Between Mohammed and Mammon. Muslims in the Netherlands

Jan Herman Brinks

On November 3, 2004, the Dutch film-maker and publicist Theo van Gogh was shot and stabbed by a Muslim extremist in Amsterdam. The alleged killer, who has dual Dutch-Moroccan citizenship, had prepared his crime thoroughly and carried it out in broad daylight. A letter which was pinned to van Gogh's body contained death threats against the liberal politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Together with her, van Gogh had made a short movie entitled *Submission. Part 1,* in which he attacked anti-female quotations from the Koran. The film was broadcast on Dutch television and caused an outcry. Both van Gogh and Hirsi Ali received death threats, but while Hirsi Ali accepted personal protection van Gogh refused to do so. The Dutch authorities were in any case not pressing him to accept such protection, maybe because, since the murder of right wing populist Pim Fortuyn two years ago, death threats to politicians are nothing unusual. However, it was remarkable that information had leaked out from the Dutch secret service to the perpetrator's environment. Van Gogh refused to be intimidated. Shortly before his death he played down fears of being shot by saying "if it happens, it happens".[1]

Following the murder, several questions demand an answer. Firstly, are there any parallels between the killing of van Gogh and that of Pim Fortuyn, both of them being popular critics of Islam, and secondly, did van Gogh, who used very offensive language in his columns and on TV, cross the line of journalistic decency and freedom of speech? A third question deserving attention is what is the position of Muslims in Dutch society and, finally, what does the assassination of van Gogh and its aftermath say about Dutch society.

Jan Herman Brinks has specialized in modern and contemporary German and Dutch history and has published in a range of journals of international provenance. He is the author of *Children of a New Fatherland. Germany's Post-War Right-Wing Politics* (London, New York: IB Tauris, 2000) and *Paradigms of Political Change: Luther, Frederick II, and Bismarck. The GDR on its Way to German Unity* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001). He also co-authored *Nationalist Myths and the Modern Media. Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization* (London, New York: IB Tauris, 2005) to be published by the end of this year. Dr Brinks has held fellowships at the *American Institute for Contemporary German Studies* of the Johns Hopkins University in 1995-6 and from 1997-8 was a Research Fellow at the *University of Bath* and at *Birkbeck College* in London. From 2002-2004 he was working as a researcher at the *Centre for German-Jewish Studies* at the University of Sussex.

[1] Interview with Theo van Gogh on October 29, 2004. *RVU Educatieve Omroep*, http://www.rvu.nl/rvu.php?i=3&l=0&n=221.

Certainly there are striking similarities between van Gogh's views and those of Fortuyn, who was a friend of his. He called Fortuyn "Divine Baldy" and was about to finish a film about him in which he exposed, among other things, the co-responsibility of Dutch politics for Fortuyn's death. Just like Fortuyn, van Gogh, who liked to call himself an "old reactionary", played a prominent role in discussion about Islam in the Netherlands. But while Fortuyn, a former university teacher who once taught "Marxist sociology", had described Islam as "stupid" and "backward", van Gogh went much further. He tried to stimulate the debate about the Netherlands' multicultural society often with very insulting statements and he was particularly keen to provoke the Muslim population.

According to him, headscarves "were invented by backward medieval goatf… s who want to restrict our freedoms".[2] In May 2004, during a panel discussion about the Netherlands' future in Amsterdam's packed city theatre, he called the chairman of the Arab European League, Abou Jahja, "the prophet's pimp".[3] And he wrote about Amsterdam's city councillor Fatima Elatik, who originates from Morocco and who, according to Mayor Cohen, had accomplished good things behind the scenes within the Moroccan community: "I do not think much of Miss Elatik and what she stands for. In my opinion she is someone who in 1947 went on the street to explain that the nature of her freedom goes with boots and death's-heads. Anyone who thinks that I exaggerate should just talk to those women in Afghanistan who, under the veil, experience the blessings of the Taliban."[4] This list of offensive language against Islam and Dutch Muslims could easily be extended.

Time and again both Fortuyn and van Gogh warned against the danger of "Islamic-fascism" which, according to them, was about to strike at the roots of the system of Western values. Both expressed a deep fear of Islam by which many Dutch feel threatened. Van Gogh even feared that the Netherlands might get caught up in a civil war similar to what went on in Northern Ireland.

