

The Nerve to Break Taboos: New Realism in the Dutch Discourse on Multiculturalism

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This article traces the emergence of one particular genre of discourse, the genre of "new realism", in the Dutch public debates on multicultural society from the early 1990s till Spring 2002. The focus upon different "genres" implies an interest in the performative power of discourse, i.e. the way in which any discourse, in or by its descriptions of reality, (co)produces that reality. Four distinctive characteristics of "new realism" are detected in three subsequent public debates, culminating in the genre of "hyper-realism", of which the immensely successful and recently murdered politician Pim Fortuyn proved to be the consummate champion.

Cet article explique le développement d'un genre particulier de discours, le "nouveau réalisme", au sein du débat public sur la société multiculturelle aux Pays Bas. La période étudiée s'étale du début des années 1990 jusqu'au printemps 2002. L'importance attribuée aux différents "genres" reflète un intérêt pour le pouvoir performatif du discours, notamment la façon dont le discours (co)produit la réalité qu'il décrit. On décèle quatre traits distinctifs du "nouveau réalisme" dans trois débats publics qui débouchent sur le "hyper-réalisme", genre dont Pim Fortuyn, homme politique ayant connu un grand succès et victime récente d'un meurtre, s'était fait le champion attitré.

Key words/Mots-clés: Public debate/débat public; multiculturalism/multiculturalisme; the Netherlands/Pays-Bas; genres; new realism/nouveau réalisme; discourse/discours.

Introduction

Nowhere in Europe, it seemed, did the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001 trigger such an eruption of public distrust against Islam as in the Netherlands. Optimistic views about the Dutch as a tolerant people, or about the effectiveness of Dutch strategies of pacification, were contradicted by the surprisingly high incidence of violent attacks on mosques and an increase of aggressive behaviour against individual Muslims. The situation was further aggravated when in February 2002 the flamboyant columnist Pim Fortuyn started his own election campaign after having been dismissed as the leader of the newly founded political party *Leefbaar Nederland* (Liveable Netherlands). Within months, opinion polls showed that Fortuyn, who made skilful use of the media to express his anti-Islamic and anti-immigration views, gathered an unexpectedly large following. On May 6 pollsters predicted that his *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF) could well become the largest party in the country. On that same day, Fortuyn was shot dead by a radical environmentalist. In the weeks following his death many mourners indicated how "Pim" had "said what we were not allowed to say": a formula that referred to (White autochthonous) people's fear of foreigners "invading" the country and their anger at the ruling elite for not taking their concerns seriously. On election day, May 15, the Social-Democratic, Conservative, Liberal, and Social-Liberal parties of the governing "purple" coalition suffered great losses, whereas the Christian-Democrats became the largest and the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* the second largest political party in the country.

Still, this landslide toward a more conservative right-wing government did not appear out of the blue. In this article, I argue how Fortuyn's popularity can be understood in terms of the growing appeal of a particular genre of discourse that has become increasingly dominant in Dutch public debates on multicultural society, that is, the genre of *new realism*. Since its first manifestations, representatives of this genre have met with allegations that they were playing into the hands of the extreme right. Such moral indignation notwithstanding, elements of the genre have been gradually incorporated into everyday political and public discourse. Fortuyn, I argue, did not so much break with previous approaches to multicultural society as radicalize a genre of discourse that at the time of his arrival on the political scene, had already gained considerable respectability.

The Performative Power of Language

The way the term *discourse* has come to be used, both by Foucault and by discourse analysts who have adopted his views is actually quite vague. It may refer to one particular unit of text, to a corpus of specific texts, or to everything that is said and written during a particular period and in a particular place. For Foucault, dominant discourse is constitutive of the everyday lives and experiences of modern individuals. We become autonomous subjects as a result of our submission to dominant modes of discipline and normalization. Consequently, we are not merely in the sovereign position of making use of our language; our language also makes use of us. Every sentence we utter strikes layers of meaning that may have a serious effect on the social-symbolic world in which we live. According to this constructivist view, language is a form of action with which we construct ourselves and our world (Shotter, 1993).

