

# Fortuyn, Van Gogh, Hirsi Ali

## Why the Unholy Trinity Was Driven Out of the Netherlands

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“Vulnerability” and “tolerance” are pretty vague notions. A lot of suggestions, images, and good intentions cling to them, while scientific clarity is virtually absent.

The same goes for the Netherlands. Abroad, my country had the image of a tolerant, liberal, and free society, a place where things could be said and done that were forbidden elsewhere. So the question is: how on earth did this country turn into a battlefield due to a clash of civilizations almost overnight?

I will try to explain to you how and why in the past decades the Netherlands became so vulnerable that in 2002 a political revolt broke out quite unexpectedly, a revolt that lasted for years and still is not over yet. The crisis resulted in two people becoming victims of political killings, while a third had to flee the country. Because all three of these people were liberal individualists who criticized two types of religion—the political-cultural left, or “Red Church,” and fundamentalist Islam—I will refer to them as the unholy trinity, an unholy trinity that had to be exorcized to restore the peace.

Freedom of speech and freedom of religion are key factors in the Dutch crisis. Cultural wars and mimetic rivalry are other factors. Americanization and the advent of the multicultural society are the *forces profondes*.

## I: TOLERANCE AND THE DUTCH CONSTITUTION

Let us talk briefly about tolerance first. Everybody seems to be in favor of it, except when we collectively decide we must *not* tolerate things, like drunken driving, smoking in public buildings, and so on.

In the present Dutch constitution, created in 1983, article 1 begins with these sentences: "All persons in the Netherlands shall be treated equally in equal circumstances. Discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief, political opinion, race, or sex or on any other grounds whatsoever shall not be permitted."<sup>1</sup>

In essence, the constitution states that a colored Dutchman has the right to be treated in the same way as a white one. This has, however, nothing to do with tolerance. Tolerance means that a dominant group permits a nondominant group to have opinions or lifestyles that seem to deviate from the usual order. If we ask natives to be tolerant toward exotic immigrants, this implies hierarchy. There is a group that tolerates, and there is a group that *is* tolerated. In the strict sense of the word, tolerance implies discrimination and is therefore hostile to the constitution.

As a Dutch historian once remarked, every philosopher who thought about these things, like John Locke, Mirabeau, or Thomas Paine, knew that the notion of religious tolerance is useless if you assume all men by nature to have inviolable rights anyway, like those of freedom of thought, expression, and religion.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, a nation-state has to be intolerant sometimes, for instance, when freedom of religion is used to undermine the state, when, for example, the state is promoting violence, which in democratic societies is the monopoly of the state. This is a matter of principle. The rest is a matter of political debate.

At this point we have to conclude that trying to give meaning to a word such as tolerance can be very complicated and confusing, and that such a word has to be used very carefully. The same goes for all those other container words, like racism, fascism, populism, and so forth, that have been used so frequently in recent decades to label and scapegoat people and things that are feared or simply disliked. But words are important.

The idle and gratuitous manner in which container words of this kind are used to denounce "the enemy" represents the other side of the so called liberal, "tolerant" society of the Netherlands. All this name calling definitely keeps you from researching and facing the things that are really going on. During the 1990s, this name calling resulted in the dominance of political correctness, a phenomenon that leaves no room for doubt as to who the angels and devils are in society, and it implies that there is no need to look into anything any further.

This can be quite comforting, that is, until someone, like the representatives of our unholy trinity, enters the stage and pinpoints exactly and without mincing words what the real problems and dilemmas in our modern (multicultural) society are.

One of the dilemmas is the question of prioritizing fundamental rights (as stated in the constitution) when these rights conflict with one another. For example, article 1 states the prohibition of discrimination, which we have already mentioned. And article 6 states that “everybody has the right to profess freely his religion or beliefs, either individually or in community with others, subject to everyone’s responsibility according to the law.” Article 7 states that “No one shall require prior permission to publish thoughts or opinions through the press, without prejudice to the responsibility of every person under the law.” Another part of this article states that this holds true for any medium. But what happens when there is a conflict? In the Netherlands, several orthodox religious leaders have publicly called homosexuals dirty swine and homosexuality a disease. A judge in this instance ruled that article 6 (freedom of religion) overruled article 1 (prohibition of discrimination). We know that a nonreligious citizen who said the same things would have been found guilty of discrimination, and therefore one has to conclude that our constitution can be quite ambiguous.<sup>3</sup>

Readers now probably think, well, this dilemma of conflicting articles is true for any constitution. How right they are. That’s why in America the Supreme Court is so important, and why fierce political battles are fought when the president needs to appoint a new member.

