Yes, the shockblog *GeenStijl*, notorious for being home to the darkest dreg of the digital underbelly, writes on (metaphysical) foundations that need to be called in question. Scrolling further, one discovers that the *Hufter Manifesto* contains obvious parallels to the moral philosophy that Nietzsche penned down in books such as *Beyond Good and Evil* and *On the Genealogy of Morality*.³⁹ In these texts, Nietzsche polemicizes against what he calls

³⁸ *GeenStijl* (2010).

³⁹ In their equally delighted and disdainful responses to journalistic or academic think pieces written about the website, the editors of *GeenStijl* are keen to establish their theoretical credentials, even if the tone is ironic. Responding to the critique of a literature professor that the language of its commenters is the direct

‘slave morality’ or ‘herd animal morality’. He resists the values that derive from the weak, the oppressed and the dependent, which have become ingrained in Christian ethics and socialist egalitarianism. On the opposite pole, Nietzsche identifies master morality – ‘the elevated, proud states of soul’ of the noble and powerful that dare to take themselves as point of departure. As Nietzsche writes:

The noble type of person feels that *he* determines value, he does not need anyone’s approval, he judges that ‘what is harmful to me is harmful in itself,’ he knows that he is the one who gives honour to things in the first place, he *creates* values.⁴⁰

The manifesto reads as a paradoxical translation of these Nietzschean themes to the realm of popular (online) culture. The ‘boors’ equal master morality, the ‘decency terrorists’ represent slave and herd morality. Where Nietzsche states that the aristocratic man needs no approval from others, engaging in experiment and transgression of norms, *GeenStijl* writes of boors that break loose from the herd, ‘to jump over the fence and explore the wilderness.’ Nietzsche jeers at the group conformism that characterizes herd morality. *GeenStijl* describes ‘decency terrorists’ as a ‘herd of cows that loudly moo NOT ALLOWED! to the cow that has broken loose, while they allow themselves to be meekly led to the slaughterhouse. In the name of decency. Decency is the cancer of society.’ Also the Christian character of slave morality comes to the fore in the figure of the ‘decency terrorist’ in the manifesto, who ‘preaches hell and damnation or brings in God or Godwin to reinforce his mistaken view’.

Nietzsche’s critique of religion and slave morality is that it denies life in this world in the name of another, morally righteous and heavenly world. In so doing it tames and civilizes the beast of prey ‘man’, leading to a world of mediocrity. There is an essential role for the priest in Nietzsche’s philosophy, whose remedy for the suffering of the weak is the ascetic ideal that interiorizes suffering as feelings of guilt, fear and punishment. In this way, the pain of the weak is turned inwardly, into self-discipline, self-surveillance and self-overcoming. Whereas the cruelty and punishment of the noble, aristocratic type is directed towards an external enemy, the ascetic finds it inside himself, the ‘enemy’ within. The ascetic derives pleasure from denouncing pleasure, from not harming the other but rather himself.⁴¹ This is clearly what progressive political correctness amounts to for *GeenStijl*: self-denial in the name of an unnatural and in the end illusory progressive moral order. This stance leads to an aversion to altruism, another striking Nietzschean theme:

stylistic expression of raw, unprocessed emotions, the editors of *GeenStijl* defend the opposite: ‘At *GeenStijl*, a lot of thought is put into comments. Primary emotions are foreign to us. Really, even the biggest banalities are the result of deep philosophical reflection. One on one, Nietzsche is no match for necrosis [the nickname of a *GeenStijl* commenter MO]. Kierkegaard is not even close to pious.’ Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, the godfathers of nihilism and Romantic irony, could well serve as the philosophical figureheads of the site, if it was in need thereof. See: Quid (2013).

⁴⁰ Nietzsche (2002 [1886], p. 154).

⁴¹ Diken (2009).

The noble and brave types of people, are the furthest removed from a morality that sees precisely pity, actions for others, and *désintéressement* as emblematic of morality. A faith in yourself, pride in yourself, and a fundamental hostility and irony with respect to 'selflessness' belong to a noble morality just as certainly as does a slight disdain and caution towards sympathetic feelings and 'warm hearts'.⁴²

A similar sentiment resounds in the manifesto:

Decency terrorists feel at their best when they can passionately feel offended on behalf of a group of people they do not belong to. 'I do not have red hair myself, but I find it indecent of you to say that red-haired people do not have a soul. These type of remarks touch my heart!' That type of people. Not only because they believe it is decent to stand up for everyone, but also because they sincerely think that insulted groups have the resistance of an HIV patient with pulmonary emphysema.⁴³

Even the militant tone of *GeenStijl* assumes new meaning, when we look at it in the context of the qualities that Nietzsche attributed to master morality: finding 'subtlety in retaliation' and 'a certain need to have enemies (as flue holes, as it were, for the affects of jealousy, irascibility, arrogance)'.⁴⁴ The most significant paradox here is that Nietzsche's elitist lamentations against the herd mentality of lowly plebeians, is reproduced in this manifesto for an audience that is itself often described as a resentful digital herd: the *GeenStijl* commenters. The *GeenStijl* editors seem content inhabiting this contradiction. This negative or radical nihilism of *GeenStijl* is of course far from consistent and a very selective phenomenon, it ultimately serves to reinstitute a more traditional petit-bourgeois conservative morale. Especially when it comes to crime or lax authorities, *GeenStijl* turns out to be a fervent defender of the existing moral order. Just as well, the weblog then shouts NOTALLOWED! to the cow that has broken loose, especially when the perpetrator's skin colour happens to be not white. It is mostly the negative, destructive qualities of Nietzsche's writing that *GeenStijl* has mastered in order to provoke and bring down a moral order they perceive as too egalitarian. Here, nihilism is the figurative paint stripper that serves to disintegrate the progressive layers of lacquer that have been applied to Dutch morality over the decades. When it comes down to its positive programme, we can argue that *GeenStijl* advocates a modern conservative politics oriented at the hardworking white Dutch male. It is focused on a restoration of authority; on an aversion to immigration and Islam; and a restored

⁴² Nietzsche (2002 [1886], p. 155).

⁴³ 'Fatsoenterroristen voelen zich op hun best als ze zich hartstochtelijk beledigd kunnen voelen namens een groep mensen waar zij niet bij horen. Ik heb zelf geen rood haar, maar ik vind het onfatsoenlijk dat je zegt dat roodharige mensen geen ziel hebben! Zulke opmerkingen raken me in mijn hart! Dat soort. Niet alleen omdat ze vinden dat het fatsoenlijk is om voor iedereen op te komen, maar ook omdat ze oprecht menen dat beledigde groeperingen de weerstand hebben van een AIDS-patiënt met longemfyseem.' See: *GeenStijl* (2010).

⁴⁴ Nietzsche (2002 [1886], p. 155).

masculinity in opposition to the perceived feminisation of Dutch society. Here an excerpt from one of the many semi-ironic posts dedicated to feminisation:

What an unmanly country we have. [...] We are full of sentimental nonsense. Women dominate, from the primary school teachers to the nightlife scene, and soon in business. A zombie invasion of sorts, only then by women. Time to take the country back. Let your beard grow. Stop depilating your chest hair. Fuck hand soap. Scratch your balls if you have an itch. Lift heavy things.⁴⁵

With regard to this latter theme, there are also clear Nietzschean parallels. In the eyes of Nietzsche, being a man is being able to conquer and command, to say: 'I like that, I'll take it for my own and protect it and defend it against everyone.' The compassion preached by Christian and progressive morality, is therefore seen as unmanly:

Almost everywhere in Europe today, there is a morbid over-sensitivity and susceptibility to pain, as well as an excessive amount of complaining and an increased tenderness that wants to dress itself up as something higher, using religion as well as bits and pieces of philosophy, – there is a real cult of suffering. The *unmanliness* of what is christened 'pity' in the circles of these enthusiasts is always, I think, the first thing that strikes your eye.⁴⁶

When *GeenStijl* opposes the feminisation of Dutch society, it is above all these vitalist Nietzschean themes that come to the fore, instead of a more conventional politics of sexuality as promoted by traditional or religious conservatives. *GeenStijl* believes that a real man is proud of his lack of restraint, and revels in the breaking of taboos. Inextricably bound up with his enjoyment of life are the typical incorrect jokes about Muslims with goats on their balcony, opponents that one would wish dead, and the intelligence of blond women. A real man openly shows his virility, tells everyone that wants to hear it that he likes to watch porn, and judges all female beauty by asking whether she is 'doable'. This virile, vitalist masculinity is contrasted with colourful language to the repressed masculinity of progressives, the so-called *linksmensch* (literally: left-human), *deugmensch* (literally: decentman), *Gutmensch* (a Germanism, literally: goodman), 'moral fag' or 'decency terrorists'.

A good example of the genre is a *GeenStijl* blogpost that introduces itself as a 'SAS survival-guide' on how to 'recognize, isolate and undermine' the 'decency-wanker' at birthday parties, namely by covering said person under 'an avalanche of sarcasm and irony'.⁴⁷ The decent type, we learn, serves biological fair trade peanuts on his birthday

⁴⁵ 'Wat een verwijfd land hebben we toch. [...] We staan stijf van de sentimentele nonsens. Vrouwen domineren van basisschooljuffen tot stapgelegenheden en straks ook in het bedrijfsleven. Een soort zombie-invasie, maar dan met vrouwen. Tijd om het land terug te veroveren. Laat je baard staan. Stop met het epilieren van je borsthaar. Fuck handzeep. Krab aan je ballen als je jeuk hebt. Til zware dingen.' See: Quid (2011b).

⁴⁶ Nietzsche (2002 [1886], p. 174).

⁴⁷ Quid (2011c).

party, and foregoes flirting with the 'hot babe' in attendance out of political correctness. He fails to enjoy life because he represses his inner drives. Secretly he would prefer to live out those desires, but that is not considered correct by his peers. This is the assumed hypocrisy of politically correct, higher educated progressives that *GeenStijl* loves to crusade against. In a paradoxical sense, *GeenStijl* follows in the footsteps of the libertine 1960s and 1970s slogan *verboden te verbieden* (it is forbidden to forbid) and the connected idea of emancipation and progress as the breaking of taboos. It uses these notions as artillery in the *Kulturkampf* against the baby-boomer generation that once championed them.

The 1960s origins of the conservative counterculture

The nihilist and ironic discourse of *GeenStijl* can be traced back to the Dutch 1960s, when a peculiar right-wing intellectual figure emerged on the scene, epitomized by leading writers such as W.F. Hermans and Gerard Reve. In his 1963 book *Opmerkingen over de Chaos* (Commentaries on Chaos), the leading essayist H.J.A. Hofland spelled doom for the leftist intellectual. Referencing the American end of ideology debate, Hofland observed the slackening of political passions on the Dutch left, due to the emergence of the welfare state and the rise of a powerful technocracy. He described this development as 'mass humanism':

The enemy of the radical is modern mass humanism that has deprived him of his identity as a member of the resistance. [...] His biggest opponents are the allies of the past, who have cultivated this mass humanism and now sit enthroned as Buddha's in their limitless political virtuousness.⁴⁸

As Hofland noted, the post war intellectuals with their oppositional mentality had so far been linked with the left in some way or other. The emerging welfare state technocracy, however, made it increasingly difficult for leftist intellectuals to persevere in their anti-establishment attitude. A new radical figure entered the scene, this time from the other side of the political spectrum. Hofland described these radicals as 'desperate insurgents that protest fiercely in the name of Nothing':

Those that made a name for themselves as the true radical and active opposition did not want to reform anything. They answer exactly to the description that is given of rebels without a cause. [...] For those that work with traditional political distinctions it is clear, that they are positioned far on the right, in a psychological or sociological sense they are rebels without a cause.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ 'De vijand van de radicaal is het moderne massahumanisme, dat hem zijn identiteit als verzetsman heeft ontnomen. [...] Zijn grote tegenstanders zijn de hele en halve bondgenoten van vroeger, die dit massahumanisme hebben laten groeien en die nu als boeddha's tronen in een eindeloze politieke deugdzaamheid.' (Hofland, 1964, p. 9)

⁴⁹ 'Degenen die zich als werkelijk radicale en actieve oppositie berucht hebben gemaakt, hebben niet willen hervormen. Ze beantwoorden precies aan de beschrijving die van de rebellen zonder doel gegeven wordt.'

While Hofland does not mention them explicitly, but the writers Willem Frederik Hermans and Gerard Reve gained notoriety in those days for their bleak post-war novels offering merciless and amoral portrayals of Dutch society. Both were described as cynics and nihilists by commentators and literary critics, due to their sharp critiques of the Dutch post-war moral order. The prevailing perspective on the nihilism and irony championed by Hermans and Reve, has long been to consider them predominantly as literary themes, neatly confined to the fictional world of their novels. But there has always been a worldlier and more political character to this peculiar intellectual current.

W.F. Hermans used his nihilism as a weapon to fight progressive Dutch writers and intellectuals who moralized over the legacy of the Second World War. In this capacity as a critic of Dutch post-war progressivism, Hermans has been described as the early originator of the conservative campaign against political correctness that gathered pace in the 1990s. In his insightful study on W.F. Hermans and the Second World War, the right-wing historian Ewoud Kieft praises Hermans as the principal 'trailblazer of Dutch populism':

If there is anyone that has tried to snatch from the 'leftist church' its most 'exclusive possession', it was him. Few others have so doggedly and lengthily tried to decouple the Second World War from the moral claims that the proponents of multiculturalism have attached to it. And that is nothing less than the core of the ideological battle that the PVV had to pursue in the Netherlands: 'We've been talked into accepting mass-immigration with reference to the Holocaust,' Martin Bosma writes in his book.⁵⁰

The use of the term 'leftist church' requires some elaboration. The concept was introduced by Pim Fortuyn to refer (pejoratively) to the moralizing tone of progressive politicians and intellectuals. The idea of 'the leftist church' became a leitmotif in the New Right backlash of the 2000s and has become a staple of Dutch political discourse ever since. Significantly, the concept has deeply Nietzschean undertones in the way that it opposes moralizing (which is exceptional for a conservative discourse) and conflates the egalitarianism of the left with Christianity. Ewoud Kieft convincingly argues that Hermans had set the scene for the emergence of right-wing populism by undermining the moral claims of the 'leftist church'. In the process, Kieft adopts Martin Bosma's revisionist theory of mass-immigration as a leftist project.

[...] Voor wie met traditionele politieke onderscheidingen werkt is het duidelijk, dat ze uiterst rechts staan: volgens psychologische of sociologische maatstaven zijn ze rebellen zonder doel. (Hofland, 1964, p. 9)

⁵⁰ 'Wat dat betreft mag Hermans een wegbereider van het Hollandse populisme heten: als er iemand geprobeerd heeft om de "linkse kerk" haar meest "exclusieve bezit" afhandig te maken, was hij het wel. Weinig anderen hebben zo langdurig en zo verbeten de Tweede Wereldoorlog los proberen te koppelen van de morele claims die de voorstanders van de multiculturele samenleving erop legden. En dat is niets minder dan de kern van de ideologische strijd die de PVV in Nederland te voeren had: "De massa-immigratie is ons steeds aangepreent met verwijzingen naar de Holocaust," schrijft Martin Bosma in zijn boek.' (Kieft, 2012, p. 229)

Similarly, Gerard Reve has been described as an intellectual godfather of sorts to the right-wing backlash of the 1990s and 2000s. The celebrated intellectual and columnist of *NRC Handelsblad*, Bas Heijne, wrote incisively on the subject. He described the ‘part ironic, part pestering, part deadly serious’ tone of Dutch populism while suggesting that Gerard Reve was its ‘greatest influence’. ‘The best of *GeenStijl*,’ Bas Heijne went on to argue, is ‘steeped in Revian irony’.⁵¹ This view of Hermans and Reve as the intellectual godfathers of the conservative backlash clashes with the conventional historical image of the 1960s as singularly progressive in character. In his classic interpretation of the progressive turn in Dutch society in the 1960s and 1970s, James Kennedy reserves a central role for literary iconoclasts such as Hermans and Reve:

Already in the fifties, a talented ‘realist’ tradition emerged, with Anna Blaman, Willem Frederik Hermans, and Gerard K. van het Reve in the vanguard. These realists presented themselves as iconoclasts; Hermans was indicted (and acquitted) for insulting Dutch Catholics in 1951, and Van het Reve was sued in 1966 in a trial for blasphemy.⁵²

On the one hand it is logical that Reve and Hermans are seen as part of the progressive wave of the 1960s. Both authors were at the forefront of the post-war struggle for artistic autonomy. W.F. Hermans and Gerard Reve engaged in famous judicial battles to defend their ability to insult or mock Christians and God in their books, in defiance of established Christian opinion. There is a real sense that this post-war struggle for artistic and literary autonomy was coterminous with the expanded personal autonomy that was being wrested from the old order by the protesting youth. This link between the artistic avant-gardes and the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s is more commonly made. In *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, the neoconservative Daniel Bell famously portrayed the 1960s youth culture in the US (dubbed ‘counterculture’ or ‘adversary culture’) as a result of the popularization of the anti-bourgeois, taboo-breaking mindset of the artistic avant-gardes to ever-larger parts of the educated middle classes. Similarly, in his classic account of the Dutch 1960s, the Dutch historian Hans Righart drew on Bernice Martins’ *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change* (1981), to make an analogous point.⁵³ The Dutch counterculture of the 1960s, he argued, copied artistic themes: the radical bohemian, the individual as artist striving towards self-expression, the centrality of experiment in the process of renewal,

⁵¹ Heijne (2011).