Butler (1997) has pointed out some striking similarities between such critical (post)structuralist views of language and *speech act theory* as originally elaborated by the British philosopher J.L. Austin. According to Butler, speech acts such as addressing or naming are paradigmatic for how human individuals are "subjected" through discourse. Like promising, naming, and addressing can be seen as acts with so-called illocutionary force: *in* the saying a doing is implied. Thus *in* expressing a promise, I have made it, and *in* addressing someone, I have assigned him or her a place in my material-symbolic order. Butler cautions, however, that there is always a difference between *acting* and *acting upon*. The assessment of the actual performative effects of a particular utterance or discourse cannot be made independently of the context in which it takes place. Any speech act can turn out to be infelicitous: because it was not uttered in the appropriate context or because listeners somehow resisted its appeal. By emphasizing this potential gap between saying and doing, between discursive practice and discursive effect, Butler wards off the frequently voiced accusations against Foucauldian constructivism that it leaves no room for resistance to the ubiquitous power of discourse.

Nevertheless, this constructivist view about the performative power of language concedes that especially our public speech is neither epistemologically nor politically innocent. In the following analysis, I therefore focus not only on the various standpoints taken, but also on the different genres of discourse, i.e. the various rhetorical strategies that are used to convince readers of the validity of these standpoints. In doing so I trace the emergence of one particular genre of discourse, the genre of new

realism, as it gradually gained the upper hand over other genres of discourse. The reason that I characterize new realism as a genre is because I focus on its performative effects, that is, not so much on how it describes reality as on how it (co)produces reality. I look at what came to be known as the national minorities debate (1991), the multicultural drama debate (2000), and the El-Moumni case (2001) in order to show how in these debates a particular genre of discourse emerged, of which in 2002 Pim Fortuyn proved to be the consummate champion. In order to better understand what was at stake in each of these debates, I will start by supplying some relevant background information about recent Dutch political history and culture.

Dutch Political Culture and Governmental Policy

After World War II, the first migration flow consisted of inhabitants of the former Netherlands East Indies, who arrived after the independence of Indonesia in 1949. During the 1950s and 1960s, they were joined by guest workers from Spain, Greece, Portugal, Yugoslavia, Morocco, and Turkey. Later the prospect of Surinamese independence (1975) and the expiry of an immigration treaty between the two countries (1980) triggered a large-scale process of migration from Surinam. During this period (1975-1980), the yearly number of newcomers reached a first culmination point, also as a result of family reunifications of Turkish and Moroccan workers. The marriages of young Turkish and Moroccan men and women to a partner from their country of origin further intensified this process. Finally, since the mid-1980s the number of refugees and asylum seekers from non-Western countries has increased dramatically. Thus by 2002, about 20% of the Dutch population were of non-native Dutch descent (the usual term *allochthones* has become increasingly contested), 10% of whom belong to the so-called ethnic minority groups, that is, migrants and asylum seekers of non-Western descent (CBS, 2002).

During the 1970s, Dutch government policy regarding ethnic minority groups was aimed at "integration with maintenance of identity." Initially, this approach was motivated by the assumption that most guest workers would eventually return to their country of origin. However, as this assumption proved increasingly unrealistic, it was seen to fit the well-tryed Dutch way of accommodating differences, that is, through the structures of institutionalized "pillarization." The right to organize oneself publicly in order to maintain one's religion was laid down in the 1917 Dutch constitution. Since then, Dutch consociational democracy has been firmly established

on the four religious-ideological pillars of Calvinism, Catholicism, Socialism and Liberalism. Since the 1990s migrant communities have started to make active use of the constitutional rights of consociational society, for example, by founding Hindu and Muslim schools. Since 1985, moreover, migrants legally resident in the Netherlands for five years or more have acquired the active and passive right to vote in municipal elections.