But in Holland there is no such thing as a supreme court. Perhaps the fundamental problem here is the total absence of public debate (apart from the occasional cultural conflict between the current elites, who were the generation of 1968, and “the masses,” and the mimetic rivalry among several groups that occurred in the past decade) about the new Dutch Constitution of 1983 and the possible contradictions it presents in practice.

The reason for the absence of public debate is simple: in a society dominated by *one* intellectual group, everybody agrees about the priorities, even the judges. But as soon as someone stands up and says, hey wait a minute, I do not agree, then all of sudden it seems that hardly anyone has given the contradictions much thought.

I would like to say one more thing about the constitution of 1983, because it links the constitution to the generation of 1968 that was in power in 2002 and to the crisis that followed. A Dutch historian in 1984 said about the constitution: “Dutch society of today is asking very much of itself.”<sup>4</sup> This is not just because it is probably the only one in the entire world that starts with an

interdiction—“Thou shall not discriminate”—but because all the other articles combined make up one long catalogue of citizens’ rights, while on the other hand the constitution specifies all the duties that the state should fulfill, duties varying from the provision of good housing, employment, and health care to the provision of privacy and leisure time. Civic duty isn’t mentioned anywhere.

We can easily connect the consequences of this constitution to the harsh criticism the British author and former psychiatrist Theodore Dalrymple expressed in his books about the fatal consequences of the (British) welfare state and the anti-authoritarian attitudes the 1968 revolution establishment reserved for those generations raised in British ghettos. For Dalrymple, these consequences are passivity and the establishment’s placing on others the blame for its own failure.<sup>5</sup>

## II: THE *FORCES PROFONDES*

Violence and religion (the concepts examined at the Amsterdam Conference on Violence and Religion, 2007) are key concepts if we want to understand why the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker and writer Theo Van Gogh were killed, and why politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali was exorcized by what Fortuyn referred to as “the Red Church” of Dutch cultural and intellectual elites, but perhaps also by the majority of people, who may have regarded her as too dangerous for Holland.

It’s not easy for the Netherlands to cope with realities such as religion and violence. Both our constitution, which consists mainly of statements of citizens’ rights, and the total lack of public debate about the constitution illustrate this. But the real reasons for our problematic relationship with the concept of violence are partly historical and partly geographical. Our country is so small you’ll have problems finding it on a globe. The two world wars left big scars on our national psyche. First, it needs to be stated that we did not take part in World War I. Staying aloof and having the Peace Palace in The Hague seemed to be a better protective shield than getting involved. Being without military defenses, we took the moral high ground to survive. Do not give offense to anyone!

What was striking during the 1960s was the dazzling speed at which secularization spread across Holland. People left their churches faster than in any neighboring country. When Pope John Paul II visited Holland in 1985, demonstrators pelted the popemobile with tomatoes and rotten eggs. The explanation for this fierce anti-church stance of the post-World War II generations seems

to be that the corset of prewar morality had been tighter in Holland than elsewhere. The reason for this can be linked to the fact that the Dutch stayed neutral during World War I. The dominant pre-1914 bourgeois and Christian views on morality were able to survive without being interrupted by World War I and the roaring twenties.

During World War II, the Dutch mostly felt humiliation and the need to “adjust” to the German occupation. The peculiar post-World War II history of the Dutch has a great deal to do with the traumas suffered because of the two world wars.

The postwar generations were burdened with feelings of shame and guilt about incidents of wartime collaboration, and with feelings of anger about the prolonged restraints of prewar church doctrines. So, the heartfelt cry of “Free at last, away with religion” was part of the Dutch cultural revolution of the 1960s. And Theo van Gogh was its fierce defender.

However, traditionally the Dutch predominantly have a Christian moral code. So, as soon as the 1960s were over, collective feelings of guilt caused a semi-religious agenda to enter the political hemisphere. This was an agenda that made political priorities of the Third World, the environment, animal rights, and so forth. So nonreligious environmental fanatics, like the killer of Pim Fortuyn, essentially had the same motivations as the born-again Muslim fundamentalist killer of Theo Van Gogh.