⁵² ‘In het begin van de jaren zestig namen prozaschrijvers het vaandel (en de aandacht van de media) over van de dichters. Al in de jaren vijftig bestond een getalenteerde “realistische” traditie, met Anna Blaman, Willem Frederik Hermans en Gerard K. van het Reve in de voorhoede. Deze realisten presenteerden zichzelf als iconoclasten; Hermans werd aangeklaagd voor (en vrijgesproken van) het beledigen van Nederlandse katholieken in 1951, en tegen Van het Reve werd in 1966 een proces aangespannen wegens godslastering.’ (Kennedy, 1995, p. 123)

⁵³ See the foreword of historian Niek Pas in the 2006 edition of Hans Righart (2006 [1995]).

the employment of shock tactics to break taboos and transgress cultural and personal barriers.⁵⁴

On the other hand, the relationship between iconoclastic literary figures such as Hermans and Reve and the broader progressive counterculture is deeply ambiguous. When we look more closely at the political views of Hermans and Reve, we find that they were declared adversaries of progressivism in both a more political and a more philosophical sense. Both authors were notorious right-wing polemicists, vehemently opposed to the left and the protest generation. On major themes such as the 1960s youth movements, democratization, immigration, the Cold War, decolonization, the Third World and apartheid South Africa, Hermans and Reve found themselves at loggerheads with the progressive protest generation. In 1970, Reve spoke out against the spirit of 1968 and positioned himself firmly on the secular right:

When it comes to politics: I vote for the *Vereniging voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD) because it is the only non-religious party who dares to raise its voice against the mounting terror of the rabble, against the veneration of imbecilic youth-gangsterism.⁵⁵

In a more philosophical sense, Hermans and Reve were inspired by conservative thought, in particular German Romanticism, the intellectual and artistic counter reaction to progressivism and the French Revolution. Some of the major themes of the Romantic-conservative tradition – scepticism concerning the ability of man to acquire knowledge of history, society and self; the pessimistic vision of man as inherently prone to evil; cynicism when it comes to the ability of politics to effect change – pervade the novels and public statements of Hermans and Reve. Following Karl Mannheim's description of the Romantic-conservative tradition mentioned earlier in this book, it is fair to say that the views of man and society espoused by Hermans and Reve can be placed in this school of thought.⁵⁶ Both belong to the intellectual tradition of sceptical conservatism.

Important here is that the reckoning with pillarization and Christian religion in the 1960s and 1970s was a politically heterogeneous phenomenon. There is no denying that the Dutch 'cultural revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s was predominantly progressive in character. But perhaps it was less singularly progressive than is commonly assumed in historical accounts. Progressives and right-wing intellectuals such as Hermans and Reve had common cause in their opposition to the stifling dominance of religion in Dutch public life. But after the 1960s, when depillarization and

⁵⁴ In that light it is interesting, even if pretentious, that *GeenStijl* has frequently branded itself as an 'avantgarde'.

⁵⁵ 'Wat de politiek betreft: ik stem op de Vereniging voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD), omdat het de enige niet-confessionele partij is, die haar stem durft te verheffen tegen de groeiende terreur van het gepeupel, en tegen de aanbidding van het imbeciele jeugd-gangsterdom.' Cited in: Holman (1994).

⁵⁶ Mannheim (1971, pp. 260-350).

secularization set in, progressive morality became the new target of choice for Hermans and Reve.

The divided national self-image of pillarization – Protestants, Catholics, liberals, socialists – started to give way in the 1960s to a reconstituted, unitary Dutch identity, built on the moral lessons of the Second World War. Dutch national identity was reconstructed in opposition to German occupation, to fascism and National Socialism. On the basis of this all-important reference point, a progressive moralism developed in the 1960s and 1970s that was seen by many as a secular continuation of Christian morality. Where the Italians had Catho-Communism, it can be said that the Dutch developed a Protestant-Progressivism.⁵⁷ It is the central thesis of the sociologist Ernest Zahn: Dutch secularization did not change the Christian thought pattern as such in the Netherlands; it merely transformed in a secular, progressive direction.⁵⁸

This idea was a central reference point for Dutch right-wing intellectuals, long before Fortuyn coined the term ‘the leftist church’. Gerard Reve was ‘convinced that the consciously rejected myth of original sin [...] lives on subconsciously in the myth of “Western guilt” towards the poor former colonial peoples’, while in reality, their indolence was to blame for their backwardness.⁵⁹ Frits Bolkestein referred to Dutch progressive politics as a ‘theological vision’, a ‘secularized messianism’, and a ‘social gospel’ preaching ‘consensus, social justice and a satisfactory existence for everyone’.⁶⁰ Karel van het Reve, the brother of Gerard Reve and another prominent atheist right-wing intellectual, criticized semi-religious progressivism in 1983 as the *Algemene Vooruitstrevende Levensbeschouwing* (AVL, General Progressive Worldview):

The AVL states the following: the society in which we live is sinful, because it is a consumption society, a society that pollutes the environment, a society with millions of unemployed, a profit-driven capitalist society, a society run by Jews – sorry – I mean of course multinationals, a society that is actively leading the entire world to its demise.⁶¹

While the descriptions above are somewhat of a caricature, it is true that such a post-religious progressive moralism formed the backbone of the protest movements of that time. Hermans and Reve formed the main intellectual opposition from the right. Eventually, their antimoralist position came to inspire Theo van Gogh, *GeenStijl* and the backlash against political correctness in the 1990s. The following parts of the chapter are dedicated to a more extensive exploration of the core themes of their work: nihilism and irony.

⁵⁷ Catho-communism is neutrally defined as the combined commitment to Catholic values and leftist politics. It is often used in a pejorative sense to describe a dangerous combination of two absolutist, dogmatic doctrines. See: Baranski (2001, p. 138).

⁵⁸ Zahn (1989).

⁵⁹ Cited in: Holman (1994).

⁶⁰ Bolkestein (1990, p. 17, p. 23, p. 66, p. 238).

⁶¹ K. van het Reve, cited in: Wansink (1996, p. 136).

6.3 Rebels without a cause: Dutch nihilism

The Dutch history of nihilism begins with the leading Dutch interwar critic and essayist Menno ter Braak (1902-1940). He introduced the philosophy of Nietzsche to the Dutch literary field in the 1920s and 1930s, as he struggled to free himself from his own Christian beliefs. In the post-war period it was W.F. Hermans (1921-1995), considered by some as the greatest post-war Dutch writer, who continued the tradition.⁶² Hermans became the single most prominent exponent of nihilist philosophy, a worldview that he popularized through novels such as *Ik Heb Altijd Gelijk* (I Am Always Right, 1952) and *De Donkere Kamer van Damokles* (The Darkroom of Damocles, 1958). With his distaste for literary engagement and his pitch-black vision of man and society, W.F. Hermans originally occupied an exceptional position both nationally and internationally. But eventually, nihilism developed into the single most important philosophy of the Dutch literary field, in a similar way that Sartre's existentialism did in post-war France. As the comparative literature scholar Aukje van Rooden observes in her comparison of Hermans and Sartre, while his 'disillusioned attitude' initially found a chilly reception, 'presently it seems to have become the common literary mentality.'⁶³ Nihilism is a central motif in the work of leading contemporary Dutch authors such as Arnon Grunberg, Herman Koch, and P.F. Thomése.⁶⁴ Even if nihilist ideology is rarely lengthily or explicitly debated in the Netherlands, it has nestled itself deeply into the Dutch intellectual field and is adhered to by many prominent writers and journalists.⁶⁵ Some of the defining themes of this deeply sceptical worldview are as follows: the inherent hypocrisy of any form of idealism or lived morality; *Bildung* as disillusionment; the impossibility of interpersonal connection and empathy; the failure to understand reality or to be understood; and the dominance of primary drives (sex, power and ego).

The question why nihilism became such an important intellectual theme in the Netherlands is difficult to answer in a conclusive way. Significant is that nihilist thought took hold in the Netherlands as a response to pillarization, the organization of Dutch society into Protestant, Catholic, socialist and liberal organizational subcultures, generally portrayed as lasting from 1919 to 1967. The dominant Christian pillars formed the heart of this constrained moral order, which was overseen by priests and protestant ministers, and maintained by what many described as stifling forms of social control. For subsequent generations of Dutch artists and especially literary authors, nihilist

⁶² Tromp (1997, p. 178).

⁶³ Van Rooden (2012).

⁶⁴ Literary critic Arnold Heumakers once described the worldview of Arnon Grunberg, often considered the single most influential Dutch writer today, as a reiteration of Hermans or 'nihilism-on-the-cheap'. See: Heumakers (2001).

⁶⁵ It is surprising that (to my knowledge) no overarching studies exist on Dutch nihilism as a current of thought. An academic search query on 'Dutch nihilism' returns no results. Perhaps a Romantic tendency in the Dutch literary field to accord each author their own unique and deeply personal worldview, has prevented more general accounts of this influential intellectual current. On the post-war reception of the novels of Reve and Hermans, in which they were frequently referred to as nihilists by leading literary critics, see: Kamp (2005). For a more general attempt to sociologically situate the pessimist worldview of Hermans and Reve, see: Weijers (1991).

philosophy provided an escape route. Due to the absence of a prominent bourgeois elite, the pursuit of artistic autonomy did not manifest itself as it did in France, in the form of *épater les bourgeois*. As Pierre Bourdieu observed in *Distinction*, the principal way to shock the bourgeois was by 'proving the extent of one's power to confer aesthetic status' on objects and themes outside of established conventions, and to 'transgress ever more radically the ethical censorships', concerning sex, racism, sacrilege or violence. For the artist to assert autonomy and to privilege the aesthetic above conventional societal norms implied 'moral agnosticism'.⁶⁶ Here we are merely only a small step away from nihilism. The difference with France is that in the Netherlands, artistic autonomy had to be achieved, first and foremost, in confrontation with religious elites, rather than the bourgeoisie.

The first Dutch literary avant-garde of the late nineteenth century still attacked the bourgeoisie in classic fashion. In his famous book *Max Havelaar*, Multatuli (Eduard Douwes Dekker) immortalized the conservative hypocrisy of the Dutch bourgeois, patrician elite in the figure of *Droogstoppel*. Lodewijk van Deyssel portrayed the ladies and gents of Dutch bourgeois society as soulless robots, or 'unconscious outgrowth'.⁶⁷ The ascendancy of the Christian bloc in the twentieth century changed that dynamic. The segmented class structure of pillarization and the dominance of religion in public and intellectual life, meant that not the bourgeoisie but rather the Catholic and Protestant Church and their petty-bourgeois base became the principal target for those aiming to transgress and expand the boundaries of artistic autonomy. Nietzsche's eloquent critique and conflation of Christian morality and socialist egalitarianism had a particular pertinence in the Netherlands, considering the socio-economically emancipatory role of the Dutch Christian currents.

The meaning of nihilism

Before continuing the discussion Dutch nihilism, it is necessary to elaborate a little on the meaning of the term. As Bülent Diken has noted, the term nihilism is perhaps 'the most misunderstood concept in history'.⁶⁸ We can add that it is one of the most complex and contradictory concepts, too. For Nietzsche, nihilism originates as an inability to accept the world as it is, with all of its conflicts, suffering and pain. An inability to endure the fact that the world is devoid of a goal, lacking unity or meaning. Nihilism refers to the invention of another, imaginary world where these blemishes cease to exist, where reason, justice and truth reign supreme. The origin of nihilism is the invention of a transcendent God bestowing meaning on life. This 'negative' or 'religious nihilism' posits certain moral values as superior to life and makes this life subservient to another *afterlife*. Therefore, Nietzsche describes the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christendom and Islam, as nihilistic religions. But progressive ideology can also be a form of nihilism. Nihilism here is escapism, a form of false consciousness. It refers more to a historical condition than a distinct doctrine. When

⁶⁶ Bourdieu (1984 [1979], p. 40).

⁶⁷ Van Deyssel (1979, p. 103).

⁶⁸ Diken (2009, p. 2).

W.F. Hermans, as we shall soon see, blames the 'nihilistic hordes' for the rise of the Nazis, he means negative or religious nihilism. Hermans used the term nihilism only in this negative or religious sense, to refer to the necessity of the masses to belief in something.

After 'the death of God' however, with modernity, nihilism becomes something rather different. It divides in two. There is an attempt at overcoming nihilism, moving beyond escapism and false consciousness. This is what is called 'radical nihilism': a wilful attempt to passionately negate the existing moral order. Nietzsche is a radical nihilist. This is how the term is commonly understood in common parlance when we refer to someone as being a nihilist, or when we refer to nihilism as a doctrine, rather than a historical condition. When *GeenStijl* proposes to obliterate the existing moral order, so that something new might arise from its ashes, we are talking about radical nihilism. When Geert Lovink discusses the 'nihilist impulse' of blogging as a 'nihilism of strength', he means radical nihilism. But there is also a passive nihilism, blandly accepting the world as it is, and its inherent meaninglessness. This complacent nihilism does not have a will, a passion or a programme. In sum, there are three forms of nihilism: negative, radical and passive.

It is possible to consider Nietzsche's philosophy on a deeper level, turning to ideology critique. Then the connection between nihilism and conservatism becomes apparent. I am drawing here on a series of political thinkers who have argued that Nietzsche belongs to the conservative or reactionary Counter-Enlightenment tradition. Far from being a protean thinker whose thought is so multifaceted as to resist any single political interpretation, these authors contend, Nietzsche is a radical conservative:

Christian and post-Christian ethical and spiritual ideals have attained hegemonic status in the Western world and are effectively indoctrinating superior human beings into a levelling, egalitarian ethos that, if unchecked, may eradicate human excellence. Nietzsche sees his project as nothing less than the rescue of the species from this degradation, and he initiates it by appealing to the deepest instincts of those superior specimens of humanity now in the grips of 'herd morality'. By attempting to help them wean themselves from values that are manifestly bad for them, Nietzsche sees himself as laying the foundation for a new aristocratic political order in Europe in which the herd like majority and its preferred values are put in their proper place: under the control of a self-absorbed master caste whose only concern is for the cultivation of its own excellence.⁶⁹

In a more philosophical sense, Nietzsche is described as part of the Romantic-conservative reaction against the universalist, egalitarian and rationalist thought of the French Enlightenment. As Zeev Sternhell argues in *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, Nietzsche – who lent 'the stamp of genius to anti-rationalism and anti-universalism' –

⁶⁹ Appel (1999, pp. 1-2). For other depictions of Nietzsche as a conservative/Counter-Enlightenment thinker see: Berlin (2013); Bull (2011); Robin (2011).

was at the core of that intellectual revolt.⁷⁰ Perhaps the political character of Nietzsche's work has been masked to a degree by his appeal to nature. In Nietzsche's philosophy, man is propelled by a will to power, located in natural instincts and subconscious drives. Nietzsche's vitalism could also be described as a revolt of the Freudian *id* against the *superego*. These natural instincts conveniently happen to lead, not to cooperation or egalitarianism as authors like Kropotkin or Rousseau or some contemporary scientific research would have it.⁷¹ For Nietzsche, what is natural is hierarchy and usurpation:

Mutually refraining from injury, violence, and exploitation, placing your will on par with the other's: in a certain, crude sense, these practices can become good manners between individuals when the right conditions are present (namely, that the individuals have genuinely similar quantities of force and measures of value, and belong together within a single body). But as soon as this principle is taken any further, and maybe even held to be the *fundamental principle of society*, it immediately shows itself for what it is: the will to *negate* life, the principle of disintegration and decay. Here we must think things through thoroughly, and ward off any sentimental weakness: life itself is *essentially* a process of appropriating, injuring, overpowering the alien and the weaker, oppressing, being harsh, imposing your own form, incorporating, and at least, the very least, exploiting, – but what is the point of always using words that have been stamped with slanderous intentions from time immemorial?⁷²

Establishing what life *essentially* is, necessarily entails a form of projection and metaphysical speculation. Nietzsche's travail of destroying false gods has always been a selective phenomenon. Like the conjuror that tricks his audience by enticing them to look in the wrong direction, Nietzsche never really destroyed his idols. By dextrous sleight-of-hand he concealed them in the appeal to natural, subconscious drives. The best way to defend a hierarchical ideology or morality is to pretend that it is not an ideology or morality at all, but rather what Nietzsche calls an 'instinct for rank' that is beyond good and evil.⁷³ A similar appeal to natural inequality can be found in Burke:

We fear God, we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility. Why? Because when such ideas are brought before our minds, it is *natural* to be so affected.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Sternhell (2009, p. 344).

⁷¹ It is commonly argued, for instance, that hunter-gatherer tribes were quite egalitarian, and that it was agriculture that gave rise to social stratification. See for example: Dyble, Salali, Chaudhary, Page, Smith, Thompson, Vinicius, Mace and Migliano (2015).

⁷² Nietzsche (2002 [1886], p. 152).

⁷³ Nietzsche (2002 [1886], p. 160).

⁷⁴ Burke (2004 [1790], pp. 182-183).

As E.H. Kossmann argued in his Huizinga-lecture on conservatism, conservative thought often presents itself as empirical and realist, but in reality it is a highly abstract form of thought. The conservative defence of a 'natural' order is in fact deeply metaphysical, Kossmann argues. It 'departs from an analogy between nature and society, an analogy that cannot be observed, it can only be thought'.⁷⁵ Such an analogy between nature and society is central to Nietzsche's philosophy. At first glance, Nietzsche and Burke seem to occupy the opposite extremes when it comes to their appreciation of prejudice, morality and virtue. On a deeper level, Nietzsche's writing contains obvious parallels to Burke, who founded a political ideology that denied its own ideological nature by camouflaging its metaphysical claims in an appeal to the natural. Nietzsche stayed true to the major theme of conservatism, which has over hundreds of years consistently confronted progressive ideology with an appeal to nature, instinct and tradition. In this sense, radical nihilism and conservatism can go hand in hand, if nihilism means a return to 'natural' instincts that happens to agree with the conservative defence of human inequality. If Nietzsche, as Deleuze wrote, is the dawn of the counterculture, it seems pertinent to specify we are dealing with a conservative counterculture.⁷⁶ Nietzsche is the epitome of the figure of the conservative rebel, someone who revolts against the given moral order, only to reaffirm another deeper, underlying conservative moral order which celebrates conflict, lineage, power and distinction.