By the end of the 1980s, however, the government had discarded the perspective of collective rights and care in order to put more emphasis on individual responsibilities and obligations. This was inspired by a change in political outlook, but also compelled by a long-term economic recession. Cutbacks in social welfare could no longer be avoided. Initiated by governments containing Christian Democrats and Conservative Liberals, this reorientation has been further extended by the new coalition between Social Democrats, Conservative Liberals and Social Liberals since 1994. The two consecutive purple cabinets also gave new impetus to the process of liberalization with the legalization of euthanasia, homosexual marriage and prostitution. On the other hand, the welfare state was further dismantled by the decentralization of government, the privatization of state-owned companies, and stricter policies with regard to asylum seekers and illegal immigrants.

The National Minorities Debate: The Breakthrough of New Realism

At the beginning of the 1990s, political parties had gradually developed consensus about the need to give priority to socioeconomic integration of immigrants over the maintenance of cultural and religious identity (Fermín, 1997). Still, Frits Bolkestein (1991a), then leader of the Conservative Liberals, caused quite a stir when he proclaimed that "the integration of minorities should be handled with guts" thus launching what came to be known as the national minorities debate. Bolkestein's intervention involved a determined defence of the achievements of European civilization such as the universal values of secularization, freedom of speech, and the principle of nondiscrimination, against "the world of Islam" in which these values did not flourish. It should be made crystal-clear to Muslims living in the Netherlands that any kind of bargaining about the principles of Western liberalism was out of the question.

With his intervention Bolkestein challenged the dominant Dutch discourse, which defined ethnic minorities as groups who occupied a marginal socioeconomic position and were in need of support. Social scientists were hired in large numbers by government bodies to investigate the problematics of different ethnic (sub)groups. In this genre of discourse, that of the

(scientific) *report*, one attempted to sketch a truthful image of the social position, lifestyle, and views of the object of research. *Truthful*, however, did not imply neutral. Especially the authors of qualitative, small-scale studies wrote basically sympathetic accounts that not only made readers know "from the outside," but also made them understand "from the inside" which particular obstacles and problems people had to deal with. Most studies concluded with a list of recommendations about how to further the emancipation of that particular group in Dutch society (Prins, 1997, 2003).

Bolkestein's argument was not so much focused on the goal of emancipation itself as on how it could be reached. In its eagerness to help, the attitude of the government had become too lenient and permissive. Bolkestein's supporters spoke about "hugging to death," "treading on eggs," or a "culture of pitifulness." In their view, this urge to help ethnic minority groups emancipate themselves had made them more rather than less dependent on the welfare state, allowing them to withdraw into their own group rather than try to integrate into the larger society.

Such statements are typical for a newly emerging genre of public discourse, that of *new realism*. This genre has four distinct features. First, the author presents himself or herself as someone who dares face the facts, who speaks frankly about "truths" that the dominant discourse has supposedly covered up. Thus Bolkestein (1991a) spoke firmly about the "guts" and "creativity" needed to solve the problem of integration and how this would leave no room for "compromise," "taboos," or "disengagement". His supporters accordingly praised him for his show of "civic courage," for the "mature," "civilized," and "plain" way he had placed this thorny issue on the political agenda. Second, a new realist sets himself up as the spokesperson of the ordinary people, that is, the autochthonous population. Thus Bolkestein observed that "below the surface a widespread informal national debate, which was not held in public, was already going on" and that "the issue of minorities is a problem incessantly discussed in the pub and in the church" (Bolkestein et al., 1992). Why listen to the *vox populi*? On the one hand, Bolkestein implied that ordinary people deserved to be represented because they were realists *par excellence*: they knew from day-to-day experience what was really going on, especially in the poor neighbourhoods of big cities and were not blinded by politically correct ideas: "Voters find that politicians do not take sufficient notice of their problems" (Bolkestein, 1991b). On the other hand, one should take the complaints of the ordinary people seriously in order to keep their emotions under control and channel them in the right direction: "[S]omeone who ignores the anxiety, nourishes the resentment he intends to combat" (Bolkestein, 1992).