### III: THE GENESIS OF THE DUTCH CRISIS

Early in 2002, Prime Minister Wim Kok said that the phenomenon of Pim Fortuyn was a matter of “media hype.” In other words, there was much ado about nothing. The concept of media hype is an essential part of the cultural conflicts in Holland, which can sometimes turn into lengthy wars. It is an instrument by which opinion makers are able to denounce events deemed unworthy of too much attention. In some cases it actually says something about the way the media work, but in most cases it doesn’t clarify anything. Years later, Wim Kok, leader of the social-democratic party Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA) was still unable to give any sort of explanation of what had happened in 2002, the year that saw the rise and fall of Fortuyn, an event that halved Wim Kok’s social-democratic party in size, even though Wim Kok and his party had been in government for eight years and many believed them to have been very successful.<sup>6</sup>

That Fortuyn was not a creation of “media hype” is made clear by what happened after his death. Crisis after crisis ensued, as did one more killing. Fortuyn’s

friend and adviser Theo Van Gogh was brutally murdered on 2 November 2004. The “banishment” of Van Gogh’s good friend Ayaan Hirsi Ali from the Netherlands during the summer of 2006 was the final “vanishing act.”

Though the media may sometimes be at the heart of the matter, this is seldom the case. The changes in society and in the worlds of ideas are what really matter. In the Netherlands, two (international) structural developments were at the heart of the matter: the Americanization of life and the development of a multicultural society. The emancipation of “the masses” proved to be an extra problem, that is, to those of the 1960s generation who were holding key positions in the public sphere of highbrow culture and media.

But for a complete understanding of the genesis of the revolt of 2002, besides the structural developments mentioned above, it is necessary to look at the Girardian themes of rivalry, violence, and religion (or the lack of it) as well.

With the dismantling of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the West had reached “the end of history,” as Fukuyama said. Free-enterprise, democratic capitalism had triumphed. It was against this backdrop that 75 years of Christian-democratic supremacy in Dutch politics came to an end in 1994. After 12 years, the Rotterdam-born Roman Catholic prime minister, Ruud Lubbers, had to leave office after his party suffered a severe blow in the elections, mainly because Lubbers, leader of the Christian-democratic party (CDA), had referred to the Dutch welfare state as a “sick” society that should be turned into a working holding company.

His old Jesuit college schoolmate, Hans van Mierlo, saw the opportunity for which he had been waiting for years. Having turned away from religion, Van Mierlo, a bohemian, liberal journalist from downtown Amsterdam, had in the 1960s founded a new democratic party (D’66) on the basis assumption of the political autonomy of the individual citizen, both in public and in private matters. After that, he found himself on the margins of power most of the time, complaining in 1989 about Lubbers, the prime minister and van Mierlo’s old school friend: “Why did it happen to him and not to me?” In 1994, Van Mierlo would become the kingmaker of the Purple Coalition—socialist red, liberal blue, and democratic green. This came about mostly as a result of a mixture of personal envy and politically justified motives.

More importantly, in Girardian terms, it was the first time the archenemies, socialists and capitalists, joined forces in one and the same cabinet, as a result of the socialists’ “shaking off the ideological feathers,” after many frustrating years of opposition. The fusion led—as new outsider politicians would frequently complain—to boring uniformity in Dutch politics.

#### IV: "AN AMSTERDAM CABINET"

After the protests of 1968, many Christian media outlets had turned to the left, and therefore the Purple Coalition was welcomed by the majority of the media, as well as by the people. And it was certainly welcomed by the post-1968 generation elites who were by this time living in the centre of Amsterdam and were still under the impression that they controlled the cultural (and political) universe. One of Van Mierlo's friends, the famous writer Harry Mulisch, described the coalition as follows:

Well, up to now it was always the provinces that called the shots, and I count The Hague among them too. This will become a truly Amsterdam cabinet, a big-city cabinet. The members know a totally different kind of people, move about in other circuits. That gives a cabinet like this a different aura, more worldly.<sup>8</sup>

In other words, a quarter of a century after 1968, the Netherlands, once again, would become a beacon. This time it would become a beacon of progressive cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, and postmodernism, with the intellectual, artistic, and autonomous citizen as the center of all things.

However, we all know that postmodernism means irony, that it's the rose that blossoms on the grave of lost illusions. Behind the mask of commercialized progressiveness, most of the Purple enthusiasts felt freed from ideology, free to join the world of money and television. The big fusion between money and culture began. In America, David Brooks called the new elites that came into power under President Clinton "the bourgeois bohemians."

They had learned their lessons both from the radical 1960s and from the yuppie 1980s, and tried combining them by living in the best of both worlds, like "Bobos in Paradise." After suffering a severe blow early in the administration due to a skirmish over gays in the military, Brooks writes, the Clintonites settled on "Don't ask, don't tell." "If ever there was a slogan that captured the Third Way efforts to find a peaceful middle ground, that was it."<sup>9</sup>

In Holland, where there was a moralistic tradition and where the 1960s had had more extreme results, the commercialization of the media culture happened faster and was more visible to the public. Suddenly writers, journalists, politicians, and intellectuals were rushing over to TV studios to tell all about their unhappy childhoods in order to sell their book, movie, or party politics, or to talk about anything, really, just to stay in the picture.

