

---

## Chapter 5

### **‘At Your Service!’**

Reflections on the Rise of Neo-nationalism  
in the Netherlands

*Thijl Sunier and Rob van Ginkel*



#### **Introduction**

The Netherlands, 6 May 2002. Late afternoon news bulletins report that Pim Fortuyn, leader of the newly established political party List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), has been shot. Soon after, they announce that the 54-year-old former sociology professor has died at the scene of the crime. The alleged murderer, a white animal-rights campaigner, is arrested. People respond with disbelief, abhorrence and shock, and wonder how this is possible in a country that has not witnessed political violence for many years. Fortuyn's death came just nine days before the Dutch parliamentary elections. Opinion polls had predicted that he would win enough seats to lead one of the country's largest political parties. Earlier that year, after standing as a candidate in municipal elections, Fortuyn had been very successful in his hometown, Rotterdam, the country's second largest city, and one that Labour had ruled for more than fifty years. He won more than one-third of the votes, capturing seventeen of the city council's forty-five seats. It gave a boost to his self-confidence. He made no secret of his ambition: he repeatedly stated that he wanted to become prime minister, nothing less, and that he would indeed be the next prime minister. Several bullets silenced his dissident voice.

His death could not prevent the Dutch political landscape from changing drastically on 15 May 2002. The 'Purple Coalition' of the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA), Liberals (VVD) and Liberal Democrats (D66), which had constituted government for eight years, suffered a serious blow. Newcomer LPF gained an unprecedented 18 percent of the vote (26 out of 150 seats in parliament), thus

becoming the second largest party, and it formed a new conservative coalition government with election winner, the Christian Democrats (CDA, which went from 29 to 43 seats) and election loser VVD (which retained only 24 of its 38 seats). The Labour Party lost dramatically, tumbling from 45 to only 23 seats in parliament, while the Liberal Democrats went from 14 to 7 seats. Only a year earlier no one would have imagined that this level of support were possible for a newcomer to party politics, and a populist one at that.

In a country whose intellectuals had been boasting for many decades that the Dutch are not nationalist, how can this landslide victory for a neo-nationalist party be explained? Political analysts and politicians alike were stunned by Fortuyn's success. In 2001 they expected a battle over political leadership between Liberals and Social Democrats. The economy was still booming, unemployment was at an all-time low and the large majority of voters claimed they were satisfied with 'purple' policies. The Christian Democrats were confronted with an internal conflict over party leadership and were losing ground in voter polls, while the List Pim Fortuyn did not exist as yet. Politics was still firmly rooted in the practice of consociational and deliberative democracy (Daalder 1971) in which political decisions were negotiated by all sorts of stakeholders. Every government for decades had been a coalition. Every view was taken into account, so long as it was broadly democratic. If anything, politics was stable, predictable and hence fairly dull. Many felt that elections had become somewhat meaningless since forming coalition governments necessarily implied making compromises, and party discipline numbed most parliamentary debate.

Into this scene of utter political tranquility, Pim Fortuyn emerged as the Young Turk who did not abide by unwritten political conventions and so-called political correctness. His slogan was 'I say what I think and I do what I say'. His provocative contribution made the electoral campaign livelier than it had been for decades. He received massive media exposure, especially on television. Fortuyn loved the camera, and the camera loved him. The established politicians did not have a proper answer to his unconventional performance and provocative statements. His behaviour and his message made him the talk of the town throughout the Netherlands. Journalists vied to interview him. Part of their curiosity had to do with the ungraspable character of Fortuyn, a man replete with paradoxes. Upon his death and after the elections, many scholars and journalists made attempts to analyse what had happened in the Netherlands, yet many questions remain unanswered. For example, how could one man single-handedly turn the seemingly stable Dutch political scene upside down? Why did his views appeal to a nation whose boast was that it despised nationalism and embraced multiculturalism? How does Fortuyn's party compare with right-wing or neo-nationalist political parties elsewhere in Europe? In this contribution, we attempt to present some tentative answers, but, doubtless, many puzzles and paradoxes will remain unsolved for some time to come. Before going into recent events, we will briefly deal with the

development of Dutch political culture and how it related to issues of nationhood and political, cultural and ethnic diversity.

### Political Culture: Discourses on Nationhood and Multiculturalism

The unified Dutch state started to appear on the political agenda in the late eighteenth century. Previously, ideas about the Dutch as a distinct people existed in elite circles only and were mostly supported by myths of origin and images of enemies. By 1780, a national awareness began to manifest itself in various publications concerning the characteristic nature, morals and customs of the Dutch. This self-image included such traits as tolerance, independence and open-mindedness. Yet it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that state formation and intensifying contacts, increasing interdependencies and civilising missions at national level led to growing national integration.

At the same time, however, the politico-religious compartments or pillars, of Liberals, Catholics and Protestants, emerged. They extended to all organisational spheres, not just to churches and parties *per se*. The leaders organised their followers tightly, and pillars demanded the right to run their own affairs through the principle of sovereignty in one's own domain. This brought about a compartmentalised civil society based on an institutionalised form of power sharing. Compartmentalisation also had consequences for interpretations of history and views of nationhood and national identity. Each compartment had its own version of 'Dutchness'. Nonetheless, Liberals, Catholics and Protestants, and later Social Democrats, wanted to maintain an impression of a national community. They gave an appearance of a conciliatory attitude and had quite a sound awareness of the national bond that existed alongside the bond to their particular pillar. In fact, their supra-local organisations contributed to national integration.