W.F. Hermans' nihilism

These Nietzschean themes characterize the work of W.F. Hermans, together with Reve the foremost conservative rebel on the Dutch literary and intellectual scene. Hermans positioned himself on the one hand against Menno ter Braak,⁷⁷ the leading Dutch intellectual in the interwar period, and the most prominent Dutch exponent of Nietzschean nihilism. Confronted with the rise of National Socialism, Ter Braak faced the problem that Nietzsche's will to power was not a very effective intellectual defence against the Nazi's. Ter Braak became increasingly politically active. He headed the *Comité van Waakzaamheid* (Committee of Vigilance), a coalition of intellectuals that spoke out against growing anti-Semitism in Dutch public opinion and raised consciousness concerning the dangers of National Socialism. At first, Ter Braak tried to contest National Socialism with Nietzsche's theory of resentment. But eventually, Ter Braak saw himself forced to abandon his nihilism by adopting a humanist position. He made an appeal to 'human dignity' and called for a 'struggle against the cynical contempt for humanity of fascism and National Socialism in general'.⁷⁸ This improvised alarm against fascism was Ter Braak's last effort, until the invasion of the Nazis, when he decided to commit suicide. In the post-war period, Ter Braak's figure

⁷⁵ Kossmann (1981).

⁷⁶ Deleuze (1977).

⁷⁷ See Ewoud Kieft's *Oorlogsmythen* (War Myths) for a more extensive discussion on the central relevance of Ter Braak for Hermans' intellectual development (Kieft, 2012).

⁷⁸ Ter Braak (1939b).

loomed large in the Dutch intellectual scene. Many saw him as the heroic archetype of the independent, politically engaged intellectual. W.F. Hermans, who had remained passive and neutral in the course of the war, like most of the Dutch population, launched a frontal attack on both Ter Braak and the Dutch resistance in his post-war novels. In his political essays, Hermans engaged in merciless polemics against the legacy of Ter Braak and intellectual political commitment. Hermans argued that Ter Braak had never been Nietzschean enough:

In fact, Ter Braak yearned for an ideology, a doctrine; he was not a- and immoral enough. It was not sufficient for him to say: we must fight the Germans because they are our enemies, or: we must watch the Nazi's closely because they will betray us. No, it had to be founded on something, he wanted to write, he wanted to 'think'.⁷⁹

For Hermans, Ter Braak's appeal to human dignity was a form of religious nihilism, a denial of life as is. Hermans interpreted Nietzsche's nihilism selectively, reducing the meaning of the term to negative or religious nihilism.⁸⁰ He argued that from a proper Nietzschean perspective on nihilism, it did not really matter for the masses what form their escapist ideology took:

Ter Braak did not know that the nihilist hordes are satisfied with everything that masks their nihilism. They have no special preference for a racial theory or a leader, often they are equally satisfied with dialectical claptrap, psalms, de VARA [the Dutch social democratic broadcaster], democracy, Christianity, the American Way of Life, the Third Way, peace missions, the welfare state. What they choose depends on circumstances that no one knows exactly and that Ter Braak has never inquired after.⁸¹

In his many essays and novels, Hermans expounded his interpretation of nihilism, turning it into a rather absolutist anti-ideological and anti-moralist position. Hermans argued that it was useless for Ter Braak to speak out against National Socialism, since ideas do not really matter; only power does. That the Americans and the Russians chose to fight Hitler was primarily due to the fact that their armies were stronger and

⁷⁹ 'Ter Braak smachtte eigenlijk naar een ideologie, een leer: hij was niet a- en immoreel genoeg. Het was hem niet voldoende te zeggen: we moeten de Duitsers bestrijden omdat zij onze vijanden zijn, of: we moeten de nazi's in de gaten houden omdat zij ons zullen verraden. Nee, dat moest allemaal gefundeerd worden, hij wou essays schrijven, hij wou "denken".' (Hermans, 1967, p. 60)

⁸⁰ Here I differ in opinion from Kieft, who argues that Hermans' view of Nietzsche's nihilism is essentially correct, and who portrays Hermans as giving Ter Braak a 'beginner's course' in nihilism. See: Kieft (2012, p. 118).

⁸¹ 'Ter Braak wist niet dat nihilistische horden genoeg nemen met alles wat hun nihilisme maskeert: ze hebben geen bijzondere voorkeur voor een rassentheorie of een leider, dikwijls zijn ze ook wel tevreden met dialectisch gewauwel, psalmen, de Vara, de democratie, christendom, the American Way of life, de Derde Weg, Vredesartikelen, de welvaartsstaat. Wat zij kiezen hangt af van omstandigheden die niemand precies kent en Ter Braak nooit onderzocht heeft.' See: Hermans (1967).

that they knew they could win. Why would anyone try to unmask Nazism, when there is nothing to unmask? Hermans considered it to be a great historical error that Ter Braak and his close collaborator Du Perron were seen by many as nihilists and cynics, while they had no idea what 'true cynicism, true immoralism, true godlessness' meant.⁸² Ter Braak failed to take Nietzsche's philosophy to its logical conclusion. Hating Hitler or the Church, necessarily means one hates the people that fall for it, the 'beastly stupidity' of the masses, it meant 'total misanthropy'. Shortly before, in his novel *Het Grote Medelijden* (The Great Compassion), Hermans had identified his programme with the triad: 'creative nihilism, aggressive compassion, total misanthropy.' He defended his authorship as an outlet for religious or negative nihilism: literature could satisfy the human longing for meaning and mythology while at the same time recognizing these as mere stories.⁸³ Hermans is often described as an intellectual opponent of Ter Braak and Du Perron, but perhaps it would be more correct to argue that Hermans took it upon himself to more consistently expound Ter Braak's Nietzschean inspirations.

The other reference point and nemesis of Hermans was Jean-Paul Sartre. Like Sartre, Hermans used his novels as an exposition of his philosophy. At the same time, he refined his nihilist convictions in opposition to Sartre and existentialist philosophy. As Otterspeer observes in his intellectual biography, Hermans had extensively familiarized himself with Sartre's existentialism during his visits to Brussels shortly after the war.⁸⁴ Sartre departed from the notion that man, after the death of God, is responsible for creating his own values and acting in accordance with them. During the war, Sartre had been active in the resistance, and this experience was vital to the existentialist idea that passivity or neutrality is also a choice; man is burdened with the responsibility to act, and failure to do so is a denial of the self. One of Sartre's central concepts is *mauvaise foi*, bad faith. Sartre explained it in *Being and Nothingness* using the metaphor of a woman on a date, who is the subject of romantic advances by a man. He touches her hand and she faces the choice of either refusing or accepting the flirtation. When the woman chooses to not act at all, and to pretend that the hand being touched is not part of her body, she acts in bad faith.⁸⁵ Sartre's existentialism became the dominant current in post-war French intellectual life and this implied, for intellectuals and authors, a responsibility to act and to engage themselves politically.

The ideas that Hermans championed and that came to dominate the Dutch literary scene eventually, were the very mirror image of Sartre's existentialism. From a Sartrean perspective, Hermans project revolves around the defence of *mauvaise foi*: the denial of the possibility to act and to make moral choices. Again, why France opted for Sartrean existentialism and the Netherlands eventually for Hermans' nihilism, is difficult to determine. For the large majority of the Dutch population, who had remained passive during the war, Hermans' defence of passivity and his attacks on the Dutch resistance

⁸² Hermans (1967, p. 63).

⁸³ Kieft (2012, p. 96-139).

⁸⁴ Otterspeer (2013).

⁸⁵ Sartre (1943, p. 97).

must have been comforting to some degree. And Hermans' passive conception of man also concurred with the political culture of passivity that Lijphart saw as characteristic for Dutch politics at the time.⁸⁶ Hermans most famous book, *The Darkroom of Damocles* is a powerful exposition of his dark and sceptical vision of man. The main character, Osewoudt, is active in the Dutch resistance. Until the very end of the novel, it remains unclear whether the person he is working for, Dorbeck, is real or a double agent for the Germans. The moral of the story is that it is not possible to distinguish good and evil and act accordingly. Osewoudt cannot make a moral judgement and choose which side he is on, because he never fully understands who is who. When Osewoudt is caught and put in jail because he is accused of collaborating with the Germans, this nihilist philosophy is elaborated on by a cellmate of Osewoudt: 'for those who know they have to die, no absolute moral can exist, for him goodness and charitableness are nothing but disguises of fear.'⁸⁷

This is a passive nihilism – a nihilism that in contrast with the radical nihilism that Nietzsche proposed, is not interested in overcoming nihilism and giving form to new values.⁸⁸ In his novels, Hermans construed a passive subject, who is politically paralysed and cannot change the world for the better. 'You don't even have the choice to leave things as they are in the Netherlands and in the world,' he told his literary opponent Harry Mulisch in a famous double interview. 'The world changes without anyone knowing exactly how or through what.' All societal changes, Hermans proposed, did not result from ideas and ideals, but rather from technological development. In that same interview however, Hermans went on to rapidly contradict himself, when he stated with equal decisiveness that Nietzsche provided the main inspiration for the Nazi's, and that ideas which cannot be empirically proven, like those of Mulisch, 'are the cause of all those societal convulsions, revolutions, that will lead to nothing. Only to useless bloodshed, noise, and wastefulness.' Ideas suddenly appear to have great influence, albeit only in a negative sense.⁸⁹

The power of political ideas remains one of the central paradoxes in Hermans' worldview. Hermans was a very political author, even if his message as a sceptical conservative was the defence of political passivity and an opposition to political commitment. As Hermans explained in interviews and essays, he had an explicitly ideological perspective on literature: 'A writer, a poet, a novelist puts a certain

⁸⁶ Thinkers such as Bülent Diken connect passive nihilism with the post-political order, the end of ideological conflict since 1989, when politics was increasingly reduced to technocratic management. Of course, there was also an earlier end of ideology debate in the 1960s. The work of Hermans can be seen as an expression of that political reality. See: Diken (2009).

⁸⁷ Hermans (1971, p. 361).

⁸⁸ At times, Hermans appears to employ Nietzsche's nihilism to defend a *l'art pour l'art* position. In the eyes of Hermans, the big problem of the religious nihilists, the big problem of Ter Braak's appeal to human dignity, is that they 'were opposed to *l'art pour l'art* [...], opposed to entartete kunst, against surrealism.' See: Hermans (1967, p. 60). But for Nietzsche, the function of art was to beautify life. In this way, it would allow us to cope with the truth of life's inherent ugliness and meaningless. Hermans does the very opposite in his literary practice. Rather than beautifying life, his novels are an expression of Nietzsche's bleak vision.

⁸⁹ See: Janssen (1979, pp. 170-189).

worldview on stage with his characters, those people live according to the rules of that worldview.' Or even more explicit: 'I consider a novel actually as a sort of parable that matches with a certain philosophy, a certain worldview.'⁹⁰ But Hermans denied that the worldview he was offering to his readers, affected them in any way. 'Oh, they will read a book of mine,' he said to Mulisch, 'in terms of their deeds and daily mechanisms, they will keep plodding along.' Literature, Hermans argued, is not capable of 'reaching beyond its confines and have meaning for anything whatsoever'.⁹¹ At the same time, in the same interview, in a remarkably different tone, Hermans would describe it as his 'calling' and lifelong 'mission', to fight the 'starry-eyed idealists' of the left and to defend the status quo, a classically conservative statement:

Perhaps I too have a sort of mission. I mean, the situation is not only terrible, but the situation is terrible according to my view, because the human psyche is not all that the do-gooders imagine it to be. In fact, in my books I want to point to the limited psychological capabilities of man. I am convinced that a human being is not suitable to love others, and that means things should stay as they are.⁹²

Yet Hermans' nihilism is often interpreted in an apolitical fashion and described by scholars as a form of 'realism'. The book on Hermans by the historian Ewoud Kieft is an illustrative example. After presenting Hermans as the single most important intellectual godfather of right-wing populism, Kieft goes on to qualify Hermans' nihilism as an attempt at 'being as neutral as possible'. In the eyes of Kieft, Hermans is an anti-ideological and realistic thinker, teaching 'true lessons, by taking away preconceived prejudices and misunderstandings'.⁹³ Of course Kieft's image of Hermans as the great 'realist' crusader against ideology fits nicely with the dominant ideology of the Dutch politics of accommodation. But Hermans himself would never have described his authorship in those terms. He publicly proclaimed his novels were mythological and he explicitly distanced himself from realism and pedagogical intentions. Kieft's position is exemplary of the uncritical nature of much of the secondary literature on Hermans, which treats his nihilism as an objective critique of all forms of political ideology, politely exempting Hermans' own worldview from such scrutiny.⁹⁴ For some, the narcotic effects of the ideological spell cast by Hermans have

⁹⁰ Elders (1979, pp. 132-156).

⁹¹ Janssen (1979, p. 177).

⁹² 'Misschien heb ook ik wel een soort missie. Ik bedoel, de toestand is niet alleen gruwelijk, maar die toestand is volgens mij gruwelijk omdat de menselijke psyche niet zo is als alle wereldverbeteraars zich dat voorstellen. Ik wil dus in mijn boeken eigenlijk wijzen op de beperkte mogelijkheden die een mens psychisch heeft. Ik ben ervan overtuigd dat een mens niet in de wieg is gelegd om van andere mensen te houden, en dat daardoor de toestand dus zo moet blijven als ie is.' (Janssen, 1979, p. 179)

⁹³ Kieft (2012, pp. 229-230).

⁹⁴ Take the prominent literary critic Frans Boenders, who describes Hermans in glowing terms as 'the only writer with a consistent vision of man and society', who is 'lucidly focused on facts and the unmasking of all ideologies'. See: Boenders (1985). This perspective on Hermans is puzzling, since there is nothing 'factual' about Hermans deeply metaphysical views on human nature. Hermans himself repeatedly described his writing as a form of mythology that does not belong to the realm of facts.

been powerful indeed. As the philosopher Fons Elders wrote of Hermans: ‘His worldview is that of the geologist, who forces earth dwellers to a mental striptease – willingly or not, because he is almost always right – returning them to their natural state they have disavowed.’⁹⁵ What is omitted in these commentaries is that to accept Hermans’ sceptical conservative worldview as ‘realism’, ultimately depends on an ontological decision of the reader, who needs to embrace his dark and sceptical vision of man as a return to a ‘natural state’.⁹⁶

It is this nihilist and anti-moralistic current of thought that continues to inspire right-wing opposition to progressives today. The sizeable influence of what we can call ‘the Nietzschean right’ has led to a remarkable turnaround. Traditionally, conservatives were the ones to insist on virtuousness and decency. Currently it is progressives that find themselves subject to the odd right-wing accusation of being a *Gutmensch* and a ‘decency terrorist’.

6.4 The weaponisation of irony: From Reve to *GeenStijl*

As many have observed, *GeenStijl* employs a particular form of irony that allows it to transgress the discursive order, and write about the Moroccan-Dutch minority as ‘Rif Monkeys’, women as ‘fuck objects’, refugees as ‘floatnegroes’ and to publicly wish their opponents dead, all with a wink and a smile. Again, *GeenStijl* draws on a longer and established Dutch tradition. As mentioned briefly before, Bas Heijne linked the rise of right-wing populism and *GeenStijl* to the work of Gerard Reve:

When the history of new-right populism will be written, then its greatest influence should not be forgotten: Gerard Reve. The language of the current political revolt is pervaded with the irony of Reve – that half-ironic, half seriously teasing of those brave progressive *bien pensants* with their lack of humor and moral self-righteousness. ‘They should ride a burning doll’s pram into your twat,’ is one of the favourite sentences of many Reve adepts. It’s all there – the hyperbolic aggression that expresses real anger, but at the same time comical impotence. The irony of Reve, always only half-ironic, has now lodged itself in the public domain. Theo van Gogh, allowed to whisper to ‘the Divine Bald One’ Fortuyn, was a great fan of Reve. Martin Bosma finds Reve to be the greatest writer. The best of *GeenStijl* is steeped in Revian irony.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See: Elders (1979, p. 132).

⁹⁶ Kieft’s portrayal of Hermans’ vision of the Second World War as ‘realist’ and ‘neutral’ is all the more remarkable for two reasons. First, Kieft himself argues that there is one ‘clear commandment’ in Hermans’s worldview: ‘you will not make your fictional stories out to be the everyday reality.’ And second, Kieft demonstrates quite clearly in his book that Hermans consciously and incorrectly slandered the Dutch resistance in his novels in order to score political points for his sceptical worldview. The victim of that slander happened to include Kieft’s own grandfather, who was a Christian resistance fighter.