However, he did not grasp the fact that Dutch fears might also be the result of economic problems which in the meantime have acquired an ethnic flavor. For years huge parts of society have been affected by austerity measures causing socioeconomic problems for an increasing number of people. Almost all politicians propagate or support an aggressive Neo-Liberalism and quite a few who drop out seem to be looking for scapegoats. Fortuyn knew how to capitalize on this situation and was popular far beyond his party's ranks. His ideas were a wild jumble of "left-wing" and especially "right-wing" slogans which had only one thing in common—they were radical and populist. But contrary to Fortuyn, who was recently chosen as "the greatest Dutchman of all times", van Gogh had no political ambitions. He regarded himself as a satirist and time and again he proclaimed his great love for the United States which, according to him, was the promised land of unlimited freedom of speech.

By giving himself a fool's licence van Gogh went much further in his statements than Fortuyn. This applies not only to his views on Islam. He

[2] "Beledigen was z'n lust en leven". Citaten van Theo van Gogh ("Insulting was his ruling passion". Quotations from Theo van Gogh), *De Telegraaf*, November 3, 2004.
[3] Website Theo van Gogh: http://www.degezonderoker.nl/indexc.html.
[4] Theo van Gogh, *Allah weet het beter*, (Allah knows best), Amsterdam: XTRA Producties, 2003, p. 109.

made anti-Semitic remarks which earned him the epithet "the eternal anti-Semite". In 1984 he provoked the anger of his fellow producer Leon de Winter, whom he called a "Messiah without a cross" and who was criticized for allegedly using Jewish suffering to promote his drama *Bastille*. "It smells of caramel here? Are they burning only diabetic Jews today?"[5] he asked cynically. He was reported to the police by the *Centre for Information and Documentation on Israel* in The Hague for an anti-Semitic smear and was acquitted only in 1993 when the case was settled without further appeal. About Job Cohen, the mayor of Amsterdam, he remarked: "Of all the frauds who try to sell us as enrichment that wonderful multicultural society, Job Cohen is the most sly […] Cohen really is becoming a big name among Allah's butchers, a Jew who runs errands."[6] Prior to this he had called Cohen a "Nazi collaborator by nature."[7] Politician Thom de Graaf, who in his critique of Pim Fortuyn had once invoked Anne Frank, was told on Dutch television: "Mister de Graaf would even f… Anne Frank's corpse if this could get him a seat."[8]

Not surprisingly there was no end to lawsuits, dismissals and conflicts. However, his critique was not restricted to Islam, the multicultural society or some of his Jewish fellow-countrymen. He also insulted homosexuals, women, Christians and Blacks. Just like Fortuyn before him, he railed against the "political correctness" of the Netherlands' cultural and political establishment, and he became a national favorite, not in spite but because of his polemical views. Even on the day of his murder, thousands of Dutch citizens gathered in Amsterdam to denounce "opinion assassination" and to defend the freedom of the press. But while Prime Minister Balkenende called him "a striking champion of free speech" and spoke about "a sad day for free debate in the Netherlands",[9] the mayor of Amsterdam had to proclaim an emergency, the so called "Screenplay Peace", to prevent disturbances between native Dutch and immigrants. All Islamic organizations immediately and vehemently condemned the murder. The Islamic Council of the Netherlands, the umbrella organization of Turkish state mosques, even made it clear that the perpetrator "cannot be called a Muslim or even a human being".[10] The Amsterdam city councillor for integration, social services and education, Moroccan-born, Ahmed Aboutaleb, caused a stir by calling on the worshipers in a Moroccan mosque to respect Dutch values or otherwise to pack their bags. But Aboutaleb, who himself gets personal protection, could not calm people's feelings.

After van Gogh's death, there were attacks on mosques and Islamic schools which required special safety measures, while districts with a high proportion of foreigners had to be under observation around the clock. Online condolence-sites closed within hours because they were targeted by a flood of racist messages directed against the Muslim population.