In the second half of the twentieth century the image of Dutch individuality became invariably more diffuse and, as a result of secularisation, decompartmentalisation and political pragmatism, became less allied to politics and philosophical convictions. Yet today the political culture of accommodation and pacification is still common practice and the history of peaceful coexistence legitimises present integration politics. History textbooks, for example, show how the Netherlands managed to organise a peaceful cohabitation of religious and other minorities by not making an issue of the differences, but rather by 'playing them low-key'. Religion is in a way conceived of as a matter of opinion, culture as a matter of subculture and lifestyle, ethnicity as a matter of background. Toleration, participation and inclusion are the keywords. Dutch history is portrayed as a continuous growth and refinement of an inclusive consultative democracy. The message would seem to be that differences should not be highlighted, but that they are there to be handled and overcome (for a more thorough analysis see Schiffauer et al. 2004).

With this last point we return to actual politics, particularly those issues that dominated the election campaigns of both 2002 and 22 January 2003. In both cases the integration of immigrants was one of the prime themes during the campaigns, particularly on the right wing of the political spectrum. To understand the tone of the debates one must know the background.

Until the end of the 1970s the cultural and religious background of migrants did not play any significant role in debates about their position in society. Migrants were temporary residents. The Netherlands did not yet officially conceive of itself as a country of immigration. Towards the beginning of the 1980s a turning point was reached: for the first time the government acknowledged that the idea of a temporary stay was unrealistic. In 1983 it issued a report outlining a new policy. It was at this point that the concept of 'integration with the preservation of identity' was introduced (Minderhedennota 1983: 38–42). Migrants were granted basic rights to live according to their own cultural background, while at the same time they were expected to take part in society. This became the typical Dutch trajectory towards full citizenship. An important aspect of this discourse was that a relationship was constructed between participation on the one hand and cultural background on the other. 'Guest workers' were relabelled 'ethnic minorities', 'cultural minorities' or 'ethnic groups' and later on 'allochthons' (as opposed to 'autochthons'). In other words, a shift in the definition of the situation took place. From an economic category, 'migrant' turned into a cultural one, and cultural background thus became a relevant factor in integration policies.

During the 1980s the government adopted a lenient attitude towards cultural specificities. Instead of assuming that this was rooted in compartmentalisation and multiculturalism as was assumed in debates in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, it must be traced back directly to the American assimilationist perspective as developed in sociology in the 1950s and 1960s. Preservation of cultural identity was only a temporary situation, a transitional phase to complete assimilation. One of the measures taken was the incorporation of migrants' organisations (including Islamic ones) into integration policies. These organisations were considered an important bridge between migrants and the host society. This contributed to a steady growth in the number of ethnic and religious associations (Sunier 1996: 8). Early critics stated that this could have a negative effect on integration (Vuijsje 1986), but the idea underlying these policies was that when integration was complete, these organisations would become obsolete.

The new integration policies took shape at a time when, in the Islamic world itself, dramatic events were taking place, such as the Revolution in Iran and the assassination of the Egyptian president Sadat. Suddenly migrants from countries such as Turkey and Morocco were 'discovered' as Muslims. 'Muslim migrants' emerged as a new cultural category. Islam increasingly became the explanatory factor not only for the specific (collective) behaviour of, but also for all kinds of societal problems faced by Muslims. This has been phrased as the 'Islamicisation of

the discourse' (Rath and Sunier 1994: 57). As a result, a specific image of Islam, based on the idea that Muslims were the least integrated migrants, made its way into public discourse. Islam was not just a new and strange religion, but also one known for its allegedly anti-modern character. Muslims were seen as passive, fatalistic people, turned inward and facing difficulties keeping up with the pace of modern society. For that reason it was believed that they tended to fall back easily on their faith. After the Rushdie affair and subsequent events, another image of Islam appeared. According to this image Muslims were not only conservative but also radical and a potential threat to society. This image became dominant, of course, after the events of 11 September 2001. It was in this political climate that Pim Fortuyn launched his criticisms of Islam.

Since the early 1980s the discourse on Islam, ethnic minorities and immigration has led to a revival of the discussion on national identity. In general, the political and intellectual elites embraced postmodern ideas like relativism and multiculturalism, but recently a growing number of intellectuals have argued for a deepening and dissemination of national awareness and protection of Dutch cultural identity, both in relation to the presence of ethnic minorities and European unification (see, e.g., Scheffer 2000; Schnabel 1999; van Praag 2000). Among the dissenters was Pim Fortuyn, who in 1997 (at which time he was not yet active in party politics) published a book entitled *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament* ('Against The Islamicisation Of Our Culture. Dutch Identity as Foundation') that was generally reviewed quite unfavourably. Although Fortuyn focused on Islam, his main point of concern was Dutch national identity, hence the subtitle of the book.

In that sense Fortuyn's critique fitted within a general change in the political climate that took place in the 1990s. The main idea is that the Dutch seem to be at a loss when they have to define the Dutch nation precisely. What is Dutch about Dutch national culture? What does it comprise? Why is the nation (still) an important frame of reference? The answers are equivocal (van Ginkel 1999). The cultural feeling of national belonging has become so 'natural' in the Netherlands that for a long time many thought it hardly needed contemplating. Some have mistaken this self-evidence for a lack of national consciousness, and even a denial of 'Dutchness'. This poses a dilemma for ethnic minorities: if they are willing to integrate into the nation, what is required of them? Exclusion may be a consequence of not knowing how to be included in a concept that is deeply hidden. How can they become fully fledged citizens when it is hard to know how to play by cultural rules that are unclear and constantly changing? How can you become a member of Dutch society when it is unclear what this membership implies? In general, the discourse on minorities was characterised by the rhetoric of multiculturalism, with an implicit expectation that ethnic minorities would assimilate, while separateness generally was the reality.