At the same time, the *nouveau riche* (Internet, real estate), which for some time had envied the status of the old cultural elite, tried to fight its way into the old but by then commercialized “high” media culture. Suddenly, talk shows popped up everywhere, using pleasant café settings as substitutes for the unsafe and deserted public sphere. All the chattering people sitting at those tables seemed very pleased with themselves. This indeed resembled paradise, and its denizens felt it should never change again. Of course, in spite of all these witty conversations, some topics were still taboo. For example, one wasn’t supposed to comment on the elite—this was the politically correct elite that still claimed to be anti-elite—or talk about the subject of income. This was at a time when, during some television shows, the collective annual income in millions of euros earned by the people sitting at the table was far higher than the number of participants. In America, money is an accepted measure of success, but shame and guilt still surround Holland in this respect. In spite of this, however, it seems that envy is universal.

The new cabinet was in fact pretty nervous about the bold measures it had taken to remove the Christians from power. The instruments to achieve this, for example, were maintaining a politically correct silence regarding unpleasant matters, and intensifying the ties with friendly journalists, just as in the old days of the center/left-wing cabinet of Den Uyl in the 1970s.<sup>10</sup> Based on interviews with 750 journalists in the late 1990s, 75 percent of Dutch journalists called themselves leftists.<sup>11</sup> The result was a politics-publicity complex ruled by stifling political correctness.

During the 1990s, there were indeed politicians who initiated a debate on the downsides of the multicultural society, like the liberal politician Frits Bolkestein, leader of the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie* (VVD), who introduced a genre of discourse we might call new realism.<sup>12</sup> He was immediately labeled a proto-fascist, as Pim Fortuyn would be nearly ten years later. And there was publicist Paul Scheffer, who, in 2000, characterized the Dutch neglect of the country’s immigrants as “the multicultural tragedy.”<sup>13</sup>

Luckily for the Purple Coalition, the Dutch economy started to blossom again. This, together with the emancipating and mobilizing capacity of the Internet, added greatly to the idea of the autonomy of the citizen. Soon, the social law of the revolution of rising expectations came into action, of course, as did “mimetic rivalry on a planetary scale,” to use Girard’s words in his explanation of the 9/11 crisis.<sup>14</sup>



## V: "NIHILISM-WITH-A-HUMAN-FACE"

At the turn of the millennium, however, cultural pessimists complained that the only thing "the masses" were interested in was "fun, fun, fun." So what went wrong? What enabled a sudden Dutch revolt early 2002 to break through this surface of "fun"?

Of course, 9/11 opened everybody's eyes, shook everybody's beliefs, and got on everybody's nerves. One month after 9/11, Pim Fortuyn was chosen as the leader of a party that had recently entered the national stage, *Leefbaar Nederland* (Livable Netherlands), a party that had been achieving considerable success locally for years.

The country had been—as is always the case in revolutionary situations—in a state of ferment for a long time. Under the surface of "fun, fun, fun," frustration had been brewing for years. This was, first, because of the gradual disappearance of political boundaries, both literally and figuratively. And, second, it was a reaction to the materialistic (in the economic and philosophical senses of the word) outlook of the Purple Coalitions, an outlook that was dominated by rational choice theories about the nature of human beings.

Prime Minister Kok, born in 1938 in a working-class family, was a former union man. His outlook on life was formed during the years of postwar reconstruction in the 1950s, when working hard got you somewhere. It was a linear way of thinking, in which there was little room for God or philosophy. This traditional economic way of thinking dominated the Purple Coalitions. Van Mierlo's youthful democratic party added the freedom of choice of the individual in all aspects of life to the political way of thinking. Following the legalization of abortion, homosexual marriage and euthanasia were now legalized. Pragmatism was the magic word.

This humanistic, *laissez-faire* moral attitude created an ethical vacuum, while the undercurrent of malaise that had been growing since the 1980s about the materialistic philosophy, in which everything was centered around the ego and the individual and around money and success, was misunderstood completely. The question was, and still is, whether a society can do without a religious or ideological foundation. Emile Durkheim may have been the first thinker who said that society and religion are the same thing. Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers was called a "manager in politics." However, he never threw away his organic Catholic philosophy of being "on our way together." This Christian idea was traded for the individualistic maxim "Go your own way."