⁹⁷ ‘Als er ooit een geschiedenis van nieuw-rechts populisme wordt geschreven, dan mag daarin de grootste invloed niet ontbreken: Gerard Reve. De taal van de huidige politieke revolutie is doordrenkt van reviaanse ironie – het half ironisch, half serieus sarren van die brave progressieve weldenkenden met hun humorloze bedilzucht en morele zelfgenoegzaamheid. “Ze moesten een brandende poppenwagen je kutwerk

Indeed, *GeenStijl* often refers to Reve in its blogposts. An illustrative example of the Reve-*GeenStijl* connection is an item by *GeenStijl* that deals with commenting on social media. The blogpost starts out as follows: ‘Internet comments: axe at the root of civilization or finger in the arse of society?’ It discusses the investigation by the Public Prosecutor of a Dutch policeman who voiced islamophobic comments online and wished Muslims dead. After lamenting the fact that one cannot speak freely anymore, the *GeenStijl* blogpost refers with wistfulness to the time when we could still laugh about Gerard Reve’s ‘They should ride a burning doll’s pram into your twat’. The text of the blogpost is followed by a short video. A man called ‘René Lambswool Jersey’ – who happens to wear a lambswool jersey – appears on screen, seated in a comfortable armchair. He is ‘close reading’ a selection of insulting and racist Facebook comments, posted in response to an incendiary video shared by *GeenStijl* some time ago. The soft-spoken, formal delivery of the comments is accompanied by kitschy piano music. While the item is obviously a statement in favour of freedom of speech, the irony has the effect of leaving the viewer uncertain as to whether it’s the censors or the abusive commenters that are being ridiculed. It is exactly this combination of making political statements while confusing the audience that is typical of Revian irony.⁹⁸

The occasion for Bas Heijne’s comments on Reve was a small political scandal that revolved around the use of the Dutch *prinsenvlag* by Geert Wilders Party for Freedom (PVV). The *prinsenvlag* – a historical flag with orange, white and blue colours – stems from the anti-Spanish revolt and the birth of Dutch Republic in the sixteenth century. It has since acquired a controversial status, because of its use by the Dutch National Socialist Party in the 1930s, the NSB. The Party for Freedom started to display the flag in their parliamentary office in 2011, causing a public controversy. To make matters more complicated, the party had hung it next to a flag of Israel and publicly denied the flag’s extreme right connotation. Bas Heijne interpreted it as a way for the PVV to flirt with the extreme-right subtext of the flag, trolling the Dutch political establishment. The response was a predictable, concerned reaction: some spoke of the return of fascism. For Heijne, the incident epitomized the complex, often half-ironic posturing of the PVV and the Dutch right-wing populist revolt more in general. He saw this political use of irony as setting Dutch populism apart from other European right-wing populist movements, who are more serious and straightforward in their intolerance. Perhaps that is a bit overstated: playful intolerance is certainly not limited to the Dutch.⁹⁹ But Heijne is certainly right to argue that the political use of irony in Dutch populism is poorly understood internationally, if only for the fact that irony is difficult to translate. Referring to the anti-Muslim slur that Theo van Gogh popularized and the incendiary

binnenrijden,” luidt de favoriete zin van veel revianen. Daar zit het allemaal in – die hyperbolische agressie die echte woede uitdrukt, maar tegelijk ook komische onmacht. De ironie van Reve, altijd maar half ironisch, heeft zich nu in het publieke domein genesteld. Theo van Gogh, die “de Goddelijke Kale” Fortuyn mocht influisteren, was een groot Revefan. Martin Bosma vindt Reve de grootste schrijver. Het beste van *GeenStijl* druipt van reviaanse ironie.’ See: Heijne (2011).

⁹⁸ Brusselmans (2014).

⁹⁹ A similar use of irony and exaggeration, for instance, has been observed in the Italian Lega Nord party. See: Dematteo (2007).

proposal by the PVV to tax the use of headscarves by Muslim women, Heijne observed: 'Goatfucker, head rag-tax – one never succeeds in explaining the correspondents of foreign newspapers that it sounds really intense, but at the same time has an ironic undertone. Well, half-ironic; or, a little bit ironic.'¹⁰⁰

What form of irony are we dealing with here? It is not the light-hearted Socratic irony, in the original Greek sense of the word: *eironeia*, or pretend ignorance. In the Socratic dialogues, Socrates uses it to entrap his interlocutor, by appearing to be naïve and asking a series of seemingly innocent, sly questions. In this classic meaning of the term, irony serves to further the philosophical argument; it is a weapon in the philosopher's armoury, to educate his public as to the true nature of things. In Plato's dialogues, irony ends in closure. The examples mentioned above appear to work according to an opposite logic: the irony here depends on the public's understanding that the ironic actor is not innocent, but consciously transgresses the moral order. And the public is left in perennial doubt as to the true nature of the intention of the actor. It is more akin to the Romantic irony of Friedrich Schlegel, who wrote:

It is a very good sign when the harmonious bores are at a loss about how they should react to this continuous self-parody, when they fluctuate endlessly between belief and disbelief until they get dizzy, and take what is meant as a joke seriously and what is meant seriously as a joke.¹⁰¹

Reve and Romantic irony

No one has done more to popularize Romantic irony in the Netherlands than Gerard Reve. Together with Hermans and Mulisch, Reve (1923-2006) is considered to be among the three greatest post-war writers in the Netherlands. His 1947 debut *De Avonden* (The Evenings) became a Dutch classic. It is a passive nihilistic portrait of a young man living with his family in Amsterdam at the end of 1946, spending his seemingly futile days desperately trying to simply pass the time. His scathing ironic humour seems to be his only relief. Characteristically, the war is never mentioned, heated post-war debates on collaboration and resistance, the fate of the Jews or the colonial war in Indonesia seem to have been consciously erased from the picture, in clear opposition to the 'realism' that is commonly ascribed to the novel. Parallels to Hermans' bleak nihilist worldview are also present in Reve's work: the pitch-black vision of man, the meaninglessness of life, the assumed uselessness and unsocial nature of art, and the aversion to the left as a secular continuation of a religious morality. But Reve was a radically different author, in that he chose to explore questions surrounding his own public persona as a writer, rather than construing impersonal systems in his novels, like Hermans. Reve's open homosexuality, his ironic conversion to the Catholic Church, his racist pronouncements and his play with artistic

¹⁰⁰ Heijne (2011).

¹⁰¹ Cited in: Riley (2000, p. 150).

conventions by flirting with commerciality, mass media and popular culture, made him into a celebrity, equally provocateur, show master and jester.

In his study of Gerard Reve, Edwin Praat explored the subject brilliantly. His central focus is the self-reflexive manner in which Reve started to confuse his – increasingly autobiographical – literary universe with that of his public persona. Similar to Hermans, Reve's first opponent in his pursuit of symbolic transgression was the Catholic Church. In 1966, Reve had to appear in court on blasphemy charges for describing a sex scene with God incarnated as a donkey in one of his books. The trial became an iconic reference in the secularization process that started to take hold in those years. More important for our purposes here, however, is the controversy surrounding Reve's racist statements. In a personal letter to a fellow writer included in *De Taal der Liefde* (The Language of Love), a book from 1972, Reve pleaded to deport immigrants from the former Dutch colonies, who had arrived in the Netherlands in large numbers, following decolonization:

Now we still have to get rid of that trash from Surinam, Curacao and the Dutch Antilles. I am much in favour of those beautiful peoples becoming fully independent as soon as possible, and no longer costing us anything, so we can send them all with a big bag of little beads and mirrors on the Tjoekie Tjoekie steamer, single way to the Takki Takki jungle, Sir!¹⁰²

It led to a sharp reaction from Harry Mulish, who condemned Reve for hiding sincere racism behind irony.¹⁰³ It was not the first time that Mulisch and Reve confronted each other. With his communist sympathies, his affiliation with the Provo youth movement, and his believe in authenticity and literary engagement, Mulisch embodied everything that Reve (and Hermans) opposed. During his trial defence on the donkey controversy, Reve had called Mulisch a 'motorized riot voyeur' and in interviews, he had suggested that Mulisch should be beaten to death and put into a communist prison camp. In the same letter in *De Taal der Liefde*, Reve portrayed Mulisch, son of an Austrian-Hungarian father and a German-Jewish mother, as an (artistically) infertile product of miscegenation. He also stated that an earlier accusation of racism by Mulisch had allowed him to sell more books:

As you know, due to the accusation of 'racism', directed at my person some years ago, the sale of my books has multiplied. I am not single minded enough of spirit, and also far too intelligent, to be a racist. But those accusations, and their lucrative effect, have made me think. I only need to stage some character, uttering degrading

¹⁰² 'Nu moeten we nog van die Surinaamse en Curaçaose & Antilliaanse troep af. Ik ben er erg voor, dat die prachtvolken zo gauw mogelijk geheel onafhankelijk worden, en ons niks meer kosten, zodat we ze allemaal met een zak vol spiegeltjes en kralen op de tjoeki tjoeki stoomboot kunnen zetten, enkele reis Takki Takki Oerwoud, meneer!' Gerard Reve, Brief aan Simon Carmiggelt, in *De taal der liefde* (1972), cited in: Van Hasselt (2003).

¹⁰³ Mulisch (1976).

things concerning all sorts of inferior coconut pickers, who defends the honour of 'our young girls and women', and Money comes flooding in. Black gold.¹⁰⁴

In response, Mulisch argued that the irony of Reve's irony, was that Reve was being sincere in his opinions:

The irony leads to parody, parody leads to identification – that is the infallible law that Reve is beholden to above all. [...] In this way, play becomes serious. The fraternity student plays the man with the filthy mouth, to the point where he becomes his role. That is the irony of irony: that it suddenly stops being ironic. He has, so to say, fallen through the double bottom of irony. Who speaks ironic, says the opposite of what is intended, but in such a way that the other sees it. Van het Reve says what he means, but in such a way, that the other doesn't get it and thinks he is still being ironic. When he writes: 'I believe that the workers should live in separate neighbourhoods, that they are only allowed to exit when commuting to work, and beyond that only with special permit-passes' – that is simply his opinion, no joke, no fantasy.¹⁰⁵

As Edwin Praat makes clear, two different visions on irony collide in this confrontation. Mulisch departs from classical irony, which is based on a notable discrepancy between what is said and what is intended. Even if people can momentarily be misled, in the end, this type of irony leads to closure. Mulisch accuses Reve of using irony the wrong way around: Reve is sincere while pretending to be ironic, and thus falls through 'the double bottom' of irony. It is debatable whether Mulisch fully does justice to Reve's use of irony. Following the lead of Ernst Behler's study of irony, Edwin Praat argues that Reve stands in the Romantic tradition of literary irony, which was introduced by Friedrich Schlegel and the German Romantics at the end of the eighteenth century. Romantic irony implies a playful, subjective, seemingly non-committal, suspended and sceptical pose. What is more, Romantic irony does not restrict itself to a single ironical statement, but encompasses an entire philosophical attitude, in which the boundaries

¹⁰⁴ 'Zoals je weet, is door de beschuldiging van "racisme", enkele jaren geleden aan mijn adres geuit, de verkoop van mijn boeken verveelvoudigd. Ik ben niet enkelvoudig genoeg van geest, en ook veel te intelligent, om een racist te zijn, maar die beschuldiging, en het lucratieve effect ervan, hebben mij aan het denken gezet. Ik behoef maar een of andere persoon sprekend in te voeren, die zich laatdunkend over allerlei inferieure kokosnotenplukkers uitlaat en voor de eer van "onze meisjes en jonge vrouwen" opkomt en het Geld stroomt mij toe. Het zwarte goud.' Cited in: Van Hasselt (2003).

¹⁰⁵ 'De ironie leidt tot parodie, de parodie leidt tot identificatie – dat is de onwrikbare wet, waaraan van het Reve nog het meest onderhorig is. [...] De corpsstudent speelt net zo lang de man met de grote bek, tot hij het is. Dat is het ironische van de ironie: dat zij het plotseling niet meer is. Hij is als het ware door de dubbele bodem van de ironie gezakt. Wie ironisch spreekt, zegt het tegendeel van wat hij meent, maar zodanig, dat een ander dat doorziet. Van het Reve zegt wat hij meent, maar zodanig dat de ander dat niet doorziet en denkt nog steeds met ironie van doen te hebben. Als hij schrijft: "Ik vind, dat de arbeiders in bepaalde aparte wijken zouden moeten wonen, die ze alleen op weg van of naar hun werk zouden mogen verlaten, en verder alleen met speciale verlofpasjes" – dan is dat eenvoudig zijn mening, geen grap, geen fantasie.' See: Mulisch (1976).

between art and life, between author, narrator and characters are increasingly dissolved, in accordance with the Romantic mission to aestheticize life and make it subservient to artistic play.

In this way, the confrontation extended to the very character of literary autonomy itself. In his critique of Reve, Mulisch distinguished between the fictional world of the novel, and the world of everyday reality. Characters in a novel are free to say anything because they are fictional, and their words can never be ascribed to real people. In everyday reality however, people are not free to say anything they like; they have a responsibility for the consequences of their words and can be called to account. In public appearances, the author needs to present him or herself in an authentic manner, so that his or her statements can be judged accordingly. Mulisch accuses Reve of consciously confusing his audience, first by mixing his literary work with autobiographical elements, for example by publishing a seemingly authentic (racist) personal letter in a fictional work such as *De Taal der Liefde*. And second, by being ironic and insincere in his public interventions, fictionalizing his public persona. When Mulisch writes that for the reader, Reve is 'less of an author than a fictional character', that is meant as a critique. It allows Reve to play hide and seek, and make racist statements pretending to be engaged in artistic play. But from a Romantic perspective, the accusation is a compliment, testament to the superiority of art over life.

Revian irony distinguishes itself from Romantic irony in one important respect that isn't mentioned by Praat. In his writings on the tradition of Romantic irony, Kierkegaard portrayed it as an inherently elitist and exclusive form:

It looks down, as it were, on plain and ordinary discourse immediately understood by everyone: it travels in an exclusive incognito. [...] [It] occurs chiefly in the higher circles as a prerogative belonging to the same category as that *bon ton* requiring one to smile at innocence and regard virtue as a kind of prudishness, although one still believes in it to a certain extent.¹⁰⁶

For Kierkegaard, irony is like a masked ball, aristocratic and refined. In comparison, Revian irony is more crass and popular. Reve continuously mocked artistic conventions in a way that the Romantics never would, by portraying himself as a 'writer of the people' or 'everyman's writer' and brutishly promoting his work as a commercial enterprise.

Reve and the carnivalesque

Revian irony seems to draw on another literary tradition too. It contains strong parallels to what Bakhtin once called the carnivalesque: a literary form that aims at breaking conventions through humour and confusion. Bakhtin formulated his theory of carnival as a way to interpret the work of the French humanist Francois Rabelais (1494-1553) and other writers of his time (Shakespeare, Boccaccio, Dante, Cervantes). In Bakhtin's

¹⁰⁶ Riley (2000, p. 149).

work, carnival has a utopian quality; it creates an imaginary world where the social order is turned upside down. Masks and disguises served to dissolve fixed identities and role patterns. Carnival created a liberated form of speech, free of etiquette and common notions of decency. These carnivalesque expressions survived outside of the carnival season in the form of satire, defamatory pamphlets, in theatre, spectacles and in the language of the marketplace, full of swearing, obscenities and other forms of linguistic innovation and transgression. Particular to carnivalesque humour is that it does not place itself above or outside the object of mockery. The joker himself is an integral part of the world that is being mocked. Likewise, in his many public performances, Reve continuously satirizes himself and the aura surrounding the figure of the writer.

In parallel to Mulisch, many critiqued Reve for his clownesque behaviour and his camp television performances, in short, for playing the joker to the point where the real Gerard Reve disappeared behind a smokescreen of poses and fictional storylines. When Reve received the most important Dutch literature prize in 1969, the P.C. Hooft prize, the award ceremony was held in a Catholic church in Amsterdam, and broadcast on Dutch public television. After a night of circus-like performances and interviews, in which he likened the church to a puppet theatre in need of a Punch like Reve, causing great consternation among the Catholic community, Reve ended with an expression of gratitude:

To those who might think differently of me, who always say, whether they are my enemies I don't know, he is an actor, a charlatan, a comic, he is a clown; to these people I would like to say: yes, that is true. I am an actor, I am a comic, I am a charlatan, and a clown. But the crazy thing is, that I am the role that I play, and that tonight, I sincerely believe, I haven't actually said anything that I did not mean.¹⁰⁷

Again, there is an interesting role reversal taking place here. Mulisch is the emblematic figure of the politically engaged author, with his believe in sincerity and his leftist sympathies. At the same time, Edwin Praat accuses Mulisch of seeing the literary world as a cage, a confined space in which literary characters have to be restrained.¹⁰⁸ Only when exiting the literary world, in serious public interventions, can a writer be politically engaged. The paradox here is that it is Reve, the man who argued that all art is quite useless, amoral and unable to influence society in any way, who seems to believe in the power of literature to transcend its artistic confines.¹⁰⁹ Similar to Hermans, it is by denying that he has an effect on the world, that Reve legitimates his ability to do so. In

¹⁰⁷ 'Dat er misschien mensen anders zouden over mij kunnen denken, die altijd zeggen, of het vijanden zijn weet ik niet, hij is een acteur, een charlatan, een komediant, hij is een clown, en tegen die mensen zou ik willen zeggen: ja, dat is waar. Ik ben een acteur, ik ben een komediant, ik ben een charlatan, en een clown. Maar het krankzinnige is, dat de rol die ik speel, dat ik dat ben, en dat ik vanavond, dat geloof ik in diepe ernst, eigenlijk niets heb gezegd wat ik niet heb gemeend.' (Praat, 2014, p. 175)

¹⁰⁸ Praat (2014, p. 145).

¹⁰⁹ Praat (2014, p. 72, p. 73).

his pleas against immigration, Reve adopts the position of the politically engaged author, all the while denying that this is what he is doing.