Yet, until recently at least, the multiculturalism discourse itself reflected a mode of debate that is very much in line with Dutch political culture. Sociologist Frank

Lechner raises the question of how Dutch policy on minorities reflects and transforms a sense of national identity. He writes:

Dutch minorities policy ... has 'managed others' in keeping with the code of national identity. It operates by consensual methods, strives for egalitarian inclusion, advocates a form of pluralistic tolerance, constitutes a major state project, and contributes to a Dutch conversation about what the Dutch nation is. It also, though, reflects changes in the meaning of membership and identity ... Minorities policy has helped to create a new form of citizenship; it has articulated a new sense of nationhood. (1999: 20)

The debate on the multicultural character of Dutch society and the need for and prospects of integration of ethnic minorities was well underway when Pim Fortuyn burst onto the political scene.

### A Maverick Political Leader: 'Professor Pim' and His Followers

Born in 1948 to a conservative, Catholic family in Velsen, a small town in the north-west of the country, Fortuyn went to the (Protestant) Free University in Amsterdam in the 1970s to study sociology. After graduation he became a lecturer at the University of Groningen where he taught Marxist sociology and defended his Ph.D. dissertation on social and economic developments in the Netherlands from 1945 to 1949 (Fortuyn 1981). He joined the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA), but his wanderings in a leftist milieu did not deter him from wearing fancy suits and developing a taste for expensive cars. Contracts with the government followed after he left the University of Groningen in 1988 and he established himself as a management consultant. At that time he left the Labour Party. In 1990 Fortuyn obtained a one-day-a-week professorial post teaching social sciences at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam. There, it was said, he lived up to what had become known as 'Fortuyn's Law': wherever he worked, he brought about controversy and acrimony, on this particular occasion in 1995 (Chorus and de Galan 2002).

By the 1990s he was writing a socio-economic column for the weekly *Elsevier*. His political conviction had moved to the right and his social network was beginning to take in the business community. He disliked the dominant Dutch practice of conflict avoidance through consensus seeking, which, in his view, numbed debate. His outspoken ideas were well received among the nouveaux riches, entrepreneurs and dissatisfied citizens, and he turned into an oft-invited speaker and television chat show guest who did not refrain from making blunt and controversial statements. These activities made Fortuyn well known in the Netherlands long before he became active in politics. They also earned him sufficient money to lead a flamboyant lifestyle, including a chauffeur-driven car and a butler. Fortuyn was gay and proudly so: he boasted of his promiscuity, of nights spent in the back rooms of gay bars, and the delight he took in the male prostitutes he kept around the house, including boys whose ethnic background was not Dutch.

Fortuyn was convinced of his leadership qualities. In several publications that appeared in the 1990s he portrayed himself as a 'shepherd' who would be able to lead the 'orphaned' and 'defenceless' Dutch people if only they would let him. He would show the way in a time during which the Dutch supposedly did not know how to relate to their 'Dutchness' and Dutch national identity (e.g., Fortuyn 1995: 238). His ideal was to dispense with redundant bureaucracy, social benefits and the culture of consultation in the economy (or the so-called *poldermodel*) and clear the way for entrepreneurs and the free market much in line with Thatcherism and Reaganism. He despised the bargaining power of organised groups and stakeholders and instead felt that society had to be made up of individuals entering into voluntary contracts; at the same time he advocated a conscription for young men and women, not into the military but into public service, so that people with different sexual preferences, genders, social and ethnic backgrounds would learn how to deal with one another in a civil manner and give meaning to their Dutchness, thus reinforcing the process of nation formation (Fortuyn 2002: 176). Fortuyn also called for stricter law enforcement. He was a Euro-sceptic who frequently called for the abolition of the European Parliament, more control at the European Union's internal borders, quitting the Schengen Agreement, and the renationalisation of the Common Agricultural Policy. Through his publications Fortuyn attempted to change the Dutch political climate. Though he was ambitious enough to enter the political stage, no party invited him to take on a ministerial post or other important political position.

It was not until November 2001 that Fortuyn became leader of the newly established and supposedly radical *Leefbaar Nederland* (Liveable Netherlands Party). *Leefbaar Nederland* was an amalgam of two successful local parties (*Leefbaar Utrecht* and *Leefbaar Hilversum*) that had been hammering away at local issues mostly to do with security in the public domain, breaking up the closed politics of the established parties, and policies and decisions that went against the wishes of citizens but which were nonetheless pushed through. Fortuyn accepted his election as party leader with the pathetic words 'At your service!' He guided the party towards the right, slamming bureaucracy in public services and challenging long-established Dutch political norms. The party rose sharply and quickly in voter polls under his leadership. His relationship with *Leefbaar Nederland* was, however, to be short-lived: in February 2002 he was expelled by the party's board for coming down harshly on Muslim immigrants in an interview (Poorthuis and Wansink 2002: 13) and suggesting that the Dutch Constitution's article one, banning discrimination, should be changed if he could not say what he wanted.<sup>1</sup>

Two days later he set up his own party, *List Pim Fortuyn*. A huge part of the electorate that had supported *Leefbaar Nederland* followed Fortuyn, and in opinion polls his party, or rather the leader himself, swiftly gained potential votes.<sup>2</sup> What about Fortuyn's political stance? He blamed the established politicians for neglecting the country's real problems and for losing contact with 'ordinary people'. He despised bureaucracy and railed against the ever-increasing restrictions

on Dutch life and commerce imposed by the imperious and undemocratically appointed European Union bureaucrats in Brussels. He campaigned for harsher penal laws, less tax, a leaner bureaucratic apparatus, more government accountability to voters and fewer decisions made behind closed doors by an isolated, self-appointed political elite dishing out jobs. Fortuyn promised to solve problems in healthcare, education and public security without increasing budgets or creating additional jobs in the public sector, while at the same time promising to take a firm line with large-scale bureaucracy. What aroused most attention, support from many dissatisfied voters and resentment from proponents of multiculturalism, however, was the fact that he emphasised time and again that Dutch politicians had been too soft on immigration.