The Purple view on the autonomy of the individual, the uselessness of a metaphysical morality, and the necessary self-restraint of the state in all things

economic, artistic, moral, and societal led to an enormous inability to cope with the greatest problems of the 1990s: violence and the multicultural society with its Islamic newcomers. Because religion was regarded as a private matter, though old-fashioned, some saw Islam as a lifestyle, like being single or gay or being fond of hiking.

The second Purple Coalition did try to reduce the growing number of asylum seekers, whose numerical increase in some years came close to the number of inhabitants of a middle-sized city. The law aimed at reducing the number of asylum seekers passed in Parliament in 2000 as quietly as possible, partly out of fear of the left wing of Kok's own social-democratic party, PvdA, and partly out of fear of the wrath of the left-wing media. This is one reason why Fortuyn was able to shout out as loudly as he did that the government was neglecting the issue, and why his standpoint on immigration was unambiguous: "Full is full."

In a world dominated by economic thinking in which the autonomy of the individual is the new God, or idol, it is hardly surprising that the Purple Coalitions were as helpless as they were in respect to the other big, emotionalizing theme of the 1990s: violence. First there was the Srebrenica slaughter in former Yugoslavia in 1995, where the Dutch blue helmets failed to prevent the killing of 7,000 Muslims.

Helplessness was also the operative word in the cases of what during the 1990s became known as "useless violence" in Holland—cases of rape and murder or deadly violence for no apparent reason, apart from boredom or a misinterpreted look. These incidents led to events of national mourning that kept growing in intensity and drew more and more attendants, in Lady Diana style. At one memorial event, in 1997, Prime Minister Kok spoke. He described his own political powerlessness, saying: "I stand here with empty hands." Instead of being decisive and taking a firm line, a stance that, unknown to him, many people would by then have welcomed, Kok blamed the growing loss of public morality on television, something he apparently could not fix. In 1999, Kok's minister of justice, after yet another shooting incident at a disco, declared: "It is for society and not for the state to guarantee safety in the streets."<sup>15</sup>

It was at this time that many citizens, and not only those in the new multicultural ghettos, began to feel as though their government had deserted them. The ever visible "fun, fun, fun" culture of large-scale outdoor amusements may have been simply a reaction to the growing loneliness of the individual citizen, alone with his or her autonomy and television set.

In 2000, the renowned Dutch columnist J. L. Heldring described the dominant climate in the Netherlands as "nihilism-with-a-human-face." This was a

climate to which an enlightened conservatism would eventually offer a good alternative.<sup>16</sup>

## VI: ENVY IN THE MEDIA CULTURE

Nobody listened to Heldring's warning, not The Hague, not Amsterdam, the self-proclaimed creator of the Purple "progressiveness," and not the provincial town of Hilversum, where all national radio and television stations are based. This was because, after many grassroots mini-revolts in local politics, the real revolt broke out in Rotterdam, a city largely ignored by The Hague, Amsterdam, and Hilversum. There were several other reasons why so many journalists totally missed the rise of discontent.

The first was their marriage to the Purple Coalition, which raised their sense of power and thus discouraged them from going out in the streets and searching for news themselves. The second was the fierce competition between established and upcoming commercial broadcasting stations and established and free newspapers. Journalism was fighting for its own survival. Some quality papers, commercial by nature, even hoped that the expected third Purple Coalition would be willing to subsidize them, so that they would in fact become civil servants, with a lifelong job guarantee.

Commercialization and television in particular made many people in the media world envious and frustrated. In the rest of the West, commercial television had been in existence for decades. But in the Netherlands this wasn't the case. Until 1989, there were only two TV stations, both publicly funded. All national dailies were commercial, though some of them were guided by foundations with an ideological programme. The image the average journalist had of himself was that of an independent professional, serving democracy, the truth, or whatever the ideology was at the time. After 1990, the first commercial TV and radio stations emerged in the Netherlands, thanks to Europe's internal market. They were immediately ridiculed by the established media as "pulp" for "simple minds."

Toward the end of the twentieth century, things started to go wrong. The Internet led to desperation: how should the media react to it? In 1999, the first of a series of free papers appeared. This phenomenon was ridiculed too. But what was worse, the number of subscriptions to quality papers decreased dramatically. And what was even worse for the serious journalists of the state financed Public Broadcasting System, the commercial stations had become market leaders.

A late-night talk show broadcast by a commercial station became the most popular show on television, even among newspaper journalists. For a few years, it was the talk of the town. From this moment on, politicians weren't interested in giving interviews to newspapers anymore. Instead they drove to the studio if they wanted to promote a new idea or themselves. In an imitation reflex, newspaper journalists secured their own seats at the talk show tables, and they were increasingly to be found discussing public issues on radio and television as well.