In august 1974, Reve published the poem *Voor Eigen Erf* (For Our Estate) in *Propria Cures*, the renowned satirical student paper. 'Throw out all that black scum, our country for us. Onwards, towards White Power!', the ironic and hyperbolic poem ended. Despite its inflammatory content, the poem did not elicit much response. That changed when Reve presented the poem in a theatrical manner on the yearly Poetry Night in Kortrijk, Belgium. A scandal was born. In a documentary of the Dutch television programme *Andere Tijden*, titled *Het Raadsel van Reve* (The Riddle of Reve), we see how the Surinam-Dutch lawyer Haakmat walks up to Reve after his performance to confront him with the criticism that he deploys 'despicable racism'. The reaction of Reve is striking: the ironic mask is suddenly gone. 'Because those niggers were slaves in Surinam 125 years ago, is it their right that their great-grandchildren come to Amsterdam to live off welfare?', Reve answers visibly agitated.¹¹⁰

While his understanding of irony is perhaps somewhat selective, the core of Mulisch' critique seems nonetheless justified, namely that Revian irony can be used for making serious political statements. That point is underlined further by a letter that Reve send to the Amsterdam newspaper *Het Parool*, in response to the consternation caused by his performance. He described his poem as a 'primitive cry of alarm, probably posited in too vulgar terms':

I do not literally mean what is said in the poem, because I am no racist and the negro, in my opinion, has a right to a place under the sun that is equal to the white man. I have in this brutish way, found an audience of millions for my plea, stating that the migration policy of the Dutch government that allows massive entry of migrants, for whom in the Netherlands, there is no work, no accommodation and no future, except pauperization and criminality, will lead to disaster.¹¹¹

Irony here does not imply the impossibility of political commitment, as the Dutch writer P.F. Thomése argued some time ago.¹¹² What Reve shows is the opposite: carnivalesque irony can be a powerful instrument for political engagement. It is moreover, a form of engagement that seems to have withstood the test of time (in contrast to Mulisch, whose sympathy for Cuba feels somewhat outdated). Because presently, it is exactly this clownesque, ironic and hyperbolic form of engagement that

¹¹⁰ Van Hasselt (2003).

¹¹¹ 'Ik bedoel niet letterlijk wat in het gedicht staat, want ik ben geen racist en de neger heeft mijns inziens recht op een plaats onder de zon gelijkwaardig aan die van de blanke. Ik heb echter door dit brute middel bij miljoenen gehoor gevonden voor mijn betoog, volgens hetwelk de immigratiepolitiek van de Nederlandse regering, die massaal mensen binnenlaat, voor wie er in Nederland geen werk, geen woonruimte en geen toekomst is, en slechts verpaupering en criminaliteit in het verschiet liggen, tot een ramp zal moeten voeren.' See: Van Hasselt (2003).

¹¹² In a prominent essay in *NRC Handelsblad*, Thomése wrote an ode to Romantic irony. He stated that irony implies that writers can not speak out about worldly affairs since they cannot be understood. He referred to the famous parable by Kierkegaard of the clown trying to convince his audience that the theatre was on fire, but receiving nothing but laughter. See: Thomése (2013).

we find at *GeenStijl*, where for almost fifteen years, the editors have sounded a primitive cry of alarm, posited in what are commonly considered to be too vulgar terms.

6.5 Closing the circle: From Hermans and Reve to Van Gogh and *GeenStijl*

In the 1990s this iconoclastic right-wing repertoire of Hermans and Reve is picked up by a new generation whose activities are no longer restricted to the confines of the literary field. The 1960s literary rebellion against the priests of the religious and progressive moral order proved a formative inspiration for the online conservative counterculture that provided the shock troops for the Fortuyn-backlash. The court cases of Hermans and Reve on their insults to religion were returning references in the debate on Islam and freedom of expression. More so after Salmon Rushdie became the victim of a fatwa due to his book *The Satanic Verses*.

The murdered Dutch filmmaker and columnist Theo van Gogh is perhaps one of the most intriguing examples of this development. Theo van Gogh first achieved fame in a long crusade against columnists and antiracist organizations that mobilized the memory of the Second World War to curb racism and hate speech. In fact, Van Gogh's first protracted battle in the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s revolved around the liberty to insult Jewish people with references to the Holocaust and Anne Frank. As Theo van Gogh was taken to court seven times in that period, he defended himself by referring to the genre of the 'sick joke', introduced by the surrealist avant-garde.¹¹³ And he explicitly placed himself in the tradition of Reve and in particular Hermans, who had been sued with the accusation of 'insulting the Catholic part of the nation' in the 1950s. In his columns, Van Gogh made repeated references to Hermans, writing about being prosecuted for insulting the 'Jewish part of the nation'. He made sarcastic jokes about insulting epileptics and being prosecuted by 'the epileptic part of the nation'.¹¹⁴ And when Van Gogh achieved fame for insulting Muslims as goat fuckers, many forgot to mention that Reve was the first to coin the term.¹¹⁵

Theo van Gogh was not merely being recalcitrant, his insults were part of a political campaign against the moral order, against political correctness and the Dutch law section 137c prohibiting insults to groups on the basis of race, sexuality, religion, physical ability, etc. Semi-ironically, Theo van Gogh described freedom of speech in religious terms as absolute, one and indivisible. More generally, Van Gogh's politics were informed by a Nietzschean aversion to social justice as leading to mediocrity. For Nietzsche, profound suffering is at the root of nobility and creativity. The attempt to

¹¹³ Theo van Gogh wrote he 'had been acquitted, partly thanks to Hofland's view on the function of the sick joke ("making the unspeakable visible")'. See: Van Gogh (1993, p. 105). More specifically, Theo van Gogh mentioned Hofland's writing on the subject in *Opmerkingen over de chaos* (Commentaries on Chaos). See: Hofland (1964, p. 37).

¹¹⁴ Van Gogh (1993, p. 93). For Van Gogh's references to Hermans' 'Catholic part of the nation' (Katholieke volksdeel), see: Van Gogh (1993, p. 75, p. 118).

¹¹⁵ Max Pam, another leading columnist politically formed in the tradition of Hermans and Reve, has written a useful historical overview of the use of the term 'goatfucker'. See: Pam (2009).

abolish suffering, to seek comfort, leads to mediocrity and boredom as exemplified by Nietzsche's last man. Van Gogh's critique of Dutch politics is Nietzschean in nature:

Here people do not starve to death on the streets, here the trade unions bend the knee, here the police is corrupt but not unreasonable. I stand with empty hands, since the true paradise is an idyll for the mediocre who smother their lack of passion in reasonableness. [...] Dutch politics listlessly proceeds in an endless drizzle, constructing the most just society ever created by man. We will die of boredom.¹¹⁶

Like Reve, Theo van Gogh is often described as the figure of the jester: an anti-authoritarian rebel, a nihilist, a provocateur and a self-proclaimed village idiot. In the spirit of Reve, Van Gogh played the role of Punch in the puppet theatre of the Dutch media landscape of the 1990s and early 2000s. In what is probably the single most accomplished analysis of the political context of Van Gogh's assassination, the Yale sociologist Ron Eyerman portrays Theo van Gogh as a child of the 1970s: 'In many ways Van Gogh was perfectly placed to absorb the anti-bourgeois, anticlerical revolutionary atmosphere that ran through significant parts of Dutch society during his teenage years.'¹¹⁷ The leading Dutch anthropologist Peter van der Veer describes Van Gogh in a similar vein: 'He was fat, purposefully unkempt, antiauthoritarian, satirical, and immoderate in his language – in short, a personification of the Dutch cultural ethos since the 1970s.'¹¹⁸ But it would be a mistake to characterize Van Gogh as a progressive figure. Returning to the more ambiguous view of the 'cultural revolution' introduced earlier, Van Gogh was clearly drawing on the underexplored right-wing rebellious element in that 1970s ethos. Like Hermans and Reve, Van Gogh's political affinities were firmly on the right, as a self-declared fan of Frits Bolkestein and Pim Fortuyn. And if, as his close friend and kindred spirit Theodor Holman argued, the remembrance of the Second World War shaped his entire artistic production, we should add that it was very much in the nihilist, antimoralist and anti-progressive spirit of Hermans and Reve.¹¹⁹

Two weeks after the brutal murder of Theo van Gogh, the literary critic Arnold Heumakers published a landmark essay in *NRC Handelsblad*. It identified a 'literary genealogy' of a form of polemic where arguments no longer seem to matter. The offensive, foul-mouthed writing style of Theo van Gogh, Heumakers observed, drew on the polemical techniques employed in the Dutch literary field and the privileges accorded to the domain of aesthetic play. He identified the style of Van Gogh, 'vicious,

¹¹⁶ 'Hier creperen geen mensen op straat van de honger, hier buigen de vakbonden, hier is de politie corrupt maar niet onredelijk. Ik sta met lege handen, want het ware paradijs is een lustoord voor middelmatigen die hun gebrek aan hartstocht in redelijkheid smoren. [...] De Nederlandse politiek druipt voort in eindeloze motregen, bouwend aan de rechtvaardigste samenleving ooit door mensenhanden geschapen. Wij zullen sterven van verveling.' (Van Gogh, 2000, p. 38)

¹¹⁷ Eyerman (2008, p. 95).

¹¹⁸ Van der Veer (2006).

¹¹⁹ Eyerman (2008, p. 94).

lively, coarse, funny, overblown, always in opposition and always ad-hominem' as part of the Romantic tradition of the polemic 'that doesn't focus on reasonable arguments, but rather on style, aggression and exaggeration, in which play and sincerity are difficult to distinguish'.¹²⁰ Heumakers credits W.F. Hermans, who prided himself on the aesthetic, non-argumentative quality of his polemics in *Mandarijnen op Zwavelzuur* (Mandarins on Vitriol), as the initiator of that style. It was subsequently adopted by columnists and journalists and became a defining influence on the Dutch (anti-)intellectual debate in the decades after. A polemic had to entertain, and preferably offer malicious delight in the victim being rhetorically ripped apart. We have seen the same style employed by Reve in his personal attacks on Mulisch.

For Heumakers, the case of Theo van Gogh represents the literary polemic gone rogue. While Hermans and Reve claimed the freedom to shock and insult in a largely literary context, that abrasive style increasingly expanded itself beyond the artistic domain in the 1990s and 2000s. Unlike Hermans and Reve, Theo van Gogh had no literary background and did not write in a literary context. He was a columnist. The media platforms used by Van Gogh further enhanced the dynamic of an originally literary genre progressively transgressing the limits of the literary field. Through television and above all the internet, Van Gogh's interventions were no longer understood by his audience in the context of the literary rules of the game; they were taken seriously. And in fact, when Van Gogh turned on Muslims and Islam, he himself became increasingly sincere in his attacks. As Heumakers concluded, the ability to pursue literary polemics is dependent on the willingness to recognize a confined literary space, regulated by certain conventions. 'Uninhibited, the citizen pours out his heart in the digital jungle, if needed anonymous or under a fake name.' To Heumakers, the murder of Van Gogh was a cruel reminder to the world of aesthetic play that it should know its proper place. Of course, the opposite occurred. Following the assassination of Van Gogh, his abrasive style of writing and his semi-ironic, semi-religious crusade for freedom of speech was taken up by friends and followers, including some leading columnists.

At the same time, when compared to Hermans and Reve, a qualitative change had taken place in the target of provocation. While the Catholic and Protestant Church in the 1950s and 1960s could still be described as a dominant institution, and literary autonomy a subordinate phenomenon, this had radically changed after the 1960s due to rapid secularization. The polemics of Van Gogh and his contemporaries were targeted at minorities in the name of a dominant, secular order that fully accepted the autonomy of the literary field. These developments were accompanied at the end of the 1990s by the emergence of the internet. In his columns for newspapers and weeklies Van Gogh still experienced occasional censorship, and he welcomed the internet as the ultimate harbinger of the freedom of speech:

¹²⁰ Heumakers (2004).

Internet is a revolution that can only be compared with the Enlightenment: a stream of information that threatens to reach all sensible citizens without any form of censorship. [...] Seldom have I made such a self-evident statement, but the strange thing is that if you ask the ordinary proponent of 'protective measures' and 'decency', you are confronted with an abyss of misunderstandings. No censorship, no form of prohibition will be to the advantage of our ignorant humanity. To the contrary, only in the greatest possible freedom of expression lies the saviour of humanity. And only the terrorists who want to safeguard the internet of sinful opinions are afraid of that.¹²¹

At this point, we have come around full circle and we are back at the origins of *GeenStijl's* rhetorical attacks on 'decency terrorists'. There is also a direct organizational link connecting Reve, Hermans, Van Gogh and one of the editors of *GeenStijl*. All partook in the student-run satirical literary magazine *Propria Cures*. A magazine that is renowned for the many Dutch writers and journalists who started their careers there. At *Propria Cures*, Reve published his racist poem *Voor Eigen Erf* (For Our Estate). At *Propria Cures*, Hermans' polemics were covetously imitated by new generations in the 1970s and 1980s. While the magazine had shifting political affinities over the years, it acquired fame for its rebellious stance against political correctness by insulting as many people as possible, including Jewish, Surinam and Turkish minorities.¹²² Reve praised the magazine as follows:

The tendency of PC has always been strictly negative. God, the Nation and the Monarchy, Parliament, princess Beatrix, Renate Rubinstein, the University, the United Nations, the struggle against Fascism and Communism, Jews, Christians, Mohammedans, the First World, the Second World, the Third World, the Ten Commandments – for this magazine nothing is holy, everything is fondly poked fun at.¹²³

This description would not be unfitting for *GeenStijl*, even if PC is firmly part of the Dutch cultural establishment and *GeenStijl* is commonly seen as engaged in cultural guerrilla warfare against that very establishment. Together with his kindred spirit Theodor Holman, Theo van Gogh became guest editor of *Propria Cures* in 1987. The journal was proud to be sued for publishing an incendiary anti-Semitic illustration of Jewish writer Leon de Winter. In typical unobvious fashion, Van Gogh accused him of exploiting the holocaust to sell his books. From 1995 to 1997, Marck Burema served as editor of *Propria Cures*, depicted in the journal's 125th anniversary publication while

¹²¹ Van Gogh (1993, p. 32).

¹²² Ligtenberg and Polak (1990, p. 325).

¹²³ 'De tendens van PC is altijd strikt negatief geweest. God, Nederland en Oranje, het parlement, Prinses Beatrix, Renate Rubinstein, de Universiteit, de Verenigde Naties, de strijd tegen fascisme en communisme, joden, christenen, mohammedanen, de eerste wereld, de tweede wereld, de derde wereld, de tien geboden – niets is dit blad heilig. Met alles wordt vaak op minne wijze de draak gestoken.' (Reve cited in: Ligtenberg and Polak, 1990, p. 386)

making an ironic Hitler salute.¹²⁴ Burema, nicknamed *Pritt Stijf*, became one of the editors of *GeenStijl*.

Rather than being hard coded in the techno-mentality of its users, it is more apt to see *GeenStijl* as a result of a process in which a literary culture is popularized, politicized, and transposed onto the digital domain. The writers of *GeenStijl* perceive the internet as an autonomous space, and their relationship to their online identity has surprising parallels to the way literary authors relate to the fictitious characters in their novels. In media interviews, the editors of *GeenStijl* take particular pleasure in sowing confusion surrounding the sincerity of their online identities. The founder of *GeenStijl*, Dominique Weesie used the online alter-ego *Fleischbaum*, a name he adopted in online gaming. 'We were so-called Germans and had all taken German names for that purpose, ending in *-baum*. Then we would be in the German team and shoot these guys in the back. Very lame.' Friends describe Weesie as a very well behaved and decent guy, his nihilism supposedly merely a front for his petit bourgeois character. 'You will never get to see my real me,' Weesie stated in an interview in *de Volkskrant*. 'Imagine what happens when I say publicly that "I spend every evening snugly on the couch with my girlfriend watching [the popular Dutch soap series] *Goede Tijden, Slechte Tijden*". It is not true of course, but it would be the end of the cool *Fleischbaum*.'¹²⁵

Former *GeenStijl*-editor Bert Brussen, dubbed 'the monster of Blog Ness', or 'figurehead of the online bully-generation', presented his online persona in a similar manner, as belonging to another, autonomous dimension. In a prominent interview in the Dutch weekly *Vrij Nederland*, Brussen explained his motives. 'The moment I get behind my computer, I immediately enter my own universe. There is no one in front of you. You do not see any facial expressions, if you get angry, there is nothing to temper it.' In everyday reality, Brussen asserts, he is well behaved: 'In normal human interrelations I have been raised as any other person. If I get emotional, then I apply the breaks, I will not start cursing or use big words.' In the digital world, it is different. Brussen compares the expression of opinions to urinating: 'It is like being toilet trained. In real life you will visit the toilet when peeing, on the internet, you just let it loose, because you know, it does not matter, there are no borders.' The internet is a giant toilet for Bert Brussen, an autonomous domain where one can do everything that is not allowed in everyday life:

It was a subculture of provocation, of saying really intense things, and especially in the beginning there was little consciousness of the outside world. The idea was: the internet, it is ours, it is for the boys who enjoy it. The old media are there for the official, decent stories, on the internet one can let fly, there are no limits.¹²⁶

¹²⁴ Polak (2015).

¹²⁵ Effting and Dekker (2008).

¹²⁶ 'Het was een cultuurtje van choqueren, van heel heftige dingen roepen, en zeker in het begin was er geen enkel besef van de buitenwereld. Het leek zo'n afgescheiden domein. Het idee was: internet, dat is van ons, de jongens die dat leuk vinden. Oude media zijn er voor de officiële, keurige verhalen, op internet kan je onbeperkt los.' See: Donkers (2013).