Most controversial was Fortuyn's position on Islam, a culture he dubbed 'backward' in an interview with the national newspaper (Poorthuis and Wansink 2002),<sup>3</sup> as well as his hard-hitting anti-immigrant views. Fortuyn wanted to reduce significantly the number of immigrants and asylum seekers arriving in the Netherlands each year, from 40,000 people in the mid 1990s to just 10,000 'in no time at all'. According to him 'enough was enough', and with 16 million inhabitants the Netherlands was already a very densely populated country. 'This is a full country', he said, 'We are already overcrowded, there's no more room and we must shut the borders' (Poorthuis and Wansink 2002: 13). Those immigrants already in the Netherlands could stay but had to integrate as quickly as possible. 'Professor Pim', as he liked to be called, shocked the Dutch political establishment in February 2002 with a call for the repeal of the first article of the constitution, which forbids discrimination. His argument was that the Netherlands used to be and still was a liberal, tolerant and freedom-loving country where people could freely express their opinion. He feared that with an expanding Muslim minority these permissive values would be at stake. He himself supported gay rights, the legalisation of soft drugs and prostitution, the very hallmarks of permissive Dutch society. In an interview with BBC reporter Kirsty Lang, Fortuyn contended: 'Muslims have a very bad attitude to homosexuality, they're very intolerant ... And women. For them women are second-class citizens' (Lang 2002a). Explicitly referring to Samuel Huntington (1996), he continued: 'What we are witnessing now is a clash of civilisations, not just between states but within them ... I have gay friends who have been beaten up by young Moroccans in Rotterdam. We need to integrate these people; they need to accept that, in Holland, gender equality and tolerance of different lifestyle is very, very important to us' (Lang 2002b). In the same interview (Lang 2002a), he went on to say, 'In Holland, homosexuality is treated the same way as heterosexuality. In what Islamic country does this happen?' Fortuyn's fundamental point was: 'Why embrace them if they won't embrace you?' The Netherlands, he claimed, is a modern, tolerant European culture admirably free of the sectarian and religious violence of countries like Ireland, Spain, most of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. In another interview, he said: 'For Muslims, as a homosexual, I am less than a pig. I am proud that in the Netherlands I can

come out for my homosexuality and I'd like to keep it that way' (Graff 2002). A key feature of the new Islamic spirit, he said, is religious evangelism that seeks to convert infidels, meaning anyone who is not a Muslim.

With this kind of statement Fortuyn breached the generally restrictive 'speech code' regarding ethnic minorities and consequently aroused strong opposition from all established parties, particularly from the left. His opponents were quick to point out that his ideas were akin to those of extreme right-wing politicians elsewhere in Europe, among them Filip de Winter in Belgium, Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, Jörg Haider in Austria and Umberto Bossi in Italy. Fortuyn strongly resented being mentioned in the same breath as them or being dubbed a 'neo-fascist' or 'racist'. Fortuyn felt he was being 'demonised' by left-wing politicians, unjustly so. He denied that he was a racist and religious bigot; he said he was a pragmatist concerned about the rapidly expanding numbers of immigrants demanding full social benefits at the expense of taxpaying citizens. Immigrants were to him consumers who gave nothing back to the country that sheltered and fed them, and they sent the money they received directly overseas to their families. He stressed time and again that he defended the permissive, open, libertine culture that the Netherlands is known for. That is why Fortuyn deemed it of the utmost importance that immigrants had to integrate into (read: assimilate to) the prevailing Dutch society and culture as quickly as possible and embrace its democratic values. 'My policies are multi-ethnic and certainly not racist', he said, 'I want to stop the influx of new immigrants. This way, we can give those who are already here the opportunity to fully integrate into our society' (CNN.Com World 2002).

So Fortuyn employed the culturist argument, claiming that he wanted to protect and preserve Holland's supposedly distinctive culture of tolerance and liberty. Fortuyn was certainly not the only one to do so. There were other pleas for a kind of 'enlightened' nationalism, even from left-wing intellectuals, as we have seen (Scheffer 2000). However, what made Fortuyn's viewpoints different was the fierceness with which he opposed Islam and Muslim immigrants. He claimed that the Dutch had to close ranks to withstand 'the dangerous other' (Fortuyn 1997: 16). National unity was required to survive the 'clash of civilizations', i.e., Islam versus Judaeo-Christian Humanist culture. In his view, cultural relativism and multiculturalism eroded the existing shape of national culture and identity. He attempted to turn the attitude of 'let's celebrate our differences' into a 'let's stick with what we know' spirit of nationalism: 'The problems [in Dutch society] concentrate on those fellow citizens who hail from culture areas that are distant to very distant from ours' (Fortuyn 1997: 183). In addition to this culturist argument, Fortuyn and his followers saw immigrants as a financial burden: they constituted a threat to the country's economic prosperity, and the healthcare and prison systems would be less overburdened without the presence of ethnic newcomers.

Fortuyn's anti-Muslim views, calls for limiting immigration, and pledges to come down hard on crime struck a chord with voters despite the country's celebrated reputation for liberalism and religious tolerance. Sentiments like 'they

take our jobs', 'they eat our welfare', 'they want my wallet, my wife, our daughter' gained ground. Fortuyn's agitation against Muslim immigrants exploited an anti-Muslim atmosphere that had been encouraged by Western governments and media in the aftermath of 11 September 2001, and by extensive media coverage of the opinions of some radical imams and incidents with the problematic or delinquent behaviour of small groups of youths of Turkish and Moroccan descent in several of the major cities. Those who felt threatened by immigrants applauded Fortuyn's generalising and stigmatising view of Islam as a backward culture. He had broken the taboo on talking about ethnic difference and found ways to air his ideas, and those who bore a grudge against immigrants felt henceforth free to express their opinions too.