A third characteristic of new realism is the suggestion that realism is a characteristic feature of national Dutch identity: being Dutch equals being frank, straightforward, and realistic. This is particularly manifest in the publications of another new realist, the prominent journalist Vuijsje (1986). In *Murdered Innocence. Ethnic Difference as a Dutch Taboo* (1986), he elaborated the view that, after World War II, the Dutch had collectively developed a guilty conscience about the fate of the Dutch Jews, the majority of whom did not survive the holocaust. Ever since, the Dutch had become overcautious: wary of being accused of racism whenever they treated people differently because of their ethnicity. Vuijsje testified to his desire to return to an authentic Dutchness, to the pre-war days when, as he supposed, "our country distinguished itself for its preeminently matter-of-fact like treatment of ethnic difference" (p. 7).

A fourth and final feature of new realism is its resistance to the left. New realists find it is high time to break the power of the progressive elite that dominates the public realm with its politically correct sensibilities regarding fascism, racism and intolerance. This supposedly left-wing censorship of public discourse is also criticized because it is accompanied by a highly relativistic approach to the value of different cultures.

Bolkestein was the first to truly mobilize Dutch public opinion on the issue of ethnic minorities. Still, even his sharpest opponent agreed that liberal principles should not to be relinquished and that cultural relativism was indeed an untenable position. Few also disagreed with his proposals for the direction of minorities policy (as indicated above, the Dutch minorities policy had already switched its focus to integration). However, many took issue with the style and manner in which Bolkestein had voiced his opinion, playing on a simplified hierarchical opposition between *us*, the representatives of Western civilization, and *them*, those belonging to the world of Islam, which overlooked the injustices and evil perpetrated in the name of the former while ignoring the actual diversity within the latter. For some this tended to turn modern Dutch citizens into the subjects of discourse, talking among themselves about how to handle them, while reducing Muslims to the status of objects of discourse. Others criticized the arousal of public sentiment that might result from this eagerness to break taboos and talk straight (Rabbae, 1991; Bagci, 1991). In these responses the claim by new realists to occupy an objective and value-free standpoint vis-à-vis reality was dismissed; instead they were called to account for the potentially detrimental effects their standpoint would have on that same reality. In doing so, the opponents of new realism implicitly subscribed to a constructivist view of language.

A Multicultural Drama: New Realism With a Social Face

Since the national minorities debate, the position of allochthones remained a recurrent issue in political and public debates, focusing, for example, on the emergence of so-called "black" schools (i.e., schools with more than 50% of students from ethnic minorities) and Muslim schools, the ongoing "flood" of immigrants and refugees, and the questionable role of Islam.

In response to growing concerns about the lack of integration of allochthones, in 1998 a new ministry was established, the Ministry for Metropolitan Affairs and Integration (*Grote Steden- en Integratiebeleid*). In his first White Paper, Minister Roger van Boxtel (1998) sketched the outlines of a policy finely balanced between taking care of people and urging them to take their own initiative. At the same time he declared the Netherlands to be an immigration country and a multicultural society. Many new initiatives were taken to improve the situation of ethnic minorities, one of which was a compulsory settlement program for newcomers from outside the European Union.

In spite of such efforts, in January 2000 publicist Scheffer castigated the Dutch for closing their eyes to the multicultural drama that was developing right before their eyes. Whereas the rates of unemployment, criminality and school drop-out amongst ethnic minorities were extremely high, the Dutch mistakenly held on to their good old strategies of peaceful coexistence through deliberation and compromise. In doing so they ignored the fundamental differences between the new situation and the earlier days of pillarized society. Presently, Scheffer argued, there existed fewer sources of solidarity, while Islam, with its refusal to accept the separation between church and state, could not be compared to modernized Christianity; finally, allochthone youngsters were accumulating feelings of frustration and resentment. Teaching Dutch language, culture, and history should be taken much more seriously. Only then would allochthone residents acquire a clear view of the basic values of Dutch society.