But it is not merely an observation of a technological mindset that Brussen describes. It is literary nihilism gone rogue and digital. Brussen talked of his strict Christian upbringing in the town of Bennekom and his discussions with the minister concerning the existence of God. Nietzsche called the death of God and the absence of moral certainties a ‘metaphysical wound’ that can never be healed. Brussen presents his life, and that of his nihilist circle, as an attempt at coping with that condition:

He lives ‘within a wound,’ Brussen says. And that is what he proposes to have in common with the circle he regularly hangs out with. The friends of Hans Teeuwen, with people such as Theodor Holman, Jonathan van het Reve and Gummbah. They gather in the house of Teeuwen, dubbed ‘the Palace of Freedom’. ‘We often have a lot of fun, they are great evenings. An open house. But a certain nihilism, a realization that this life is quite miserable in the end, that is something that binds us.’¹²⁷

6.6 Conclusion

Ever since its humble beginnings as the amateur hobby project of *De Telegraaf*-journalist Dominique Weesie in 2003, the shocklog *GeenStijl* has developed into a dominant presence on the internet, a trend setting actor in the Dutch media landscape, and one of the major platforms for the diffusion of the ideas of the Dutch New Right. With estimates varying between half a million and one and a half million unique visits per month, with ten thousands of registered visitors leaving comments, it is one of the most popular and influential internet phenomena to have emerged in the Netherlands. The blog has developed its own political subculture, a particular rhetorical style and language, and has profoundly influenced the Dutch mainstream.

Using the work of cultural studies icon Raymond Williams, this chapter began by analysing two dominant frames used to make sense of the rise of *GeenStijl* and the Dutch online counterculture: the technological determinist frame and the cultural pessimist frame. After critiquing the limitations of these frames, the analysis has followed up on Williams’ exhortation to study the rhetoric and textuality of new cultural forms. The intellectual origins of *GeenStijl*’s sardonic campaigns against morality and decency can ultimately be traced back to Nietzsche’s nihilist philosophy. *GeenStijl*’s love affair with Nietzsche should be understood in the context of a longer and prominent intellectual tradition of Dutch nihilism. This current of thought emerged in the 1960s in opposition to both religious and progressive morality. The two principal figures are the Dutch writers and provocative right-wing intellectuals W.F. Hermans

¹²⁷ ‘Hij leeft “vanuit een wond”, zegt Brussen. En dat is ook wat hij gemeen zegt te hebben met de kring waarin hij tegenwoordig regelmatig verkeert: de vriendengroep rond Hans Teeuwen, met mensen als Theodor Holman, Jonathan van het Reve en Gummbah. Ze komen meestal samen in Teeuwens woning, ook wel ‘Het Paleis van de Vrijheid’ genoemd. ‘We hebben daar vaak de grootste lol, hoor, het zijn soms geweldige avonden. Een zoete inval. Maar een zeker nihilisme, een besef dat dit leven toch uiteindelijk behoorlijk kut is, dat is wel iets wat ons bindt.’ See: Donkers (2013).

and Gerard Reve. This intellectual current formed a right-wing sub stream in the 1960s counterculture that has often been overlooked in historical accounts of the 'cultural revolution'. The conservative backlash against progressive political correctness that emerged in the 1990s, derived an important part of its inspiration and peculiar style from this older 1960s current.

Having rejected technological determinism and cultural pessimism, this chapter proposes an alternative thesis. *GeenStijl* is not simply a necessary expression of a certain technological condition, nor is it a result of a crisis in social mores. Rather, it is the contradictory outcome of a popularization of an originally predominantly literary current of thought, proliferating beyond the boundaries of the literary field. Reve and the Romantics sought to break the distinction between art and life while making life subservient to aesthetic play. The emergence of *GeenStijl* can be understood as a popularized, unintended consequence of that aim towards transgression. Finally, the relation between this nihilist and ironic current and the rest of the New Right has been complicated and far from straightforward. Nevertheless, the New Right backlash would have been unthinkable without the shock troops and the ironic humour provided by the online counterculture.

Conclusion

Both a revolt and an echo

To the person who wonders whether it is possible 'to contribute with all the passion of a practical opportunism to what can soberly be called "improvement of present conditions"', it has to be pointed out that this pursuit immediately becomes a rudderless and unproductive muddling on, if one does not depart from an essential image of man that orients one's actions on this terrain.

Hendrik Marsman¹

What matters is the criticism to which such an ideological complex is subjected by the first representatives of the new historical phase. This criticism makes possible a process of differentiation and change in the relative weight that the elements of the old ideologies used to possess. What was previously secondary and subordinate, or even incidental, is now taken to be primary - becomes the nucleus of a new ideological and theoretical complex. The old collective will dissolves into its contradictory elements since the subordinate ones develop socially.

Antonio Gramsci²

To talk of ideology in the Netherlands is to court controversy. The Dutch are not exceptional in that sense. Ideology is known internationally to have a bad reputation. After all, the word first came into common use when it was employed by Napoleon as a swearword. But the Dutch distaste for ideology seems to have taken on particularly sharp features. The country lacks a prominent tradition of political theory and political ideology research and often perceives itself as having achieved the end of ideology. Taking recourse to Mannheim's sociology of ideas, I have attempted to contest that image and fill a small part of the lacuna of Dutch ideology studies. The book started out

¹ In this passage, the leading Dutch expressionist poet Hendrik Marsman (1899-1940) admonishes the literary critic Menno ter Braak (1902-1940) for his lack of 'political vision'. Ter Braak responded by insisting on 'muddling on' (*schipperen*) as the preferable political vision for the Dutch elite, a relativist view later advocated by Dick Pels (2005, p. 185). 'Tegenover den man, die zich afvraagt of het niet mogelijk is "met alle geestdrift van een practisch gesteld opportunisme deel te hebben aan datgene, wat men nuchter 'verbetering der bestaande toestanden' kan noemen", moet men erop wijzen, dat dit streven onmiddellijk een stuurloos en onvruchtbaar schipperen wordt, indien hij niet uitgaat van een essentieel beeld van den mensch dat zijn handelen ook op dit terrein richt.' (Marsman cited in: Ter Braak, 1939a, p. 5)

² Gramsci (1971, p. 195).

with an attempt to formulate – in broad strokes – an explanation for the peculiarly apolitical atmosphere in Dutch intellectual life. The relative absence of ideological thought in the Netherlands, I have argued, can be traced back to the historical dominance of one particular form of ideological thought: an organicist doctrine that considers Dutch society as a differentiated, historically grown, organic whole. It considers the state and the media as the passive reflection of societal developments, with elites serving as conduits. Organicism is a sceptical, relativist ideology that stresses harmony and historical continuity. Shared by the twentieth-century elites of the different currents in the Netherlands, this ideology has been depicted as the metaphorical roof uniting the different pillars. It has filtered through Dutch intellectual history in complex forms, to emerge in more contemporary manifestations such as Lijphart's pluralist theory of accommodation. The thesis of this book is that this has resulted in a lingering tendency in the literature to downplay conflict, rupture and ideology in Dutch history. And instead to favour more harmonious portrayals of Dutch society developing gradually and continuously as a unity, as an organic whole. When it comes to the Fortuyn revolt, a similar inclination has resulted in depoliticized interpretations of the revolt as the exclusive imprint of secular trends that Dutch politics and media simply needed to reflect. Hans Daalder, the doyen of Dutch political science, argued that there is a political incentive to depoliticize matters in the Dutch political system. In the context of the close relationship between politics and social science in the Netherlands, this has given rise to a paradoxical reality: the more politically involved social science becomes, the more depoliticized it needs to become. Ironically, this means that a more autonomous social science will need to repoliticize its account of Dutch political transformation to some degree. That is what this study has sought to do.

This study is an interpretation of the swing to the right in Dutch politics in the years surrounding the Fortuyn revolt. In seeking to make sense of this political shift, this book has foregrounded two major points of reference. On the one hand, I have argued that the political transformation of the 1990s and 2000s cannot be understood in separation from the profound political changes of the 1960s and 1970s. The analysis in this book builds on the analytical framework set out by the historian James Kennedy to understand the exceptional consensual nature of the progressive paradigm shift of the 1960s and 1970s. Kennedy famously argued that the accommodating attitude of traditional Dutch elites made them comply with the progressive protest generation of the 1960s, rather than resisting it wholesale, mobilizing a conservative counter-tendency. As a result, the Dutch experience of the 1960s and 1970s differs strikingly from countries such as the US and the UK, where the New Right emerged as a conservative backlash movement contesting the advances of the New Left. Kennedy attributed this difference to the importance attached to consensus in the Netherlands. In a political culture where ideological conflict is seen as undesirable, opposing visions do not clash but succeed one another in time. The conservative reaction against the progressive wave of the 1960s did not occur in the 1970s or 1980s in the Netherlands. It first emerged in the 1990s, when the progressive wave had fully ebbed away. The profundity of the changes surrounding the Fortuyn revolt can be explained, as in the

1960s and 1970s, by the accommodating attitudes of Dutch elites. Even though in this instance, the roles have been reversed. It is the prudent-progressive elites who are doing the accommodating and a conservative backlash movement that has taken over the historic role of the protest generation.

On the other hand, I have tried to make sense of Dutch reality by placing it against the background of Anglo-American developments. In the 1990s, a conservative undercurrent emerged in Dutch politics and public opinion that drew inspiration from the New Right movements in the US and the UK. These Dutch conservatives, present in all major parties, became the social critics of the 1990s, lamenting the atomisation, permissiveness and moral decline in Dutch society. They appointed themselves as the spokespersons of a broadly felt anxiety surrounding the erosion of community through globalization, deindustrialization, individualization and immigration. These critics portrayed the baby-boomer generation and the progressive legacy of the 1960s as a primary cause of Dutch distress. The central thesis of this study is that this conservative wave of the 1990s and 2000s can be understood as a belated iteration of the New Right backlash that occurred overseas. The New Right has been described as a tactical fusion consisting of neoliberal and (neo)conservative currents. I believe it makes analytical sense to look at the politics of Dutch New Right figureheads such as Bolkestein, Fortuyn, Wilders and Hirsi Ali in the light of a similar framework. To a large degree, these figures derived their ideas from their Anglo-American counterparts. By retracing the process of translation of ideas I have attempted to reconnect the words and the things, introducing ideological currents to Dutch politics that have so far, received little scholarly attention.

The process of translation has not been a simple copy and paste from the Anglo-American source. As the historian Henk te Velde posits, in such a 'political transfer' the element that is transmitted undergoes a process of transformation. The import of New Right ideas formed part of a complicated negotiation with the existing Dutch context, marked by its exceptional progressivism, due to the unusual length and breadth of the progressive wave of the 1960s. The New Right backlash in the Netherlands distinguished itself from its Anglo-American counterparts by both its belated occurrence and by the greater degree to which it has absorbed progressive values. I have drawn on Angela McRobbie's notion of a 'complex' conservative backlash, to make sense of this phenomenon. It refers to a conservative countercurrent that incorporates a select series of progressive attainments, while contesting the progressive agenda in a broader sense. McRobbie introduced that notion in the field of women's rights; she called this conservative tendency 'post-feminism'. The Dutch New Right has a broader scope, and extending on McRobbie's analysis, we could qualify this conservative movement as a 'postprogressive' politics.

The contradictory nature of the revolt

A current of thought is always, at the same time, continuation and negation of the current that it opposes. Following this dialectical logic described by the Dutch historian Von der Dunk, the complex New Right backlash against the 1960s and 1970s is best

described as both a revolt and an echo. In part, this double character is due to the fact that some of the standard-bearers of the New Right were politically formed by the movements of the 1960s and 1970s, as was Dutch society more broadly. And in part it is a logical result of the fact that ideological contestation never implies a wholesale and clean-cut replacement of one body of ideas for another. Rather, it involves a reordering of existing elements into a new synthesis. This contradictory character is particularly visible in five key themes from the 1960s and 1970s that were embraced by the conservative countercurrent in contradictory fashion and mobilized against the progressive legacy of that period.

a) The discourse of emancipation

Rather than bitterly opposing the emancipatory project of the long 1960s as such, the Dutch New Right came to present its politics as a further extension thereof. In his books, Fortuyn appealed to the emancipated citizen, and sought to complete the process of emancipation by ridding Dutch citizens of the welfare state. The right-wing liberals (VVD) argued that the emancipatory project of the workers' movement had been such a great success that the workers could now be relieved from the burden of the existing social security system. It needed to be replaced by a basic income on subsistence level, inspired by Milton Friedman.

The same curious contradictions can be seen on the social-cultural level. In a short period of time, the conservative currents within the Dutch right, who had never been the most joyous supporters of women's emancipation and gay rights, revealed themselves as the most strident defenders of that progressive legacy, in the face of the challenge posed by conservative Islam. The discourse of emancipation became a central element in the Dutch version of the clash of civilizations theory. That theory was expressed by Fortuyn in terms of a cold war: an 'ideological battle' with Islam to convince Muslims to 'embrace the norms and values of modernity', with the goal of making 'prosperity, development, self-fulfilment and emancipation' for them achievable.³ In so doing, the legacy of emancipation became an important pawn in the cultural politics revolving around Dutch Muslim minorities.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali became the most important expression of this paradoxical embrace of emancipation by the New Right. Like Fortuyn, she offered Muslims a choice between the West and Islam. She equated emancipation with the escape from (Muslim) community, requesting Dutch Muslims to turn their backs on their families and friends. One of the many curious side effects of this new discourse of emancipation, was that the emancipation of the white Dutch population was now considered complete. Dutch feminism was seen as a largely defunct phenomenon. A more conservative neo-masculine rhetoric could increasingly be heard. These paradoxes would eventually come to a head in the New Right critiques of the feminisation of Dutch society. The supposed prevalence of 'feminine values' was seen as a dangerous weakness preventing the Dutch from defending their emancipated norms and values from the

³ Fortuyn (2001c, p. 9).

macho-culture of Islam. As *Elsevier* editor Syp Winia writes: 'The "feminine" Dutch values are no challenge for a collectivistic, masculine culture focused on shame and honour that has the eternity as its horizon'.⁴ Dutch femininity needs to be curtailed to protect Dutch femininity.

b) The notion of progress as the breaking of taboos

In the writings of Fortuyn, Schoo and Vuijsje, the legacy of the 1960s was described in terms of a campaign to break the totems and taboos of the Christian, pillarized order. Emancipation meant liberation from the religious taboos on sexuality. The most powerful complaint of Dutch conservatives against the baby boomers was that they had betrayed their own ideals by installing a series of new taboos, in particular on the issue of race and immigration. Also more traditionalist conservatives eventually adopted this discourse. The conservative law professor Couwenberg, who at earlier moments had railed against the hedonism of the 1960s, is a good example of this shift:

The repressive and controlling sexual morality of pillarization that leftist elites from the rebellious 1960s generation rose up in resistance against was under their supervision swiftly replaced by a new repressive and controlling morality, with political correctness as its guideline.⁵

In so doing, the conservative countercurrent evoked a metonymical connection between sexual liberation and the liberation from political correctness. The Romantic motif of sexual liberation as the authentic expression of self was now mobilized to promote an almost absolute version of freedom of expression. Contained implicitly in this notion, as defended by Fortuyn and Van Gogh, there is an image of the Dutch discursive order as fundamentally free, open and equal, once the taboos have been cast aside. It is a utopian image unspoiled by any Foucauldian insights concerning the way discourse is always saturated with power, or more common concerns about unequal access to the public sphere. We can speak freely about race, sexuality and religion in the Netherlands, because we are all equal. We have the right to offend, because the Netherlands is an emancipated country.

In so doing, the conservative campaign against political correctness was framed as a paradoxical reiteration of the secularization of the 1960s. It involved emancipation for the white Dutch majority, who were liberated from the 'leftist Church' and could now speak freely. And it (ostensibly) meant emancipation for Dutch Muslims, who were freed from protective paternalism, whose religion needed to be criticized and mocked as the Dutch had criticized Christian religion in the 1960s. Free and uninhibited discussion of immigration and race, even if it involved and encouraged open racism,

⁴ Wynia (2015).

⁵ 'De seksuele beheersings- en onderdrukingsmoraal van het verzuilingstijdperk waartegen linkse elites van de rebellerende jaren zestig-generatie in verzet kwamen is onder hun supervisie spoedig vervangen door een politieke beheersings- en onderdrukingsmoraal met politiek correct denken als maatstaf.' (Couwenberg, 2004, p. 23)

came to be seen as a sign of Dutch progress with regards to other countries with more restrictive public debates, for instance Germany. The abolition of anti-racism was thus incorporated in the progressive national imaginary of the Netherlands, as a *Gidsland*, a pioneering country.

c) The critique of Dutch political culture

The 1960s critiques of Dutch democracy and political culture were a crucial inspiration for the conservative countercurrent. Leading lights of the movement, such as Bolkestein, Fortuyn and Spruyt, criticized the Dutch political culture of consensus, depoliticization and accommodation, referencing Daalder, Lijphart and Hofland. Pim Fortuyn was one of the first to enact a change in the political character of these critiques. In the beginning of the 1990s, Fortuyn connected the critique of consensus politics with a radical neoliberal programme that would serve as the lever to break open the closed Dutch political system. Plans originally formulated in the 1960s to introduce more competition into Dutch democracy, were now taken up by the New Right under the banner of Fortuyn's 'new politics'. The election of Mayors and the introduction of referenda, the instruments with which the progressive-liberal D66 sought to bring down the closed political order in the 1960s, were now propagated by the other side of the political aisle. The ambition to introduce a more competitive Anglo-American election system in the Netherlands, first discussed by social democrat luminaries in the 1960s and 1970s such as Ed van Thijn, were proposed by Bart Jan Spruyt and Geert Wilders in the first political programme of the PVV.