What is the background of LPF voters? The LPF found support among voters who would traditionally veer to the (far) right, but also among those weary of the existing political landscape and centre-left government and its 'back-room decisions'. The LPF also had a particularly strong appeal among the young and the poorly educated: nearly half of eighteen- to thirty-year-olds recently polled wanted to see no Muslim immigration at all and 56 percent of LPF voters enjoyed only advanced elementary or lower vocational education. The party also gained a considerable number of votes in urban settings with a high percentage of ethnic minorities, but also in 'white-flight' suburbs. Interestingly however, a considerable percentage of LPF voters are immigrants and once in, they seem to develop an interest in keeping other newcomers out for fear of having to share jobs and welfare benefits. Among the mourners queuing at Fortuyn's house in Rotterdam after 6 May 2002 were many people whose ethnicity was obviously not Dutch. Many traditional non-voters also decided to vote LPF. They felt that for the first time in years someone had voiced their discontent unequivocally. Upon Fortuyn's death many commented that he spoke the unspeakable, broke taboos and voiced the concerns of ordinary people that were swept under the carpet by mainstream politicians. Then there were the sympathy votes.

Without a doubt, Fortuyn was a charismatic leader. Unprecedented scenes accompanied his burial, with thousands and thousands of supporters along the route to his grave weeping, throwing flowers at the hearse, flying banners or national flags. The ceremony was broadcast live by several national television and radio networks. Fortuyn's critics were blamed for demonising him, and by association being guilty of his assassination. 'The bullet came from the left', as an LPF board member insisted. Some left-wing politicians received hate mail and death threats in the wake of the murder. Surely the political climate had turned sour. Established politicians refrained from tackling LPF points of view for fear of being accused of besmirching 'Pim's political legacy'. Rhetorically, LPF politicians began talking frequently about 'the national interest' (*het landsbelang*) and claimed that the party represented 'the people's voice' and 'the people's will'. Who 'the people' are is left obscure; they certainly do not include all 16 million or so inhabitants of the Netherlands.

Fortuyn was his political movement. Without its leader the List Pim Fortuyn was rapidly confronted with internal conflicts and mayhem. None of the elected MPs was of his stature; a real programme, a sound party organisation and discipline, and hence coherence, were lacking, and there was no 'natural' and uncontroversial successor accepted by the vast majority of LPF politicians and party members. Although it continued to hammer away at the issues of immigration, security and healthcare, it soon became apparent that the LPF was inclined to give in to the practice of consensus politics that so many of its voters despised.

The Christian Democrats and Liberals skilfully encapsulated their coalition partner and neutralised much of its political appeal by emphasising equally some of the themes that had led the LPF to electoral success. To the dismay of its voters most of the energy of LPF MPs was consumed by intra-party quarrels. It began to disintegrate as soon as it entered political centre stage. Only hours after the presentation of the new coalition government, a junior minister, Surinam-born Philomena Bijlhout, had to vacate her post because she had concealed having worked in a paramilitary militia in Surinam, at the time when the junta liquidated eight of its opponents.<sup>4</sup> There were also well-publicised conflicts over faction leadership in parliament and within the party board. When the conflicts spread to the ranks of the appointed members of government it was clear that the party had lost its position as an acceptable coalition partner. When two LPF ministers were forced to resign by the other LPF members of government, coalition partners CDA and VVD lost confidence and decided that the government would resign. It fell only eighty-seven days after it had been installed. Some commentators had predicted that this was likely to happen. For example, BBC Europe correspondent Angus Roxburgh stated that, 'It could be the worst of all worlds – a hard-right party holding the balance of power, but led by political pygmies and novices' (2002). Dutch social scientists point out that post-war, extreme right-wing parties are usually rapidly confronted with schisms and as a rule of thumb have been rather unsuccessful (e.g., van Donselaar 1993).

As a consequence of the turmoil in government, the dubious statements of some LPF ministers about a variety of issues, and the internal party squabbles, the electorate's support for the party quickly diminished to less than a possible six seats in parliament. During the campaign for the January 2003 elections the party made an effort to invoke, once again, the heritage of Pim Fortuyn, referred to as *de geest van Pim* (Pim's spirit) or *het gedachtegoed van Pim* (Pim's ideas), but with just eight seats they finished far below their previous twenty-six.<sup>5</sup> The LPF will reappear in parliament for years to come as a small party on the right side of the political spectrum. In the January 2003 elections, the Labour Party was victorious and regained many seats lost less than a year earlier (forty-two seats, an increase of nineteen). The Christian Democrats and the Liberals, the coalition partners of the LPF, also won some seats and ended up with forty-four (an increase of two) and twenty-eight (an increase of four) respectively. Apparently, after a turbulent year in Dutch politics the electorate yearned for stability again.

## Conclusion: A Nationalism of Sorts

In recent studies on nationalism it has been argued that the spread of neo-nationalist ideology in Europe must be understood in relation to important post-Second World War developments such as mass immigration and unification of Europe (see Eriksen 1993; Schierup 1997). Wicker (1997) argues that the type of nationalism witnessed in Western Europe today is internally rather than externally oriented. Modern nation states do not have to struggle for recognition vis-à-vis other states such as in the case of independence movements in the colonial era, or post-communist Eastern European states (see also Billig 1995). The question is to what extent these factors can account for the initial electoral success (and subsequent demise) of the LPF.

As we have argued, the relative success of the LPF and the popularity of Pim Fortuyn must indeed be understood partly against the backdrop of these developments. It is the Dutch version of processes encountered throughout Europe. Fortuyn's neo-nationalism was based to a large extent on anti-immigrant populism; its central tenets were keeping 'the external Other' out and culturally colonising 'the Other within'. Despite differences of style and emphasis there is a common set of ideas underlying the resurgent populist or right-wing movements in the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Denmark and elsewhere. This consists of ending or even reversing immigration and restoring at least part of the powers that are being, or may be, taken from nation states by the European Union; in the Netherlands and Denmark, for example, this has already resulted in much tougher immigration and asylum policies. From being ardent supporters of European integration, the Dutch population and conservative politicians are recently more reluctant to support the European idea, for example, in connection with the expansion of the European Union and the accession of new member states.