Scheffer's (2000) essay became the intellectual talk of the town. Like Bolkestein's intervention it was welcomed because of the courageous way it challenged the view of the dominant elite, which, these critics suggested, had stubbornly refused to face the serious problems of a multicultural society. Scheffer accused politicians of "looking the other way," causing "a whole nation to lose sight of reality." In this fashion the rhetoric of Scheffer's article perfectly complied with the genre of new realism. Here again was someone who dared to break taboos. Like a decade earlier, several commentators were pleased that it was finally possible to have a "frank" and "candid" conversation without "politically correct reflexes"

taking the upper hand (Soetenhorst, 2000). Scheffer too claimed that what happened to ordinary people, the stories told "below the surface," remained unseen and unheard, although his reference was not to the autochthonous population, but to the feelings of anger and frustration among allochthone youngsters. Yet Scheffer showed a similar ambivalence as to why these feelings should be taken seriously: on the one hand, these youngsters were frustrated for a legitimate reason, that is, for remaining stuck at the bottom of the social ladder; on the other, government should do more to prevent these frustrations from turning into social upheaval. Like Vuijsje (1985), Scheffer also recommended the affirmation of Dutch identity as an important remedy for the problems of multicultural society, although his ideal Dutchman was not the romanticized "ordinary" man or woman in the street, but the decent and politically knowledgeable citizen who was finely aware of the good and bad sides of Dutch identity.

Nevertheless, Scheffer shared with his predecessors an impatience with the cultural relativism of the progressive elite, which in his view had developed into an attitude of moral indifference. Resisting the growing leniency and laxity in the execution of laws and regulations, the typically Dutch culture of toleration (*gedogen*), Scheffer emphasized that it was high time to draw clear lines on what people were and were not allowed to do. What irritated him was not so much the toleration of anti-Western values and practices (although this surely should be tackled too), but the incomprehensible indifference of the left to the ever-widening gap between a (mostly autochthonous) majority of the well off and a (mostly allochthone) minority that remained stuck in a situation of deprivation. Scheffer's version of new realism, in other words, was more politically correct than that of his predecessors: a new realism with a social face.

In the responses to Scheffer's (2000) essay, however, this socially engaged part of the message went almost wholly unnoticed. Most commentators welcomed Scheffer's intervention for the "tougher" demands he made as a justified criticism of multiculturalism and a plea for assimilation (Schnabel, 2000; Bodegraven, 2000; Van den Brink, 2000). Others saw it as a confirmation that immigrants had been "hugged to death." While ignoring that Scheffer had actually called for the opposite, they claimed that well-intended measures had merely produced dependent and passive clients of an overcaring welfare system (Pinto, 2000; Van Veen, 2000). Finally, many appreciated Scheffer's essay as an opportunity to ring the alarm bells once again on what they considered to be the true drama: the influx of too many immigrants (Van Loenen 2000; Vink 2001; Van der List, 2000).

Next to these supporters, many also challenged Scheffer's account. While the discourse of new realism whipped up the sense of drama, some of its critics attempted to calm these feelings: a strategy that can be seen as typical for the genre of the *report*. Thus readers were assured that things were not as bad as they looked, and that, however slowly, progress was being made: it only required patience (Vermeulen & Penninx, 2000; Penninx, 2000; Van Boxtel, 2000).

Other critics sympathized with Scheffer's lack of patience. He had been right to speak about a drama, but he was mistaken about what caused it. For ethnic minorities were not so much held back by their lack of knowledge of Dutch ways of life as by their socioeconomic position. Problems were class- rather than culture-related. The social issue to which Scheffer had referred in the past tense had not really disappeared: it had merely acquired a colour (Hilhorst, 2000; Halsema, 2000; Aboutaleb, 2000). These texts resonated a critical genre of discourse that in the 1990s had already lost much of its appeal, that is, the genre of *denunciation*. In its heyday this genre of discourse had revealed the shameless exploitation and discrimination against foreign guest workers by capitalist industries, hoping to mobilize (autochthonous) readers to show solidarity and engage in political action (Prins, 1997, 2003).