---

[5] Karin Kuijpers, Theo van Gogh; "Rebel zonder reden", (Interview with Theo van Gogh; "Rebel without a cause"), *Algemeen Dagblad*, November 20, 1993.
[6] *De Telegraaf*, *op. cit*. [2].
[7] http://www.degezonderoker.nl/elatik_nova.html.
[8] Van Gogh, *op. cit*. [4], p. 14.
[9] Site of the Dutch government: <regering.nl>, "Van Gogh was voorvechter van het vrije woord", (Van Gogh was a champion of the free word), http://www.regering.nl/actueel/nieuwsarchief/2004/11 November/02/0-42-1_42-50266.jsp.
[10] "Moordenaar lid terreurorganisatie", (Killer member of terror organisation), *Trouw*, November 3, 2003, p. 1.

Yet almost all the Dutch media and most politicians were solidly behind van Gogh, who quickly developed into an icon of free speech. One of the very few critical comments came from the Minister of Justice, Jan Piet Hein Donner. Shortly after the murder he argued in favor of the reactivation of articles 147 and 147a of the criminal code which attach a penalty to blasphemy. These articles, which were drawn up in the thirties by his grandfather Jan Donner, then a minister, had led a dormant existence since 1968. Donner took offence at the tone of the debate about Islam in the Netherlands: "Just as people do not wish to be offended in their feelings with regard to equality for males and females or equality for homosexuals, it is also inappropriate for people to be confronted offensively in their deepest religious faith."[11] But his proposal died without a struggle and the Minister Thom de Graaf pointed to an existing ministerial note quoting a pronouncement of the European Court for Human Rights which states that "a believer cannot expect to be protected from every criticism of his religion".[12]

In 2002 a sigh of relief had run through the country when Fortuyn's killer turned out to be a nature activist and no Muslim. But in the eyes of many a time bomb was ticking which went off when his friend and sympathizer Theo van Gogh was killed by a Muslim terrorist. Suddenly quite a few people seemed to remember that for more than a millennium a war had raged between Christianity and Islam. Blaming multicultural society in general and Islam in particular some people have even shown their willingness to emigrate.

However, anti-Islam sentiments are not related only to van Gogh's death. In spite of all the reservations one might and should have about opinion polls, all the figures point to the existence for some time in the Netherlands of subdued tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims. A 2003 survey by the *Market and Opinion Research Institute* (NIPO) shows, that most Muslims do not feel at home in Dutch society: 85% of the interviewees did not feel welcome and 69% agreed with the proposition that however much a Muslim adapts to Dutch society, he or she will stay an outsider forever. Only 9% of the native population thought Muslims did enough to integrate into Dutch society compared with 52% of Muslims. 51% of non-Muslims agreed with the proposition that they were scared by the growing number of Muslims in the Netherlands. 24% of Muslims were of the opinion that in general Western culture exerts a bad influence.[13]

Particularly since the killing of van Gogh, Islam is often perceived as a monolithic bloc and is being associated with extremism, religious fanaticism, suppression of the rights of women, honor revenge, the burka and the sharia; in short, with phenomena that are incompatible with liberal, Western democracy. However, this identification is not "natural" for the Netherlands. The country has long been host to a very mixed group of

---

[11] Carin Tiggelovern, "Discussie over godslastering barst los", (Discussion about blasphemy bursts out), *Radio Netherlands*, November 16, 2004 http://www2.rnw.nl/rnw/nl/achtergronden/nederland/nederlandsepolitiek/act20041116_godslastering.

[12] "De Graaf ziet geen reden hardere aanpak belediging", (De Graaf does not see a cause for a tougher policy on insulting), *De Telegraaf*, November 15, 2004. http://www2.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/15640911/De_Graaf_ziet_geen_reden_hardere_aanpak_belediging.html.

[13] E. Nieuwenhuizen, "Publieke opinie en de multiculturele samenleving in Nederland – Factsheet", (Public opinion and multicultural society in the Netherlands), *Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie* (National Bureau against Racial Discrimination), Rotterdam, September 6, 2003 http://www.lbr.nl/?node=1926.

Muslims. They originate from the former colonies of Surinam and Indonesia and have been well integrated into Dutch society, though not always without a struggle. It is not at all surprising that for them there was no inherent opposition between religion and democratic freedom. Not least because in its original sources Islam contains several concepts that can be related to contemporary democratic principles. The concept of "shura", for example, refers to mutual consultation and "bajat" can be translated into a social contract.