Accusations of sweeping contentious issues under the rug had been a prominent theme of the critiques of the 1960s and 1970s, such as Hofland's astute commentary on decolonization.⁶ What Lijphart called the 'icebox policy', the tendency of Dutch elites to agree to disagree and allow 'a vexatious issue to be temporarily frozen' originally referred to both decolonization and the controversies surrounding the Monarchy. In the 1990s, a similar attitude seemed to prevail on the issue of immigration, as Dutch elites were again criticized for sweeping things under the rug.⁷ The widely documented inability of Dutch political culture to deal with conflict and emotionally contentious topics functioned at the same time as a break and a catalyst for the New Right. It functioned as a break, because debate on hot-button issues such as immigration and integration was preferably suppressed. After the initial efforts of Bolkestein to gain acceptability for a New Right discourse on immigration and race, it still took a long time before the issues became an acceptable topic of conversation. The publication of Vuijsje's *Correct* in 1997 was widely seen as one of the milestones.⁸ At the same time, the Dutch culture of consensus functioned as a catalyst for the New Right because once the ban had been lifted, it was seen as polarizing to oppose the New Right position on these issues. The inability to deal with conflict meant that after wholesale exclusion from the debate proved untenable, accommodation was the only

⁶ Hofland (1972).

⁷ Lijphart (1968, p. 125).

⁸ Vuijsje (2008 [1997], p. 80).

other option in the playbook. The third option of accepting the legitimacy of political positions outside of the given consensus, while ideologically contesting them, still seems quite foreign to Dutch political culture.

d) The appeal to accommodation and toleration

Despite these radical critiques of Dutch consensual politics, the Dutch New Right did appeal to a distinct element of that same political culture. In the 1960s, the protest movements were famously co-opted by accommodating elites. Bolkestein, Fortuyn and Wilders consciously made a plea for a similar accommodating treatment of the New Right backlash in the 1990s and 2000s, in particular on the issue of race and immigration. They presented their politics as a therapeutic escape valve, a way to relieve tension and prevent extremism. And they evoked the fear of polarization, radicalization and even civil war, Lijphart's foundational myth of Dutch political culture. The argument for toleration and accommodation can perhaps best be compared with the toleration of soft drugs: you accommodate or tolerate something with the idea of keeping it under control. Toleration prevents drug use from going underground, where the step from soft drugs to hard drugs is easier to take. The New Right discourse on racism in the 1990s appealed to this Dutch tradition. Allowing people to express their feelings on immigration, even if these feelings were racist, would forestall political radicalization. It would prevent people from radicalizing, going underground, resorting to extremism or violence. Politicians needed to politically represent anti-immigrant sentiments, to prevent people from turning to the extreme right.⁹

Before, the scapegoat mechanism had been an important frame in the understanding of racism and the public debate, leading to some degree of suppression of the debate on these issues. As the French theorist René Girard famously explained, the scapegoat mechanism is a classic and recurring dynamic in which societal tensions and frustrations are projected on a subordinate group.¹⁰ With the memory of the Second World War in the back of the mind, Dutch politicians viewed the issue of immigration implicitly through this frame. The unspoken rule was that politicians and journalists should not stir up anti-immigrant sentiments. This began to change in the late 1990s, when the escape valve frame became more and more dominant. Fortuyn (and many others on the New Right) defended civic nationalism, as a way to prevent ethnic nationalism:

If we continue to ignore the essential human need to distinguish oneself, and to experience identity, then we pave the way for an experience of identity that excludes outsiders. Concretely, we open the door for nationalist and ethnically 'pure' ideas.

⁹ Already in 1992, F. Bolkestein had argued that speaking out on immigration would lead to a dampening of resentment. See: Bolkestein (1992).

¹⁰ Girard (1989).

We leave the expression and formulation of our identity to extreme right political organisations.¹¹

Of course, Fortuyn's civic nationalism is less exclusionary and violent than ethnic nationalism, and therefore preferable. But the way he formulated and expressed Dutch identity did have an exclusionary effect. As part of his 'cold war' against Islam, Fortuyn argued that Muslims were condemned by their culture to backwardness and could not leave their culture behind. This more subtle form of cultural discrimination – 'culturalism' – became normalized in the years after Fortuyn in Dutch politics, policy and public opinion, and have been discussed by Dutch scholars in terms of the 'culturalization of citizenship'.¹² As these scholars have argued, the lines between culture and race cannot be clearly drawn; culturism and racism have historically been deeply intertwined. In that sense, the civic nationalism of the New Right is not harmless and can in itself serve as a 'gateway drug' if left unchecked.

e) The adversary culture

The New Right in the US opposed the New Left counterculture of the 1960s, referring to it as the 'adversary culture', the 'counterculture' or the 'New Class'. The neo-conservatives, in particular Daniel Bell, argued that the hedonism, normlessness and licentiousness of the counterculture undermined American norms and values. While Dutch New Right intellectuals such as Schoo, Vuijsje and Bosma were explicitly inspired by the New Right analysis of the 1960s counterculture, the critique was taken in a remarkably different direction. Schoo, Vuijsje and Bosma criticized the Dutch baby boomers for their 'conformism', their unwillingness to break taboos on all terrains. The charge was not that baby boomers were too hedonistic and licentious. It was that they were not rebellious enough; they had failed to live up to their non-conformist image. In fact, the 1990s saw the emergence of a conservative counterculture that embodied many of the characteristics Daniel Bell had attributed to the adversary culture. Theo van Gogh, Theodor Holman and the website *GeenStijl* are the most prominent examples. This conservative counterculture celebrated the breaking of taboos and the freedom provided by the internet, in terms of pornography and freedom of speech. It even explicitly mirrored itself at times, to the counterculture of the 1960s. Ironically, 'prudent progressive' intellectuals such as Dick Pels and Bas van Stokkum came to occupy the traditionalist position of decrying the degeneration of norms and values among the wider population in general and *GeenStijl* in specific.

¹¹ 'Sterker nog, als we doorgaan met het negeren van deze wezenlijke menselijke behoefte om zich te onderscheiden en de eigenheid te beleven, dan maken we mede daardoor de weg vrij voor een beleving van eigenheid die buitenstaanders uitsluit. Concreet: dan maken we de weg vrij voor eng-nationalistische en etnisch "zuivere" opvattingen.' (Fortuyn, 1997, p. 106)

¹² Duyvendak, Geschiere and Tonkens (2016).

A politics of ideas

This study has looked at the role of ideas in the swing to the right in Dutch politics. That choice of focus has sometimes led to raised eyebrows, since the right is not commonly associated with the power of thought in the Netherlands. A prominent motivation of this study has been to dispel a long, established tradition of intellectual disdain for right-wing politics. Perhaps a verse by the leftist writer Harry Mulisch is the most significant Dutch expression of this pervasive prejudice. In May 1970, Harry Mulisch presented his vision on the political difference between left and right at the manifestation *Writers for Vietnam* in the Amsterdam Frascati theatre:

The left has opinions.
 The right has interests.
 The left needs to have opinions because it has no interests.
 The right can do without opinion because it has interests.
 The left has its opinion as interest.
 The right has its interest as opinion.
 The left is therefore in good faith.
 The right is therefore in bad faith.¹³

This contrast between idea and interest is of course exaggerated. Mulisch has a rather intellectualist understanding of politics. Historically, the left tends to defend the interests of the workers and the underprivileged. And the right needs to formulate opinions to understand how its interests are best served in the first place. But even if this is clearly an oversimplified and partisan view, it resonates with a more common perspective on politics: the left is the faction of idealism and ideas, the right is the faction of power and interests. As the American political theorist Corey Robin argues in his study of US conservatism, 'it has long been an axiom on the left that the defence of power and privilege is an enterprise devoid of ideas.'¹⁴ In fact, that point of view is not restricted to the left: liberal intellectuals have equally underlined the thoughtless nature of right-wing politics. Thomas Paine described the counterrevolution as an 'obliteration of knowledge'. To Lionel Trilling, American conservatism was a collection of 'irritable mental gestures which seek to resemble ideas'. Robert Paxton saw fascism as an 'affair of the gut', not 'of the brain'.¹⁵

Similar perspectives can be heard in the Netherlands, where Menno ter Braak claimed that the essence of fascism resided in its resentful surface rather than its romantic depths. Treading in the footsteps of Ter Braak, prominent Dutch intellectuals such as Henk Hofland, Rob Hartmans and Kees Schuyt have explained the rise of

¹³ 'Links heeft meningen. Rechts heeft belangen. Links moet meningen hebben omdat het geen belangen heeft. Rechts kan het stellen zonder meningen omdat het belangen heeft. Links heeft zijn mening als belang. Rechts heeft zijn belang als mening. Links is daarom te goeder trouw. Rechts is daarom te kwader trouw.' (Cited in: Piryns, 1988, p. 6)

¹⁴ Robin (2011, p. 17).

¹⁵ Robin (2011).

Fortuyn as a comparable knee-jerk expression of the resentment of the masses.¹⁶ As a result of this still common perspective, confusion surrounding Fortuyn's political ideas continues to abound, even if Fortuyn's ideology has achieved semi-mythical proportions in the wake of his assassination. When asked about Pim Fortuyn in a television programme dedicated to the ten-year anniversary of Fortuyn's election victory, then social democrat leader Wouter Bos confessed that he couldn't make heads or tails of his ideas.¹⁷ The same preconceptions appear to prevail when it comes to more established forms of right-wing politics. As we have seen, the Dutch newspaper of note, *NRC Handelsblad*, wrote of the VVD at a moment of peak intellectual activity that 'intellectual laziness and poverty are catchwords that seem to cling to the party'.¹⁸ Dutch political journalists certainly cannot be accused of exhibiting a vivid interest in political ideas.

In fairness, this preconception of a thoughtless right-wing politics has often been reinforced by the right itself. As Corey Robin points out, it was the nineteenth century aristocrat Palmerston, when he was still a Tory, who introduced the famous nickname of the Conservative Party: the stupid party. Republicans have taken to describing themselves in similar terms, as part of their populist charm and common appeal. That self-image, Corey Robin contends, should not be taken too seriously.¹⁹ When not playing the role of the dull-witted country squire, the right engages as much in an idea-driven politics as its left-wing contestants. Part of the confusion arises from the fact that the right tends to dress up its politics as a form of sober realism. From Burke to Hayek, from Nietzsche to Strauss, the right has traditionally clothed its ideas in an appeal to human nature and historical tradition. For the right, understanding historical and natural laws – which conveniently tend toward a conservative agenda – is a matter of hard-boiled realism, mere common sense. Inequality is natural, redistribution artificial; cultural homogeneity is natural, diversity artificial; the market is natural, the welfare state artificial; authority is natural, dissent artificial. The seemingly self-evidential nature of this political appeal allows for a broad anti-intellectual repertoire. But when progressive movements and revolutions change the natural order of things, what was self-evident becomes curiously contingent. It leads the right to profound intellectual remunerations on how to restore order and lend it once again, its lost aura of taken-for-grantedness. That is the argument of Robin, and some of it certainly seems to apply to the New Right backlash in the Netherlands too.

The Dutch right-wing liberal party (VVD, the party closest to Anglo-American conservatism) has cherished a comparable anti-intellectual self-image. As the journalist Sitalsing writes in a recent book on the VVD: 'You can try to have an endless discussion on Popper and Hayek and who fits in what liberal tradition, but many within the VVD

¹⁶ Oudenampsen (2014).

¹⁷ Television programme *Pauw & Witteman* (2012, March 6).

¹⁸ Kranenburg and Van Roessel (1990).

¹⁹ See also Michael Freeden's discussion of conservative ideology, who notes that 'proponents of conservatism have shared this deep-rooted image of anti-intellectualism' and concludes that 'this line of argument cannot be adopted' (Freeden, 1996, p. 318).

find that deep in their heart, to be the pursuit of a hobby by a handful of people.' And she cites the former chairman of parliament, Frans Weisglas: 'At a certain moment the Dixieland band starts playing and then for the VVD, the gabbling is over.'²⁰ Former party leaders unanimously affirm: for the VVD, the game of politics revolves solely around the players, not ideas or ideology. This is a deeply deceptive self-image. After all, it has been the VVD that has functioned as a biotope for a political figure some consider to be un-Dutch: ideologically driven, intellectually formed, combative, sharp, always on the look-out for controversy. Figures such as Frits Bolkestein, Geert Wilders, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Andreas Kinneging, Gerry van der List or Paul Cliteur, who have all made their mark on Dutch public opinion. To be sure, we are talking about a passionate minority; of whom many have since left the party, but in retrospect it has been a remarkably influential current.

When we expand our horizon beyond the VVD, arguably the most remarkable and – frankly – admirable quality of the Dutch New Right is the movement's widely shared belief in the power of ideas. Pim Fortuyn saw the 'clash of ideas' as central to politics. He lamented the fact that political debates in the Netherlands were marked by pragmatism and consensus. He proposed an alternative form of conflict management, namely through lively public debate, in which opposing parties respectfully expressed and explored their ideological differences, instead of seeking consensus. Fortuyn framed his conflict with Islam explicitly as a battle of ideas that had to be pursued with 'the word as a weapon'. He strongly admonished his readers that violence was a form of cowardice.²¹ For Bart Jan Spruyt and the other members of the Edmund Burke Foundation, ideas are the principal drivers of change:

Who wants to change political decision-making should not in the first place strive to acquire power, to represent interests or to form parties. One should use ideas to acquire influence over the public debate – for instance through a real think tank – because a change of culture precedes political transformation.²²

For Bolkestein, the long-term Hayekian 'battle of ideas' has been central to his entire political career. For Wilders, it was the principal lesson he learned as Bolkestein's 'sorcerer's apprentice'. Hirsi Ali described herself as engaged in a battle of ideas with Islamic fundamentalism, to win over the hearts and minds of Muslims. Paul Cliteur presented himself as a freethinker, who could dispel religion through the force of his arguments. Theo van Gogh believed in ideas as a means to bring down the politically correct establishment, through shock, provocation and transgression. *GeenStijl* presented its ideas in glorified manner as 'boorish precision bombardments', 'verbal and digital cynicism' aimed at destroying the sacred totems called 'decency' and 'respect'.

²⁰ Sitalsing (2016, pp. 30-31).

²¹ Fortuyn (2001c, p. 12).

²² Spruyt (2003a, p. 204).

This eclectic New Right alliance has been the dominant force in Dutch intellectual life since the 1990s, while Dutch progressives became increasingly intellectually moribund, expressed in Jos de Beus' observation of 'the lacuna on the left'.²³ What the New Right philosophy lacked in consistency, it amply made up in its fidelity to the Gramscian ideal of the socialization of political thought:

Creating a new culture does not only mean one's own individual 'original' discoveries. It also, and most particularly, means the diffusion in a critical form of truths already discovered, their 'socialisation' as it were. [...] For a mass of people to be led to think coherently and in the same coherent fashion about the real present world, is a 'philosophical' event far more important and 'original' than the discovery by some philosophical 'genius' of a truth which remains the property of small groups of intellectuals.²⁴

The New Right has consciously sought to fundamentally change Dutch politics through a battle of ideas, contesting the legacy of the 'revolution' of '1968' and with considerable success. This study has been the story of that battle.

²³ De Beus (2003, July 18).

²⁴ Gramsci (1971, p. 325).

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Samenvatting

De observatie dat zich rond de eeuwwisseling een belangrijke breuk heeft voorgedaan in de Nederlandse politieke cultuur wordt inmiddels tot de dooddoeners van het publieke debat gerekend. Een land dat een imago koesterde als baken van tolerantie en progressivisme ontwikkelde zich in kort tijdsbestek tot de Europese voorhoede van de politieke wederopleving van nationalisme en anti-immigratiesentiment. De bliksem-snelle opkomst en dramatische moord van Pim Fortuyn in 2002 leidde tot een verbluffende verkiezingsoverwinning van zijn partij, de Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF). Uit het niets werd het de tweede partij van het land, met zeventien procent van de stemmen, in wat algemeen bekend is komen te staan als de Fortuyn-revolte. Sindsdien zijn identiteit, immigratie en *law and order* de dominante thema's van het publieke debat. Het vormde de aanvang van de Nederlandse *culture wars*, een strijdterrein waarin conservatieve voorstanders van een strenger immigratie- en integratiebeleid de degens kruisten met prudente progressieven.

De vraag die centraal staat in dit boek is hoe deze verschuiving begrepen kan worden in ideologische zin. Tot dusver fungeert het populisme als dominant analysekader om de politieke transformatie in Nederland te duiden. Het is een focus die de nadruk legt op stijl, techniek en retoriek, maar weinig oog heeft voor ideeën. Populistische leiders zoals Pim Fortuyn en Geert Wilders werden bovenal gezien als gewiekste politieke entrepreneurs die op succesvolle wijze de genegeerde zorgen van een gemarginaliseerd electoraat wisten te vertegenwoordigen. In veel mindere mate zijn ze bestudeerd aan de hand van hun politieke ideeën, als onderdeel van een bredere politieke en intellectuele tendens. Niet de bovenkamer maar de onderbuik, niet ideeën maar de empirische realiteiten van de 'man op straat' werden gezien als de doorslaggevende factoren, verder versterkt door de nieuwe macht van de media en het persoonlijke charisma van de populistische leider.