Other critics claimed that the real causes of socioeconomic inequality could be found in mechanisms of racism and discrimination. Here we recognize some of the characteristic features of a third critical genre, that of *empowerment*. In this genre ethnic minorities figure as the victims of racial marginalization. Although texts in this genre are often interlaced with denunciatory remarks about Whites, they ultimately wish to inspire and empower members of ethnic minority groups. They do so by offering them stories of successful migrants and Blacks who, due to their political engagement and personal strength, actively contributed to the transformation of Dutch society from a mono- into a truly multicultural society. Whereas within the genre of denunciation, (political) solidarity is the most prominent value, authors in the genre of empowerment aim for (cultural) diversity (Prins, 1997, 2003). Still, in the Scheffer debate the accusatory tone was prominent. It was, for example, suggested that the White establishment acted out of fear of losing its privileged position (Nimako & Willemsen, 2000) or that Scheffer's emphasis on cultural differences could be perceived as a form of everyday racism (El Madkouri, 2000).

Finally, there were voices that countered Scheffer's anticipation of an imminent drama with a staunch belief in the ideal of multicultural society. The opportunity to maintain one's own culture, it was held, would strengthen and empower people rather than hold them back. The argument was shored up by pointing to apparent analogies with the Dutch tradition of

pillarization and the strategies of new social movements. Some stated that the idea of pillarization should be cherished precisely because it offered new minority groups the best opportunity for emancipation, as it previously had for the Catholics and the Dutch-Reformed. Others (rhetorically) wondered why especially liberals and social democrats were so wary of collective identity formation. As it was phrased in the language of pillarization, did the women's or the gay movement not also go through a necessary stage of "strengthening within one's own circle" (Duyvendak, 2001). Several allochthone spokespersons similarly happily adopted the language of pillarization. The director of the Dutch branch of the Islamic Turkish movement Milli Görüs, for example, praised the Netherlands for being "a more Islamic country than my country of birth, Turkey" (Karacaer, 2000). Thus leftist adherents to the strategy of collective empowerment gradually associated with the typically confessional-Dutch tradition of pillarization (Fermin, 1997).

The El Moumni Case: The Proliferation of New Realism

Scheffer's wish for openness and, if needed, confrontation was complied with quickly and in an unforeseen way. On May 4, 2001, the television news program *NOVA* dedicated an item to the attitude of Dutch Muslims toward homosexuality. Young Moroccan men were shown bragging about their manhood and venting their disdain for homosexuals. One of the more prominent Islamic spokespersons interviewed was Khalil el Moumni, Imam of the An-Nasr mosque in Rotterdam. His statements were unequivocal: homosexuality was a contagious disease; if it spread among Dutch youth, it would mean the end of the Netherlands, for "if men marry men and women marry women, who will take care of procreation?"

Journalists were quick to find other imams willing to side with El Moumni (Lange, 2001a). Public indignation followed instantly, and with it the next episode in the Dutch debate, which came to be known as the El-Moumni case. The significant difference from earlier debates was that whereas previously the "clash of cultures" was talked about as happening "below the surface," the El Moumni case brought that clash out into the open, into the public realm itself. On this verbal battlefield the genres of denunciation and empowerment did not fare very well. There were still those who regretted the stigmatizing effects of this bad publicity for Islam (Nahas, in Benbrahim, 2001). But these views were pushed to the margins by the much stronger voices of new realism. At the same time different versions of the genre proliferated.

Prime Minister Kok declared that El-Moumni's statements were highly offensive and intolerable. Minister Van Boxtel similarly made it clear that El Moumni had crossed the line. Both therefore adopted the tough talk demanded by the new realists. But the familiar Dutch strategy of deliberation and pacification was not discarded. Shortly after the uproar started, Van Boxtel, emphasizing the need for dialogue, organized a meeting with a delegation of Dutch Muslims including El-Moumni himself. Thus the government adopted Scheffer's style of new realism with a social face, as did Christian Democrat, Progressive Liberal, and GreenLeft representatives in Parliament, who rejected the imam's words while emphasizing that imams should be required to take a settlement course in order to learn Dutch values and the Dutch language. No wonder Scheffer (2001) expressed his contentment: a conflict like this should be fought out in the public realm, not avoided by bringing it to court.