So the growing frustration among quality newspapers—the merging of five of them into one only added to the frustration—meant that the media were predominantly involved with their own troubles, and this was one reason why they failed to see what was happening in society at large. Public television journalists' growing unease about their own imitation of commercial television was another.

By the time Pim Fortuyn came onstage in this buzzing media theater and outwitted them all, the quality papers and public broadcasting stations were already nervous and frustrated for reasons other than their legitimate objections to the populist approach of this newcomer.

The negative and defensive atmosphere that existed among the media lasted for a long time after Fortuyn was murdered, and it also dominated reactions to Theo van Gogh and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. All three of these individuals refused to adjust to the Purple consensus on keeping up appearances, and two of them, Fortuyn and Van Gogh, showed no respect for the powers that be in the world of the media. Van Gogh ceaselessly and ruthlessly attacked and offended every dignitary he thought was “collaborating” for the sake of peace, self-interest, or whatever other reason that in his view was hypocritical and in conflict with liberal individualist society.

## VII: IRONY DISLIKES PASSION

The left-wing comedian Freek de Jonge, who had publicly ridiculed Fortuyn even hours after Fortuyn was murdered, later recognized that he himself and his avant-garde friends had in fact been complicit in what had happened in Dutch society while he wasn't looking:

Left intellectuals took part in creating the segregation in the country. With the unbelievable disdain of the left we tortured people who had become rich for a reason we didn't approve of. . . . The landslide at the elections was also an answer to the arrogance and the hubris of the left-

wing establishment. Irony came first; life itself came second. Serious conversations were stifled at the start. Passion was treated as suspicious. Great engagement was ridiculed. All of that, we have undermined.<sup>17</sup>

So, while the governing elites after 2002 kept complaining that “the voters,” who in large numbers had voted for Fortuyn and his party, and “the public” in general were “spoiled brats,” “unstable,” and not to be taken seriously, a case could be made for the idea that in fact it might have been the other way around. Many people were just longing for new boundaries and were demanding clear answers from the government to the questions and problems that they had to deal with every day. These problems involved violence and crime, the health care system, the future of their country as a multicultural society, and the future of their country as part of an expanding European community.

I said earlier that the media are seldom at the heart of the matter. More than anything, it is a lack of boundaries and directions and an excess of egocentrism that pose the threat to the coherence of the lives of individuals and that of societies as well. However, the media—newspapers and television—played a very important role in the emergence of the “killing fields” of the Netherlands, in every mimetic sense one can imagine.

The key points here are the hypocrisy that was manifested by the masters of the Citadel of Culture; the diminishing status of the old “queen of the earth,” the quality press; and the envy and frustration that all this brought about. In general, envy seems to be at the center of things when we try to understand the whole period. The bourgeois bohemians could just about handle a radical bohemian like the Dutch rock star and painter Herman Brood. He was a harmless junkie. The neurotic, alcoholic Dutch folk singer André Hazes, who was predominantly popular with “the masses,” could be ridiculed without consequence. He was harmless, too. But as soon as political individuals, like Fortuyn and Hirsi Ali, with real passions and beliefs, who said they wanted to warn people of future dangers, even change society as a whole, came onstage, the progressive portion of the bourgeois bohemians started to get very nervous indeed. Not only were the politicians in The Hague unmasked as emperors without clothes, but many a serious journalist met the same fate. Some of them returned as quickly as possible to the old ideological stance they had earlier abandoned so happily, and started fighting all three members of the unholy trinity, because they were responsible for ruining the cosiness and predictability of the talk show tables, where all the discussions had formerly ended like the old joke of Yogi Berra, who, when asked for a direction, replied: “If you come to the T-crossing, just take it.”

## VIII: THE REVOLT

So, while the government kept persevering with the message “You’ve never had it so good,” while the mimetic rivalry within the media worlds was raging, and while the anxieties of the 1960s elites about the native masses emancipating themselves according to their preferences were growing, it would ultimately be the neglected constitution that ignited the Fortuyn revolt.

On 4 May 2001, a TV program focused on the attitude of Dutch Muslims toward homosexuality. Youths of Moroccan origin openly despised homosexuals. An imam of a Rotterdam mosque, Khalil el Moumni, declared homosexuality to be a contagious disease, which had to be stopped because it would ultimately destroy the country. He also referred to Europeans as “lower than dogs or pigs.”<sup>18</sup>

After this, on the Web site of the leading Dutch gay community-oriented magazine, 91 percent of respondents said they agreed with the proposition that “New Dutchmen have to tolerate *our* tolerance or they don’t belong here.”<sup>19</sup> Here the traditional symbol of the country, Dutch tolerance, was in severe conflict with the new intolerant minority.