Yet, Fortuyn drew on some of the central tenets of the discourse on Dutch political culture and national identity, tolerance, liberty and democracy to expound his views regarding immigrants. He propagated these mythical core values of Dutch society and wanted to instil them into immigrants so that they would become assimilated (not just integrated) into Dutch society. Unlike politicians like Le Pen however, Fortuyn did not propose forced remigration and preferential treatment for the native Dutch population. Whereas other political parties would point to 'integration problems' as justification for anti-immigration policies, he went further and was explicit in his cultural nationalism: for example, as we have seen, the title of one of his books is 'Against The Islamisation Of Our Culture', i.e., Dutch culture (Fortuyn 1997). In the three decades before Fortuyn's political star rose there had been other political parties that adopted anti-immigrant and nationalist or even racist views; among them were the Nederlandse Volksunie (Netherlands People's Union) established in 1971, the Centrumpartij (Centre Party) established in 1980, and the Centrum Democraten (Centre Democrats) established in 1984. Though they sometimes succeeded in getting seats

on municipal councils, their role in national politics was limited (van Donselaar 1991). None of these parties has ever gained more than three seats in parliament. They were characterised by internal strife and their leaders did not appeal to a broad public. They were even considered to be the best remedy in minimising their own impact. The media were generally reluctant to provide a platform for their viewpoints and the taboo on open discussion of ethnic difference was still firmly in place. Racism and discrimination were strongly condemned. In this sense intolerance was not tolerated, at least not in public.<sup>6</sup>

A reason for the initial success of the LPF is the particular circumstances under which the party, or rather its leader, gained support. The backlash of the 11 September attacks, in combination with the very explicit opinions of Fortuyn about Islam, played a decisive role. In that respect the landslide victory of the LPF was contingent upon a combination of specific circumstances. It is precisely the political climate produced by the 11 September backlash that made it relatively easy to challenge the dominant discourse in which open reference to integration issues was a political taboo. The year 2002 will be recalled as the year in which almost every politician put Islam and the integration of Muslims high on their priority list. On the other hand however, the success of Fortuyn cannot be assessed only in relation to international developments, and unlike many other extreme right-wing parties the LPF was not a single-issue party. There is a typical Dutch edge to the movement. By 2002 transformations in Dutch society had brought about an atmosphere in which a man like Fortuyn and his ideas could move to the political centre stage.

First, depillarisation, along with the abandonment of socialist ideology by Labour leaders (as exemplified by Wim Kok's statement in 1995 that the Labour Party 'had shed its ideological feathers'), meant that the pluriform but stable segments in Dutch society lost much of their meaning and became increasingly porous. Concomitantly, political and religious leaders lost their grip on their traditional rank and file, resulting in a large proportion of 'floating voters'. Party loyalty has increasingly crumbled away, a symptom of which is that party membership has generally been in decline for decades. Whereas the media had long served the interests of particular segments in the pillarised Netherlands, this has changed considerably over the past thirty years or so. Commercial television and radio stations were established without any ties binding them to particular pillars, and broadcasting companies and newspapers linked with specific ideological or religious segments cut themselves loose under the influence or as part of the depillarisation process.

Second, with the diminished role of ideology many votes went to politicians not so much for their politics but for their appearance, presentation and media appeal. Once in the political limelight, Fortuyn stood out as a remarkable television personality, whereas most other leading politicians performed rather poorly. Without the old ideological bounds, Fortuyn became heavily mediated and favoured appearing in live broadcasts on commercial television so that his words



'could not be twisted'. Fortuyn fitted well within what Elchardus (2002) has called 'drama democracy', in which the media play a crucial role. The 2002 campaign was probably the most media-dominated up until then. It was clear that some political leaders had serious problems with this type of campaigning, most notably Labour leader Ad Melkert and Liberal leader Hans Dijkstal. Their successors as party leaders, Wouter Bos (Labour) and Gerrit Zalm (Liberal), did much better in this 'mediacracy', Bos in particular.

Third, since the 1970s the ethnic composition of Dutch society has changed considerably with the influx of migrants from the (former) colonies and immigrant labourers hailing from Morocco and Turkey. Though in the 1980s and 1990s some intellectuals and politicians raised the question of what the implications might be for 'dominant' Dutch culture and identity, the issue was hedged about by taboos. Nevertheless, there were growing anxieties in urban and 'white-flight' suburban settings as regards multi-ethnic society. These 'gut feelings' had much to do with a sense of alienation, with being increasingly unfamiliar with the languages spoken in one's environment, with the smells, sounds, dress modes and codes and so on. Having the political climate on his side, Fortuyn fuelled these fears, which had been simmering for some time. Given his outward appearance he did not seem like other Dutch nationalist or racist politicians that had been rather unsuccessful in the 1970s and 1980s. His twin 'solution' for what he deemed the undermining of national identity – halting immigration and stimulating integration of ethnic minorities – met with growing consent among an increasing proportion of the electorate.

Fourth, with the economy booming there was a general feeling of economic security. However, this favourable situation went hand in hand with growing anxieties and dissatisfaction regarding one's own personal position. One reason for dissatisfaction was that with economic growth in the Netherlands and increasing income differences came social inequality. The layer of wealthy people at the top was growing richer and richer due to disproportionate advances in wages and profitable option schemes; yet, many entrepreneurs felt restrained and pressured by the consensual politics regulated and controlled by the state bureaucracy. Fortuyn appealed to them because of his critical stance towards the politics of deliberation and compromise seeking, and his call to cut bureaucracy. For the poorly educated working population and those depending on welfare benefits, incomes hardly increased, if at all, and upward mobility seemed impossible. Losers, or potential losers, in the economic upsurge blamed the politics and politicians of the Purple Coalition and the corporatism of trade unions that agreed to self-restraint in wage demands, and believed that Fortuyn voiced their discontents. It turned them into vindictive voters. They paid the establishment back by voting for the LPF.