Many, however, opted for a tougher approach. Several individuals and organizations filed official complaints against the imam, asking for El Moumni to be convicted on the grounds of discrimination. Some even wanted him deported. On a web site opened by the Gay Newspaper (Gaykrant), 91% agreed that "New Dutchmen should tolerate our tolerance, otherwise they don't belong here" (Trouw, 2001a). In Parliament, Conservative Liberals and Social Democrats took a similar stand. Some opinion makers even announced that Islam was the new enemy, explaining that "war" was inevitable (Sinnema, 2001a) and that Dutchmen and Muslims were one day likely to "bash each other's head in" (Lazrak, in Sinnema, 2001b). For Vuijsje, the El-Moumni case signified a "milestone in frankness": unlike 10 years ago, when political correctness still prevailed, the Dutch "are no longer afraid to say what they think, and people are once again prepared to act" (Wagendorp, 2001).

Finally, the El Moumni case offered the opportunity for a new and more radical version of new realism to emerge. The remarkable thing about this was that it was practised by *both* parties in the conflict alike. On the one hand, the prerogative of frankness was used to insult and provoke El Moumni. Van Gogh (2001), well-known *enfant terrible* of the Dutch media, talked carelessly of Muslims as "goatfuckers" and imams as "pygmies," whereas French-Dutch columnist Ephimenco (2001) showed no qualms typifying Islam as "a disease" that "infects the mind and distorts reality." Both defended their blunt talk by referring to freedom of speech as the highest value. Thus alluding to the famous words of Voltaire against the detested Catholic clergy, Ephimenco assured the imam that he would passionately resist any attempt to prevent him

from freely uttering his cocktail of “backward concepts, prohibitions and taboos.” Theirs was a secular, individualistic defence of new realism.

On the other hand, El Moumni and his adherents defended their right to qualify homosexuality as a disease and about Europeans as standing “lower than dogs or pigs,” as El-Moumni allegedly said in one of his sermons (Botje & Lazrak, 2001). Ironically, though, while defending such anti-Western views they invoked the Western values of freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. Like their secular counterparts they did so in a strikingly blunt manner. Thus one imam argued that: “We live in a free country. What others do, is up to them,” and another: “I don’t need to do anything. Go and mind your own business” (Lange, 2001a; Lange 2001b). El Moumni (2001) himself was similarly outspoken: “I do not need to justify myself to you [Minister Van Boxtel, bp] with regard to the content of my sermons,” and young Muslims assembled some 20,000 signatures to express their anger with the Minister’s “interference with religious matters” (Trouw, 2001b). Thus although their frame of reference was religious pillarization rather than the motto of the enlightened philosopher Voltaire, Dutch fundamentalist Muslims agreed with their utterly heretical enemies that they had every right to say what they wanted to say without being in any way accountable for the effects their words might have on others, or on society as a whole. Both, as Van Gogh (2001) phrased it, “shrugged their shoulders in murderous indifference.” In April 2002, when El Moumni appeared in court, he was vindicated: the judge ruled that the imam had merely expressed his religious beliefs and acquitted him of all charges of discrimination.

Pim Fortuyn and the Turn to Hyperrealism

In the atmosphere of crisis following September 11, Pim Fortuyn suddenly entered the political scene as the elected political leader of *Leefbaar Nederland*. An ex-Marxist sociologist, Fortuyn had left his job at the university to start a consultancy in “political strategic decision-making.” Starting in 1994, in weekly columns of the liberal-conservative magazine *Elsevier*, he expressed his aversion for, among other things, the welfare state, European unification, Islam, the policy of *gedogen* (toleration), the “left church,” and the continual influx of immigrants and asylum seekers (Fortuyn, 2001a).

Fortuyn’s rhetoric showed all the characteristics of the genre of new realism. On one occasion, his face was pictured on the cover of a magazine gagged with his necktie, accompanied by the caption: “Are you allowed to say everything you think? Dutch taboos” (de Jong, 2000). And notwithstanding his aristocratic manners and appearance, Fortuyn prided himself on