The Rotterdam imam, quoted above, defended his views by citing the constitutional freedom of speech *and* the constitutional freedom of religion. In April 2002, a court declared he was not guilty of discrimination because he had merely expressed his religious beliefs. All grievances over discrimination were declared to be unfounded.<sup>20</sup>

As an inhabitant of the Rotterdam ghettos, former professor and publicist Pim Fortuyn had, because he was a flamboyant homosexual, been called a dirty pig many times. He had debated with Muslim leaders like el Moumni, and had published one of these discussions in a book. In another book, in 1997, he warned, in the words of the title, *Against Islamization of our Culture*. He became a fierce defender of Western values, although at heart his success was based in a strange mixture of reaction and modernism. He harked back to the solidarity, safety, and Christianity of the 1950s, while simultaneously pushing forward toward a hedonistic, individualist, Internet world of private enterprise and a small-scale public sector, without state bureaucracy. Work had to be taken away from the managers and given back to the real professionals like the teachers, doctors, and policemen. Fortuyn’s message was about going back and forward at the same time, while using the pragmatic present as a starting point.

Besides his slogans with regard to the multicultural society—full is full, present immigrants have to integrate first—his clash with *Leefbaar Nederland* was caused by Fortuyn’s remark that, if he had to choose between all the articles

in the constitution, he would prefer the one that states the freedom of speech over the one that states the prohibition of discrimination. His reasoning was as follows: “If Muslims may refer to our society as decadent, I may refer to Islam as a backward culture”.<sup>21</sup>

Van Gogh and Hirsi Ali would repeat the same opinion. And they also claimed the right to offend, as a fundamental part of the freedom of speech, and to criticize religion, as the heart of the Enlightenment.<sup>22</sup> This would become fatal for Van Gogh. He was murdered in the street by a Muslim fundamentalist after producing Hirsi Ali’s 11-minute *J’Accuse*-like movie *Submission* in 2004, a movie that inveighed against the suppression of women in Islam.<sup>23</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The fusion of liberalism and socialism in the Purple Coalitions (1994–2002) created a worldview that was based on individualism and material success. Culturally and intellectually, the Netherlands were dominated by Amsterdam, that is, by the bourgeois bohemians who combined the best of two worlds, the radical 1960s and the materialistic 1980s.

Many Dutch people liked to experience the feeling of being cosmopolitan, tolerant, adventurous, and harmonious at the same time. Compared to the people of many other countries, maybe they are. However, in at least two aspects, historical traumas and limited size, the Dutch are blind to some realities in life, that is, with regard to religion and violence. They are not able to cope with those phenomena easily, except by pretending they are not there, or, if that is no longer possible, by negotiating or, worse, by developing an attitude that resembles the Stockholm syndrome: adjusting to a situation because they think themselves too powerless to fight it, and consequently empathizing with or making excuses for the aggressor.

Because of the fact that Holland is a small country with a great past, nostalgic dreams of being bohemian are never out of fashion. During the final weeks of each year, a Dutch radio station broadcasts the “Top 2000,” the favorite pop songs of all times, democratically chosen by the listeners. Almost every year, the number one song has been the same: “Bohemian Rhapsody,” written by Freddy Mercury and originally recorded by the band Queen for the 1975 album *A Night at the Opera*.

Perhaps this song holds the secret to the dream of the sober, level-headed, dike-building Dutch: to live as bohemians. On the other hand, what the late romantic writer Gerard Reve once said—“The Dutch want to live adventurously,

but with a good pension in their back pockets”—might hold true as well. This is why ordinary people in an egalitarian society, filled with boredom and unfulfilled aspirations, create real and fictional heroes. Heroes give people a sense of meaning, direction, and satisfaction because they live the life the people themselves know they would never dare lead. In a world without gods, there is a great need for idols.

The 1960s elites, however, thought they were the sole political and intellectual idols needed to run a country and to play a part in the media democracy. Acting in a mimetic rivalry of self-righteousness, “toothpaste authenticity,” and wittiness, they later felt they were booed off their stage by the masses knocking at their door. This unexpected display of disapproval caused them to become nervous and agitated, and made them start fighting with each other while using the unholy trinity as scapegoats for rocking the boat, by exorcizing them completely.

This is what happened at the bloody and prolonged night at the opera that the Netherlands lived through after 2001. However, the issues that were raised were substantial: they were the issues of the real world, not those of the TV studios.