Fifth, although the integration issue dominated the political scene, what made Fortuyn particularly popular was his crusade against the established political parties. Bashing 'old politics' and blaming it for real or imagined problems was his

favourite pastime, and many could find some elements to agree with in what he proposed as 'new politics'. Fortuyn's focus on the supposed wrongdoings of the political establishment appealed to a large proportion of the electorate. It is this kind of 'anti-political politics', i.e., 'turning against the powers-that-be but doing it by manifesting popular *ressentiments* in and through electoral behaviour directly related to the mechanisms of representative democracy' that 'is a significant motivational factor from which much populist nationalism in contemporary Europe draws its sap' (Hedetoft 2002: 7). Fortuyn emphasised over and over again that he would bring politics back to the *burgers* (citizens) and the *burgers* back to politics. The campaign of 2003 brought this contradiction between 'old' and 'new' politics to the centre of public attention.

The last and certainly not least crucial Dutch aspect of the Fortuyn movement is the redefinition of some of the central concepts of Dutch political culture. As we have shown above, toleration, permissiveness, inclusion and participation have been key concepts for quite some time now. At first sight it seemed as if Fortuyn rejected these central tenets altogether. His famous slogan 'I say what I think and I do what I say' in practice meant that he did not avoid confrontations and controversial statements at all. He loved to kick ass and break taboos. In the eyes of many right-wing conservatives, his behaviour, especially his libertarian ideas about sexuality, was unconventional if not shocking, but this went to the heart of Fortuyn's ideas about tolerance. His critique of Islam and Muslims was motivated by their alleged anti-homosexual ideas. He often stated that a growing presence of Islam in Dutch society would jeopardise 'our' tradition of tolerance, permissiveness and inclusion. What is at stake here is not whether Fortuyn was right or wrong, rather the crucial point is that both Fortuyn and his adversaries referred to the same set of principles, defining them differently. The present leaders of the LPF hardly refer to these ideas when invoking 'Pim's spirit'. By the elections of January 2003, the party had developed into a small, ordinary, right-wing conservative law-and-order party.

Should the sudden rise of Fortuyn's neo-nationalist party be regarded as an isolated incident, a whim of political history that will soon disappear into oblivion? It is clear that the List Pim Fortuyn was inextricably tied to its eponymous founder and that upon his death its driving force and cohesion were undermined. Though the country is not short of aspiring populist politicians, no leader of Fortuyn's stature and charisma has taken his position. The LPF and the other right-wing parties established in the meantime have not been successful in the January 2003 elections and it is highly doubtful that they will be able to recruit a mass following again in the near future. However, the discontent that surfaced in May 2002 has not disappeared and is not likely to disappear for some time to come. It gave rise to a form of conservative and populist neo-nationalism that combines elements of an open, liberal, market-oriented welfare society with a strong emphasis on national, and particularly ethno-national, interests. The discontents have found another locus.



Following the 2002 political landslide in the Netherlands, popular disgruntlement was channelled into mainstream politics. The Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party would currently seem to be the champions of tougher immigration policies. Using the 'voice from below' as justification, they arrived at new terms of inclusion and especially exclusion vis-à-vis prospective immigrants. They proposed a restrictive aliens policy and stated that illegal immigration should be fought with vigour. Insofar as immigrants are still admitted, they have to complete an integration course (*inburgeringscursus*) successfully and on time, and they must pay for it themselves. The course aims at achieving fluency in the Dutch language, acquiring insight into Dutch society and its 'core values', and knowledge and skills necessary to be self-supporting through employment. Christian Democrat Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende openly doubted the desirability of a multicultural Dutch society. He felt that his and Fortuyn's political views had much in common, and he had a tacit agreement with Fortuyn not to attack one another in the 2002 election campaign (Chorus and de Galan 2002). In the campaign for the January 2003 election, Liberal leader Gerrit Zalm, like Fortuyn, stated that the Netherlands is 'full'. Labour and the small left-wing parties also toughened their stance on public security, immigration and integration. As a consequence, neo-nationalism has spread to some of the mainstream political parties, which have thus been able to absorb a considerable fraction of the dissatisfied electorate that supported Fortuyn. Again, this response is much in line with Dutch political culture: at least since the 1960s the political and administrative establishment's response to contestation has been to incorporate and tone down rebellious ideas, thus neutralising opponents (Kennedy 1995). Although the role of List Pim Fortuyn in Dutch politics is now marginalised, its name-giver has controlled the political agenda of the January 2003 elections from beyond the grave.

## Notes

We thank Gerd Baumann for his thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this chapter. Thanks also to Julene Knox who did a wonderful editing job. Since we submitted our contribution in June 2003, several books and scores of articles have been published about Fortuyn and the aftermath of his violent death. We would like to mention Pels (2003), Wansink (2004) and de Vries and van der Lubben (2005). Although we did not have the opportunity to use these recent publications for our chapter, we think that they would not have changed our analysis in any fundamental way.

1. Thus reiterating a view he had already voiced in 1995 (Lucardie and Voerman 2002: 40).
2. In the May 2002 elections, Leefbaar Nederland got just two seats in parliament. In the January 2003 elections the party lost these seats.
3. Earlier he had expounded this view at length (Fortuyn 1997). In a column he stated that, 'The greatest threat for world peace is Islam, whereby the distinction between liberal and fundamentalist Islam is only relative' (Fortuyn 2001).
4. There were several other ethnic minority members on the party list who were elected to parliament, possibly to counter allegations of racism.