De overweldigende focus op populisme in het wetenschappelijk onderzoek heeft een rijke en veelzijdige literatuur opgeleverd. Maar om de verregaande politieke veranderingen te begrijpen in Nederland is het een te beperkt perspectief. Het rechts-populisme, in andere woorden, is een noodzakelijke maar geen voldoende voorwaarde. Hoe te verklaren dat een politieke stroming die nooit meer dan een fragment van het electoraat voor zich heeft weten te winnen, in staat is geweest om zo'n bovenmaatse invloed uit te oefenen op het Nederlandse politieke klimaat? Na de implosie van de LPF in 2003 bleef het populisme geruime tijd een vrij marginaal fenomeen. Geert Wilders, die zijn Partij voor de Vrijheid op effectieve wijze positioneerde als politieke erfgenaam van Fortuyn, kon slechts rekenen op negen van de honderdvijftig zetels in de periode

tot 2010. En toch was er in dit decennium geen sprake van een staakt-het-vuren in de *culture wars*. Eerder het tegendeel is waar.

Als gevolg van de centraliteit van het populisme in de wetenschappelijke en journalistieke analyses, is de Fortuyn-revolte in de publieke verbeelding vaak gereduceerd tot de triomf van stijl over inhoud. Wanneer ik op de spreekwoordelijke verjaardagsfeestjes vertelde dat ik de politieke ideeën achter de Fortuyn-revolte onderzocht, kreeg ik geamuseerde en sceptische reacties: 'Zijn die er dan?' Door deze blinde vlek voor de rol van ideeën zijn er in de literatuur vele verbaasde reacties te vinden over de snelle verschuivingen in het Nederlandse opinieklimaat. 'Het politieke debat is conservatiever geworden. Soms lijkt het wel of het gehele politieke discours na de moord op Pim Fortuyn door een onzichtbare hand is opgetild en een paar meter naar rechts hardhandig weer neergezet,' schreef de recent overleden rechtsfilosoof en sociaaldemocratische senator Willem Witteveen in 2005.

Een reeks van studies heeft dit perspectief proberen te weerspreken, door te wijzen op de verhitte debatten over immigratie en nationale identiteit die de lange aanloop vormden naar de kiezersrevolte. Desalniettemin blijft het beeld beklijven dat Fortuyn als een *deus ex machina* op het podium van de Nederlandse politiek verscheen. Om daar vervolgens het nietsvermoedende politieke discours op te pakken en het op krachtige wijze naar rechts te werpen. Dit boek beoogt dat *idée reçue* verder te weerleggen, door op zoek te gaan naar de intellectuele bronnen van de Fortuyn-revolte, door licht te werpen op de revolte in de bovenkamer, in plaats van de onderbuik. Tegelijkertijd behandelt deze studie ook de *mainstream* ideeën die onze blik op de draai naar rechts hebben bepaald. De focus beperkt zich dus niet tot de rechtse actoren die de rol hebben gespeeld van de onzichtbare hand in de metafoor van Witteveen, die het Nederlandse discours naar rechts hebben gemanoeuvreerd. Het bijkomende streven is om een noch immer dominante academische interpretatie van de Fortuyn-revolte te weerspreken, waarin de verschuiving wordt voorgesteld als een logische vertaling van langlopende maatschappelijke trends die de politiek simpelweg dient te accommoderen. In een dergelijk visie op politieke verandering spelen ideeën een zeer beperkte rol.

In de zoektocht naar de politieke ideeën achter de Fortuyn-revolte hanteer ik een wat ruimer conceptueel vangnet dan wat gebruikelijk is in bestaande studies. Ik stel dat politieke leiders zoals Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, Ayaan Hirsi Ali en Geert Wilders enkel de meest zichtbare exponenten zijn van een grotere conservatieve stroming, die ik aanduid als Nieuw Rechts. Het succes van het rechtspopulisme in Nederland kan niet los gezien worden van de bredere successen van deze losse en eclectische coalitie van politici, journalisten en intellectuelen in het acceptabel maken van een reeks van eens marginale en inmiddels gangbare ideeën.

Deze analytische zet kan wat onorthodox overkomen, aangezien Nieuw Rechts geen bekend begrip is in Nederland. De term 'Nieuw Rechts' kwam in omloop in de VS en het VK om de conservatieve bewegingen aan te duiden die tegelijkertijd opkwamen met Nieuw Links in de jaren zestig en zeventig. De politiek van Thatcher en Reagan wordt wel gezien als het hoogtepunt van Nieuw Rechts. Het 'nieuwe' aan Nieuw Rechts is enerzijds de combinatie van vrije marktpolitiek met cultuurconservatisme. De ideologie

van Nieuw Rechts wordt door onderzoekers beschreven als een complexe en vaak tegenstrijdige fusie van neoliberale en (neo)conservatieve ideeën. Anderzijds forceerde Nieuw Rechts een breuk met de gematigde naoorlogse consensus, een tijd waarin liberale en conservatieve partijen meewerkten aan de uitbouw van de verzorgingsstaat. Nieuwrechts is radicaler van karakter. Het had de ambitie om het oude sociale contract te verbreken en te vervangen. De 'backlash' politiek van Nieuw Rechts keerde zich tegen bestaande elites en instituties, die in haar ogen aangetast waren door de erfenis van de jaren zestig. Het doel was om de vrije markt en traditionele vormen van moreel gezag nieuw leven in te blazen. Om dit ambitieuze project te volbrengen omarmde Nieuw Rechts de maakbaarheidsgedachte. En zij zag de ideeënstrijd als cruciaal in het verwezenlijken van politieke verandering.

De centrale stelling van deze studie is dat de draai naar rechts in de Nederlandse politiek langs soortgelijke lijnen te begrijpen is, als een verlate pendant van de conservatieve *backlash* die zich in de Anglo-Amerikaanse context al eerder ontspon. Mijn these is dat de nieuwrechtse fusie van vrije marktdenken en cultureel conservatisme – in combinatie met oppositie tegen de jaren zestig en kritiek op politieke gematigdheid – een bruikbaar analytisch raamwerk vormt om de politiek te duiden van figuren zoals Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, Bart Jan Spruyt, Paul Cliteur, Hendrik Jan Schoo, Ayaan Hirsi Ali en Geert Wilders. Het zijn personen die stuk voor stuk sterk geïnspireerd zijn door Anglo-Amerikaans nieuwrechts. Tegelijkertijd is het Nederlandse Nieuw Rechts niet een eenvoudige kopie van haar Anglo-Amerikaanse tegenhangers. De progressieve golf in de jaren zestig en zeventig had in Nederland een uitzonderlijke impact en maakte bijzonder weinig weerstand los. Nieuw Rechts kwam in Nederland pas op in de jaren negentig, toen er al sprake was van een overweldigende progressieve consensus op het gebied van de zogenaamde *social issues* die de inzet van de strijd waren in de Amerikaanse *culture wars*: seksuele moraliteit, abortus, euthanasie, drugs. Deze thema's stonden in Nederland niet meer ter discussie. De opkomst van Nieuw Rechts in Nederland is het gevolg van een rommelige vertaling van ideeën, tussen zeer verschillende politieke realiteiten.

Cruciaal voor de analyse is het contradictoire karakter van het conservatisme van het Anglo-Amerikaanse Nieuw Rechts. Het kwam op als een *backlash* beweging, een anti-establishment stroming die zich richtte tegen bestaande elites en instituties. Nu is het zo dat conservatisme vaak begrepen wordt als een ideologie die gericht is op de verdediging van bestaande instituties en elites ten opzichte van pogingen om de status quo radicaal te veranderen. Als progressieve elites de instituties naar hun hand zetten echter, hebben conservatieven weinig keuze. Ze zien zich gedwongen om een anti-establishment positie in te nemen, en te proberen om het volk daarin mee te krijgen. De politicoloog Seymour Martin Lipset muntte de term *backlash politics* om het contradictoire karakter van een dergelijke conservatieve anti-establishment politiek te omschrijven. Met het begrip refereerde Lipset aan de paradoxale realiteit van 'rechtse groepen die zich genoodzaakt zien om te appelleren aan de bevolking aan de hand van waarden die zelf een voorname bron van rechts ongenoegen zijn: anti-elitisme, individualisme en egalitarisme.' De reden was simpel: dit waren de 'ultieme Amerikaanse

politieke waarden' die geen beweging kon negeren. 'Het aanhangen van deze waarden is de Amerikaanse ideologie', zo stelde Lipset vast.

Een dergelijke contradictoire logica lijkt des te meer van toepassing op de Nederlandse casus. De nieuwrechtse *backlash* in Nederland zag zich genoodzaakt om politiek in te kaderen in de 'ultieme Nederlandse politieke waarden'. De diepte en lengte van de progressieve golf van de jaren zestig in Nederland betekende dat progressieve seksuele en seculiere moraliteit zich had ontwikkeld tot 'de Nederlandse ideologie'. Door conservatieve tegenbeweging in Nederland moest door haar late opkomst in veel grotere mate het progressieve seksuele, antiautoritaire en seculiere ethos incorporeren dat de erfenis vormde van de jaren zestig en zeventig. Anders plaatste zij zichzelf buiten de werkelijkheid. In de voetsporen van Fortuyn omarmden nieuwrechtse intellectuelen de Verlichting en progressieve waarden zoals individualisme, secularisme en vrouwen- en homorechten. Zij presenteerden zich als de ware verdedigers van progressieve verworvenheden ten opzichte van de 'achterlijke cultuur' van moslimimmigranten.

De socioloog Paul Schnabel noemde dit 'modern conservatisme': 'Wilders wil maatschappelijke verworvenheden vasthouden, daarvoor is te weinig aandacht. Hij wil niet terug naar de tijd waarin homo's en vrouwen werden achtergesteld. Hij wil niet het herstel van oude waarden, hij wil het behoud van nieuwe waarden.' De essayist Ian Buruma schreef uitvoerig over deze contradictoire conservatieve politiek in zijn terecht gevierde boek over de moord op Theo van Gogh: 'Omdat het secularisme te ver is doorgedrongen om de autoriteit van de kerken terug te brengen, hebben conservatieven en neoconservatieven zich verbonden aan de Verlichting als symbool van onze nationale en culturele identiteit. De Verlichting, in andere woorden, is de naam geworden van een nieuwe conservatieve orde, en haar vijanden zijn de buitenlanders, wiens waarden we niet kunnen delen.'

Enerzijds heeft deze conservatieve omarming van progressieve waarden een instrumenteel karakter. De conservatieve interesse in feminisme en homorechten staat grotendeels ten dienste van hun oppositie tegen de Islam, en lijkt los daarvan vaak weinig om het lijf te hebben. Velen hebben erop gewezen dat vrouwen- en homorechten dienstbaar zijn gemaakt aan een nationalistische en anti-moslim politiek, een ontwikkeling die onderzoekers hebben beschreven aan de hand van termen als seksueel nationalisme, homonationalisme en femonationalisme. Anderzijds is deze paradoxale positie te herleiden tot een empirische werkelijkheid aan de basis: de oncontroversiële aard van de seksuele revolutie in Nederland had geleid tot een breed gedeelde progressieve seksuele moraliteit die niet langer door een conservatieve tegenbeweging ongedaan gemaakt kon worden. Pim Fortuyn, zelf een openlijk homoseksuele babyboomer en een kind van de jaren zestig, beschreef deze erfenis als een onbetwistbaar 'cultureel sediment' en raadde Nederlandse conservatieven af om te pogen dat weer ongedaan te maken.

Het conservatisme van Nieuw Rechts in Nederland is daardoor dubbelzinniger van karakter dan dat van haar Anglo-Amerikaanse voorgangers. Aan de hand van Angela McRobbie's notie van een 'complexe' conservatieve *backlash*, beschrijf ik Nieuw Rechts als een conservatieve tegenbeweging die op een selecte reeks thema's de verworven-

heden van de jaren zestig omarmt, en tegelijkertijd progressieve waarden fel bestrijdt op een bredere reeks van terreinen zoals *law and order*, immigratie, sociale zekerheid, het milieu, internationalisme, cultuur, economisch beleid, de arbeidsethiek, ontwikkelingshulp, mensenrechten en terrorismebestrijding. Net als bij Nieuw Rechts aan de andere kant van de oceaan, heeft de ideeënpolitiek daarbij centraal gestaan. Nieuw Rechts heeft vol overtuiging geprobeerd om de Nederlandse politiek te veranderen aan de hand van een ideeënstrijd, door de erfenis van de babyboomers en de jaren zestig te bevechten. Deze studie vertelt het verhaal van die strijd.

Tilburg Dissertations in Culture Studies

This list includes the doctoral dissertations that through their authors and/or supervisors are related to the Department of Culture Studies at the Tilburg University School of Humanities. The dissertations cover the broad field of contemporary sociocultural change in domains such as language and communication, performing arts, social and spiritual ritualization, media and politics.

- 1 Sander Bax. *De taak van de schrijver. Het poëtische debat in de Nederlandse literatuur (1968-1985)*. Supervisors: Jaap Goedegebuure and Odile Heynders, 23 May 2007.
- 2 Tamara van Schilt-Mol. *Differential item functioning en itembias in de cito-eindtoets basisonderwijs. Oorzaken van onbedoelde moeilijkheden in toetsopgaven voor leerlingen van Turkse en Marokkaanse afkomst*. Supervisors: Ton Vallen and Henny Uiterwijk, 20 June 2007.
- 3 Mustafa Güleç. *Differences in Similarities: A Comparative Study on Turkish Language Achievement and Proficiency in a Dutch Migration Context*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 25 June 2007.
- 4 Massimiliano Spotti. *Developing Identities: Identity Construction in Multicultural Primary Classrooms in The Netherlands and Flanders*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Guus Extra, 23 November 2007.
- 5 A. Seza Doğruöz. *Synchronic Variation and Diachronic Change in Dutch Turkish: A Corpus Based Analysis*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 12 December 2007.
- 6 Daan van Bel. *Het verklaren van leesgedrag met een impliciete attitudemeting*. Supervisors: Hugo Verdaasdonk, Helma van Lierop and Mia Stokmans, 28 March 2008.
- 7 Sharda Roelsma-Somer. *De kwaliteit van Hindoescholen*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Sjaak Braster, 17 September 2008.
- 8 Yonas Mesfun Asfaha. *Literacy Acquisition in Multilingual Eritrea: A Comparative Study of Reading across Languages and Scripts*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon and Jeanne Kurvers, 4 November 2009.
- 9 Dong Jie. *The Making of Migrant Identities in Beijing: Scale, Discourse, and Diversity*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 4 November 2009.
- 10 Elma Nap-Kolhoff. *Second Language Acquisition in Early Childhood: A Longitudinal Multiple Case Study of Turkish-Dutch Children*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Kutlay Yağmur, 12 May 2010.
- 11 Maria Mos. *Complex Lexical Items*. Supervisors: Antal van den Bosch, Ad Backus and Anne Vermeer, 12 May 2010.
- 12 António da Graça. *Etnische zelforganisaties in het integratieproces. Een case study in de Kaapverdise gemeenschap in Rotterdam*. Supervisor: Ruben Gowricharn, 8 October 2010.

- 13 Kasper Juffermans. *Local Linguaging: Literacy Products and Practices in Gambian Society*. Supervisors: Jan Blommaert and Sjaak Kroon, 13 October 2010.
- 14 Marja van Knippenberg. *Nederlands in het Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs. Een casestudy in de opleiding Helpende Zorg*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen and Jeanne Kurvers, 14 December 2010.
- 15 Coosje van der Pol. *Prentenboeken lezen als literatuur. Een structuralistische benadering van het concept 'litteraire competentie' voor kleuters*. Supervisor: Helma van Lierop, 17 December 2010.
- 16 Nadia Eversteijn-Kluijtmans. *"All at Once" – Language Choice and Code-switching by Turkish-Dutch Teenagers*. Supervisors: Guus Extra and Ad Backus, 14 January 2011.
- 17 Mohammadi Laghzaoui. *Emergent Academic Language at Home and at School. A Longitudinal Study of 3- to 6-Year-Old Moroccan Berber Children in the Netherlands*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Ton Vallen, Abderrahman El Aissati and Jeanne Kurvers, 9 September 2011.
- 18 Sinan Çankaya. *Buiten veiliger dan binnen: in- en uitsluiting van etnische minderheden binnen de politieorganisatie*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Frank Bovenkerk, 24 October 2011.
- 19 Femke Nijland. *Mirroring Interaction. An Exploratory Study into Student Interaction in Independent Working*. Supervisors: Sjaak Kroon, Sanneke Bolhuis, Piet-Hein van de Ven and Olav Severijnen, 20 December 2011.
- 20 Youssef Boutachekourt. *Exploring Cultural Diversity. Concurrentieoordelen uit multiculturele strategieën*. Supervisors: Ruben Gowricharn and Slawek Magala, 14 March 2012.
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The meteoric rise and dramatic assassination of the right-wing populist politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 resulted in a stunning election victory of his party List Pim Fortuyn (LPF). It became the second largest party out of the blue, winning seventeen percent of the vote in what is commonly called 'the Fortuyn revolt'.

Ever since, national identity, immigration, and law and order have been the dominant themes in Dutch public debate. It set the stage for a Dutch culture war, pitting conservative defenders of restrictive immigration and integration policies against prudent progressives. In this period, a decisive rightward shift occurred in the Dutch political climate. The central question of this book is how to make sense of this shift in ideological terms.

This study seeks to cast a wider conceptual net than what is common in existing scholarly accounts. It argues that political leaders such as Frits Bolkestein, Pim Fortuyn, Hirsi Ali and Geert Wilders are only the most visible exponents of a broader conservative political and intellectual tendency, identified as the Dutch New Right.

In the U.S. and the U.K., the term New Right has been used to describe conservative backlash movements that arose in opposition to the progressive movements of the 1960s. The central thesis of this book is that the swing to the right in the Netherlands can be understood along similar lines, as a belated iteration of the New Right backlash that occurred overseas.

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