In the meantime many experts agree that the Netherlands' multicultural society has turned out to be an illusion. At the beginning of 2004 Jacqueline Costa-Lascoux, who is a member of the French commission that advised president Chirac regarding the wearing of head-scarves in schools, sounded a warning note after a working visit to the Netherlands. She and her colleagues spoke to a range of the experts and parties concerned. The commission considered alarming the increasing presence of and pressure from Muslim fundamentalists as well as the formation of ghettos, "black schools", i.e. schools with predominantly children from immigrant-families, and demographic developments which, according to the most extreme calculations, would cause the Muslim population to be in the majority in almost all the big cities of the Netherlands by 2010. According to Costa-Lascoux, nearly all those with whom she talked spoke "without hesitation" of "the total failure" of integration. Costa-Lascoux, who is a member of the *Haut conseil à l'intégration* in France and also works for the Council of Europe as an expert in the field of citizenship and human rights, argued, that the Netherlands is "the country in Europe that is the most vulnerable to Muslim fundamentalism". In her presence French Muslims had called the Netherlands "a soft touch".[14] The Netherlands is a small country and is one of the most densely populated regions in the world. Dutch society is very "open" and has a vulnerable infrastructure; a militant minority, however small, can, indeed, disrupt social life relatively easily. Furthermore, in contrast with for example France or the United Kingdom, the Netherlands has hardly any experience with fighting terrorism.

Is Dutch civil society really threatened by an "Islamic encroachment"? According to *Statistics Netherlands* (CBS) the number of Muslims in the Netherlands is almost 1 million out of a total population of more than 16 million people. At the beginning of 2004 there were an estimated 945.000 Muslims living in the Netherlands, which is about double the number in 1990 and 5,8% of the total Dutch population. Two-thirds of Muslims living in the Netherlands are of Turkish or Moroccan origin[15] and are mainly resident in the major cities. In Greater Amsterdam 13% of the

[14] Pieter Kottman, "Moslims zien Nederland als een pakje boter", (Muslims consider the Netherlands as a soft touch), *NRC-Handelsblad*, February 2, 2004; see also: Kottman, Pieter, "Invloed Nederland op advies hoofddoek," (Influence Netherlands on advice head-scarf), *NRC-Handelsblad*, February 2, 2004.

[15] By the end of 2003 there were 453 mosques in the Netherlands. 206 were Turkish, 92 Moroccan and only 6 were Surinam-related. In: Karen Phalet, Jessika ter Wal, Carlo van Praag. *Moslim in Nederland. Een onderzoek naar de religieuze betrokkenheid van Turken en Marokkanen. Samenvatting.* (Muslims in the Netherlands. An investigation into religious commitment of Turks and Moroccans. Summary). Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau - onderzoeksrapport (Social and Cultural Planning Office - Research Report.) *SCP-report*. The Hague, 2004/9SCP, p. 35.

population is Muslim, in the conurbation of The Hague 11,4% and in the Rijnmond area of Rotterdam 10,2%.[16]

Both Turks and Moroccans feel a strong transnational solidarity which is boosted by the fact that Dutch legislation allows dual citizenship. Recent research from the *Social and Cultural Planning Office* (SCP) shows that, in spite of a trend towards secularization, the second generation as well continues unabatedly to identify with Islam and many choose partners from their countries of origin. According to the researchers no more than 60% of the native population (according to other counts as few as 40%) belongs to a religious denomination. On the other hand no less than 95% and 97% of Turks and Moroccans consider themselves Muslims. For the huge majority not to be a Muslim is apparently not an option. It is also obvious that many Muslims regard religion as an "ethnic marker".[17]

Of course the process of secularization did not pass the Islamic communities by but tolerance has its limits. The *Political Tolerance Experiment* which was carried out by the SCP before the death of van Gogh showed that, when religion was at stake and particularly when non-believers scoffed at religion, a majority of respondents was not willing to compromise on the principle of free speech. A huge majority of native young people (75%) supported free speech for non-believers, although as many as a quarter had objections. Only a small minority of immigrants supported unlimited freedom of speech, including when religion was ridiculed (17% of Turkish and 7% of Moroccan young people and only 10% and 6% of older Turks and Moroccans).[18]

Shortly after van Gogh's death these rigid opinions concerning religion were confirmed by another survey. A large majority (71%) of respondents held the opinion that giving offence to Islam should be dealt with more firmly while 12% disagreed. 51% of Dutch Muslims supported the view that a Muslim party should be founded, while one in five disagreed. A good half of those who wanted a Muslim party thought that this party should adopt the sharia, i.e. Islam's canon law.[19] The wish to introduce the sharia, which often defies Western liberal principles, can also be regarded as an act of defiance against Dutch culture.