5. Of those who voted LPF in 2002, almost a quarter (24 percent) did not cast a vote in 2003; while 18 percent switched to voting Liberal, 14 percent Christian Democrat and 10 percent Labour.
6. Backstage things were different. For example, unemployment figures of ethnic minorities were, and still are, disproportionately high.

## Bibliography

- Billig, M. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Chorus, J. and de Galan, M. 2002. In *de ban van Fortuyn. Reconstructie van een politieke aardschok*. Amsterdam: Mets & Schilts.
- CNN.Com World. 2002. 'Pim Fortuyn: Man of paradox', *CNN.Com World* 9 May, <http://europe.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/europe/05/06/fortuyn.profile/>.
- Daalder, H. 1971. 'On Building Consociational Nations', *International Social Science Journal* 23: 354–70.
- de Vries, J. and van der Lubben, S. 2005. *Een onderbroken evenwicht in de Nederlandse politiek. Paars II en de revolutie van Fortuyn*. Amsterdam: Van Gennep.
- Elchardus, M. 2002. *De dramademocratie*. Tiel: Lannoo.
- Eriksen, T.H. 1993. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press.
- Fortuyn, P. 1981. *Sociaal-economische politiek in Nederland 1945–1949*. Alphen aan den Rijn: Samsom.
- 1995. *De verweerde samenleving. Een religieus-sociologisch traktaat*. Utrecht: Bruna.
- 1997. *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur. Nederlandse identiteit als fundament*. Utrecht: Bruna.
- 2001. 'Koude oorlog met islam', *Elsevier* 25 August 2001, <http://www.pim-fortuyn.nl/columns/column.asp?ID=69>.
- 2002. *De puinhopen van paars. Een genadeloze analyse van de collectieve sector en aanbevelingen voor een krachtig herstelprogramma*. Rotterdam: Speakers Academy.
- Graff, J. 2002. 'Hostage to Fortuyn', *Time Europe Magazine*, 18 March, <http://www.time.com/time/europe/magazine/article/0,13005,901020318-216388,00.html>.
- Hedetoft, U. 2002. 'The Politics of Belonging and Migration in Europe: Raisons d'Etat and the Borders of the National', <http://www.socsci.auc.dk/institut2/nopsa/arbejdsgruppe19/ulf.pdf>.
- Huntington, S.P. 1996. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kennedy, J.C. 1995. *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw*. Amsterdam: Boom.
- Lang, K. 2002a. 'At Home with "Professor Pim"', *BBC News* 4 May, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/1966979.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/from_our_own_correspondent/1966979.stm).
- 2002b. 'Obituary. Pim Fortuyn: Maverick Dutch Rightwinger Poised for Electoral Success', *The Guardian* 7 May, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/obituaries/story/0,3604,711097,00.html>.
- Lechner, F.J. 1999. *Managing Others: Minorities Policy and National Identity in the Netherlands*, Halle Institute Occasional Paper. Atlanta: Claus M. Halle Institute for Global Learning, Emory University.
- Lucardie, P. and Voerman, G. 2002. 'Liberaal Patriot of Nationaal Populist? Het gedachtegoed van Pim Fortuyn', *Socialisme en Democratie* 59(4): 32–42.

- Minderhedennota. 1983. *Minderhedennota*. Den Haag: Ministry of Internal Affairs BiZa.
- Pels, D.L. 2003. *De geest van Pim. Het gedachtegoed van een politieke dandy*. Amsterdam: Anthos.
- Poorthuis, F. and Wansink, H. 2002. "De islam is een achterlijke cultuur", *de Volkskrant* 9 February, p. 13.
- Rath, J. and Sunier, T. 1994. 'Angst voor de islam in Nederland?', in W. Bot, M. van der Linden and R. Went eds *Kritiek. Jaarboek voor socialistische discussie en analyse 1993–1994*. Utrecht: Stichting Toestanden.
- Roxburgh, A. 2002. 'The Paradox of Pim Fortuyn', *BBC News* 16 May, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/1977511.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/from_our_own_correspondent/1977511.stm).
- Scheffer, P. 'Het multiculturele drama', *NRC Handelsblad* 29 January, p. 6.
- Schierup, C. 1997. 'Multiculturalism and Universalism in the United States and EU-Europe', in H. Wicker ed. *Rethinking Nationalism and Ethnicity: The Struggle for Meaning and Order in Europe*. Oxford: Berg, pp. 111–27.
- Schiffauer, W., Baumann, G., Kastorjano, R. and Vertovec, S. eds. 2004. *Civil Enculturation: Nation-State, School and Ethnic Difference in Four European Countries*. Oxford: Berghahn.
- Schnabel, P. 1999. *De multiculturele illusie- Een pleidooi voor aanpassing en assimilatie*. Utrecht: Forum.
- Sunier, T. 1996. *Islam in beweging*. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.
- van Donselaar, J. 1991. *Fout na de oorlog. Fascistische en racistische organisaties in Nederland 1950–1990*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.
- 1993. 'Post-war Fascism in the Netherlands', *Crime, Law and Social Change* 19: 87–100.
- van Ginkel, R. 1999. *Op zoek naar eigenheid. Denkbeelden en discussies over cultuur en identiteit in Nederland*. Den Haag: Sdu.
- van Praag, C. 2000. 'Op zoek naar de grenzen van multicultureel Nederland', *Socialisme en Democratie* 57(3): 115–17.
- Vuijsje, H. 1986. *Vermoorde onschuld. Etnisch verschil als Hollands taboe*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker.
- Wansink, H.A. 2004. *De erfenis van Fortuyn. De Nederlandse democratie na de opstand van de kiezers*. Amsterdam: Meulenhoff.
- Wicker, H. ed. 1997. *Rethinking Nationalism and Ethnicity: The Struggle for Meaning and Order in Europe*. Oxford: Berg.