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The negative consequences of the actions of the unholy trinity were there for all to see. Many members of ethnic and religious minorities felt hurt, insulted, and stereotyped. The consequences for society as a whole of the acts of murder and threats of terrorism are clear as well. In the Netherlands, people have to deal with more state security, increasing social disciplinary conformism, and self-censorship.

The killing of Fortuyn made some of the ousted elite writers, like column writer Jan Blokker, say: “I couldn’t care less.”<sup>24</sup> Ian Buruma, in his book *Murder in Amsterdam*, does the same thing only more elegantly, as he tries to find ways to forgive all three members of the unholy trinity for their “extremism.” In other words, he is blaming the victims and excusing the killers.<sup>25</sup>

Maybe a majority of the Dutch people thought along the same lines. If so, it was similar to the reaction of the West after the cartoon crisis in 2006. The British weekly the *Economist* criticized the lukewarm response to this crisis by several Western governments, misquoting Voltaire: “I disagree with what you say, and even if you are threatened with death, I will not defend very strongly your right to say it.”<sup>26</sup>

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However, there is a very positive result of the crisis as well (while we have to recognize that the word revolt is much more telling than crisis). A key sentence of *L'Homme Révolté*, by Albert Camus, published in 1951, reads as follows: "The consciousness comes to the surface together with the revolt." A revolt is much more substantial than just resentment, which is poisonous and causes impotence and isolation. The rebel "aspires that the others recognize what he owns—and that he in almost all circumstances is seen as more important than all things he could be envious about. . . . He fights for the integrity of a part of his human existence."<sup>27</sup>

A revolt may seem negative, because it does not create anything, but according to Camus, revolt is an extremely positive phenomenon, "because it reveals that which is to be defended in human beings at all times."<sup>28</sup>

Of course, Camus linked revolt with the acclaimed postwar freedom. He saw the downside of it too. "In our society the theory of political freedom intensifies the understanding of people, and through that the state of dissatisfaction." That's why Camus, in "the desacralized history" of modern times, saw revolt as the only option. "In our daily experience the revolt has the same function as the cogito in the field of thinking: it is the first self-explanatory thing. But this obviousness snatches the individual away from his loneliness. . . . I am angry, that's why we are."<sup>29</sup>

This consciousness, or awakening of "the masses," is a societal state that didn't disappear with the death of Fortuyn or with the removal of his disorganized party from Parliament. The sighs of relief that were heard in many retrospective commentaries toward the end of 2002—"a serious case of carnival," "back to normalcy," "let us be civil again"—displayed a serious misunderstanding of the structural shifting of the balance of power that had taken place for both the governing political and cultural elites and the ordinary citizens.

"The people" now knew what power they really possessed, and they did not intend to give it up easily. Their consumer power and Internet mobilizing capacity have turned them into an unpredictable but powerful force. Voting preferences have become more difficult than ever to predict.

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One might defend the claim that since 2002, and again since 2004 and 2006, the emancipation of "the lower classes" and the ethnic minorities in particular has received a great boost, a boost that is unprecedented since the arrival of the first generation of foreign workers in the 1960s.

Fortuyn emancipated the lower classes and gave voices to other groups of neglected citizens who longed to raise their voices. Hirsi Ali succeeded in lifting

the debate on the multicultural society above the predictable lines of class and ethnic groups. Because of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, the debate is conducted as it should be, with the use of arguments that go beyond boundaries of gender, ethnicity, or class.

Perhaps, when we think of the present state of caution and downright self-censorship the Netherlands finds itself in, the only person who really lost his case was Theo van Gogh. But even that's not totally true. Some of the youngsters of Moroccan and Turkish origin that he worked with in his films and TV dramas owe their present careers to the fact that he took them seriously.

If consciousness is at the heart of the revolt, it has been at the heart of the revolt of the ethnic minorities since 2002 as well. And this is exactly what the unholy trinity wanted them to do: to enlighten this society, integrate into it, and behave like participants in it, not as permanent guest workers or asylum seekers, subsidized but neglected. Now they are, at last, seen as real persons, at least by the media. And communication and visibility is where true acceptance starts.

The unholy trinity has been driven out of the Netherlands. The country has partly returned to its former position of "Don't give offense." But at the same time, it's the legacy of the unholy trinity that our multicultural society is more aware of its surroundings and more grown up than ever before.

## NOTES

This article is based on a keynote speech given at the Conference on Violence and Religion, Amsterdam/Soesterberg, the Netherlands, 5 July 2007.

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