However, at the grassroots this defiance seems to be reciprocal. In the case of negotiations for Turkey joining the European Union (EU), for example, there is a yawning gap between politics and public opinion. Politicians are usually supportive, while public opinion is divided. The results of an opinion poll showed that 48% of the Dutch support negotiations with Turkey about EU-membership while 46% disagree. It is

---

[16] See *Statistics Netherlands* (CBS): http://www.cbs.nl/nl/publicaties/artikelen/algemeen/webmagazine/artikelen/2004/1543k.htm.

[17] *SCP-report*, *op. cit*. [15], Samenvatting (Summary), p. 40 and 7.

[18] *SCP-report* part C, "Moslim in Nederland. Religieuze dimensies, etnische relaties en burgerschap. Turken en Marokkanen in Rotterdam", (Muslims in the Netherlands. Religious dimensions, ethnic relations and citizenship. Turks and Moroccans in Rotterdam), SCP-werkdocument (SCP-working document) 106c, The Hague, 2004, p. 76.

[19] "Helft van moslims wil eigen partij", (Half of Muslims wants a party of their own), *Het Parool* December 11, 2004. These results are the outcome of a representative investigation by bureau Foquz Etnomarketing which was commissioned by the television program Nova. http://www.parool.nl/nieuws/2004/DEC/11/bin2.html. These results are square to an earlier investigation by the Social and Cultural Planning Office (*SCP-report,* op. cit. [15], Summary) carried out before van Gogh's death and which states: "However, the vast majority of Turks (95%) and Moroccans (82%) are not in favor of the introduction of Islamic law for Muslims in the Netherlands", p. 21.

remarkable that only 35% are in favor of Turkey actually joining the EU in ten years time, while 55% is not. It is also rather striking that many Dutch think that their opinion is not important. 58% takes it for granted that Turkey will become an EU member anyhow.[20] Frequent arguments against Turkish membership are that the country is no part of Europe and that its admission will be a burden to taxpayers. Furthermore many assume that Turkish membership of the EU will set off a stream of migrants from Turkey which could lead to an increase of Islamic terrorism in Europe.

In spite of the 400th anniversary of relations between Morocco and the Netherlands being celebrated in 2005, the relationship between the two countries is also not as cordial as one would have wished. In December 2004, at the opening of the jubilee year, the Moroccan minister of culture, Mohamed Achaari, argued that the fact that the killer of van Gogh "has Moroccan citizenship does not mean we asked him to kill Theo van Gogh".[21] His colleague Mohamed Bouzoubaa, who is Minister of Justice, explained, that his country is not the source of "acts of terror" in the Netherlands. On 16 December 2004 in the daily newspaper *Aujourd'hui Le Maroc* he defended Morocco against the image of being a hotbed of terrorists.[22]

The Islamic minority confronts the Netherlands with key questions and dilemmas which have often been "solved" by its native population a long time ago. The Netherlands is a long standing predominantly Calvinist trading nation. Only as the result of a protracted emancipation process did Catholics, who for a long time were looked on as second-class citizens, gain equal rights. In 1848 the constitution of Johan Rudolf Thorbecke finally laid down constitutional democracy with freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. In 1917 every religious denomination was guaranteed freedom of education. Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the law just like the principle of antidiscrimination. While the advocates of gradual integration of Muslims into Dutch society refer to the Catholic process of emancipation, opponents of this evolutionary approach argue that Catholics, unlike Muslims who often originate from Turkey and Morocco, have never interfered with the traditional Jewish-Christian and humanistic values which are the foundations of Dutch culture.