knowing what was going on in the poor neighbourhoods and fully understanding the concerns of ordinary people. Like the new realists before him, Fortuyn's attitude toward his constituency remained ambiguous. On the one hand, the ordinary Dutchman was a new realist like himself. If people living on welfare illegally took jobs in the black market, their choice was entirely understandable, for "The poor are not at all the pitiful people the left church wants them to be. Most of them are just like us: emancipated, individualized, independent citizens" (Fortuyn, 2001a, p. 105). On the other hand, the Dutch people were in need of a true leader, someone like himself who could act both as their father and mother: "the father as the one who lays down the law, the mother as the binding element of the herd" (*Het fenomeen*, 2002, p. 40). The third element of new realism, the affirmation of national identity, was shown both in Fortuyn's insistence on the preservation of national sovereignty against the ever expanding influence of the EU and in his warnings about the imminent "Islamization" of Dutch society (see also Fortuyn, 2001b). Finally, his contempt for the progressive elite pervaded almost every aspect of his writings, resulting in his last book in which he "wiped the floor" with the purple governments (Fortuyn, 2002).

But Fortuyn also further radicalized the new realist discourse. In the wake of the debates on El Moumni, he took the same stand as Van Gogh and Ephimenco: freedom of opinion, even for an imam who deemed homosexuals like himself lower than pigs, was more important than legal protection against discrimination. According to the notorious interview that cost him his leadership of *Leefbaar Nederland*, the Netherlands was a "full country," Islam "a backward culture", and it would be better to abolish "that weird article of the constitution: thou shalt not discriminate" (*Het fenomeen*, 2002, pp. 61, 63). He said that people could rely on him because he was "a man who says what he thinks and does what he says." In other words, people were asked to put their trust in Fortuyn more on account of his new realism than on the basis of his actual political program. And so they did, as was evident in the massive outburst of grief and anger following his murder and at his funeral. Without doubt one of the main ingredients of Fortuyn's attractiveness had been his "frank" speech on immigrants. Fortuyn's particular style, an odd mixture of aristocratic appearance and tough talk, was his strongest political weapon. In his performance of new realism, having the courage to speak freely about problems and how they should be solved, was turned into simply expressing yourself, that is, giving vent to your feelings. Fortuyn thus managed to turn new realism into its opposite, into a kind of hyperrealism. Frankness was no longer practised for the sake of truth, but for its own sake. References to reality and the facts had become mere indicators of the strong personality of the speaker, proof that a "real leader" had entered the stage.

Conclusion: Tough Times Ahead

The murder of Fortuyn dealt a huge blow to all those who had defended the ideal of multiculturalism. First, thanks to the immense electoral victory of the Christian Democrats and the LPF, the Netherlands in 2002 was ruled by a conservative-right cabinet (presided by the Christian Democrat Balkenende) that implemented stricter policies on asylum seekers, immigrants, and settlement demands than ever before. Second, at the level of public debate, the left was blamed for Fortuyn's murder. And although his adherents had always scolded the politically correct establishment for their impediment of free speech, they now accused left-wing politicians and the progressive press of having demonized Fortuyn. Combined with death threats and juridical charges, this resulted in an unprecedented atmosphere of (self-)censorship. During the months following May 6, arguments in favour of multiculturalism were considered politically incorrect, and many critics of Fortuyn's views found themselves literally stunned into speechlessness. In the somewhat longer run, however, most of them recovered their voice. Simultaneously, not a single follower of Fortuyn managed to come near to his level of hyperrealism. A series of blunders by and conflicts among LPF politicians caused the party's popularity to drop rapidly and the newly installed cabinet of Christian Democrats, Conservative Liberals and LPF to fall after only 87 days in office. The elections of January 2003, reduced the LPF from 26 to 8 seats in Parliament. Although the Social Democrats celebrated a big victory, in the end the Dutch government was formed by a coalition of Christian Democrats, Conservative Liberals and Social Liberals ('Nalkenende II'), which is continuing on the same line as its predecessor. The Dutch attitude toward non-Western immigrants and asylum seekers seems to have changed dramatically and for good: since May 2002 in the media multiculturalism is self-evidently taken as a hopelessly outmoded and politically disastrous ideology, and firm talk about the need to reanimate "norms and values" drowns out voices that attest to a more hostile and unwelcome atmosphere for members of ethnic minority groups.

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