In the Netherlands there is a delicate balance between freedom of religion and separation of church and state, freedom of speech and the rejection of discrimination, freedom of education and the protection of pupils against ideological indoctrination, equal rights for all citizens and exceptional provisions for religious minorities. It is of course impossible for the legislator to codify all the ins and outs of this balance and quite often one has to appeal to existing facts, unwritten laws and hidden cultural codes. In May 2001 imam El-Moumni who lives in the Netherlands caused a stir when he depicted homosexuality as a dangerous and contagious disease. El-Moumni could appeal to freedom of speech, but he clashed with article 1 of the Dutch constitution which lays down the principle of antidiscrimination. It was none other than Pim Fortuyn who, while openly playing up his homosexuality, wanted to abolish article 1 which would have made it easier for him to be tough on immigrants. Muslims could have

[20] peil.nl via: http://www.nos.nl/nieuws/achtergronden/europeseunie/turkije_peiling_dehond.html.
[21] http://www.nos.nl/nieuws/artikelen/2004/12/16/marokkomoordvgoghnietonzezaak.html.
[22] http://www.elsevier.nl/nieuws/nederland/nieuwsbericht/asp/artnr/16979/versie/1/.

started proceedings against van Gogh for insulting the Muslim population but they did not do so because acquittal would have added fuel to the fire.

These legal dilemmas were further highlighted in the case of education. While many Dutch, both Muslims and non-Muslims, send their children to schools with a religious background, after van Gogh's death leading liberal politicians advocated the abolition of article 23 of the constitution which lays down that every religion has the right to found its own schools with financial support from public funds. According to the liberals this measure would suppress political Islam. Needless to say Christian politicians want to maintain this hard-won article of the constitution.

Foreign observers tend to be amazed at why it is the Netherlands of all countries which currently has to deal with a "clash of civilizations". This attitud is itself fed by a rather one-sided image of the country and its population. Contrary to popular belief the Netherlands has been far less tolerant than is generally assumed.[23] Quite often one cannot speak of a real tolerance between natives and immigrants, but rather of a kind of organized indifference.

One of the results of the prevailing culture-relativism has been that many problems between natives and immigrants have long been kept quiet by the country's political and cultural establishment. Such a policy has even been made the easier because, generally, the Dutch do not possess a well-defined feeling of national identity. This is also probably the reason why Dutch politics has embraced "European Thought" with so much enthusiasm. "European values" are being created which have something artificial and will often implicitly refer to a "Western ideology". Inter-European rivalries, on the other hand, which might interfere with common economic and political interests, are certainly not to be focused upon. Islamic extremism is a genuine concern for some; others may rather use it to divert attention from social and economic problems and to cement a "European" ideology.

Whether or not Muslim communities can and wish to develop a sense of loyalty towards the Dutch nation-state is of crucial importance. There are great difficulties in this. Not only because young second- and third-generation Moroccans and Turks often feel themselves to be neither foreigners nor Dutchmen. Political participation also leaves much to be desired. Many immigrants feel themselves hardly if at all represented by politics and try to avoid involvement with the state by building transnational networks. Their criticism of political representation is not unfounded and is shared by many native Dutch men and women.

Fortuyn was a popular hero not only because he criticized Islam but also because he decried the Netherlands' political culture. He met with approval from most of the country's leading experts. Two days before his assassination they complained about the sorry state of Dutch democracy. According to the judgment of renowned researchers, the Netherlands has only the illusion of democracy. They complained that politics has been reduced to administration and political parties have become no more than a

[23] See for example the history of Dutch (pre-)war collaboration with Nazi-Germany and its aftermath in: Jan Herman Brinks, "The Dutch, the Germans and the Jew"s, *History Today*, vol. 49 (6), June 1999, pp. 17-23. See also: http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Units/cgjs/publications/hbdutgerjew.html.

useful leg up to a further career. Hans Daudt, the *éminence grise* of the Netherlands' political scientists and professor emeritus at the University of Amsterdam, argued that we live in a country with guaranteed basic rights for everybody. "But we should not massage it with slogans into something it is not: a democracy with representatives of the people." According to him the Netherlands is actually governed by a "ruling class" which strongly resembles "the Republic since the 17th century". "The difference from the past", according to Daudt, "is at the very most that the positions are no longer hereditary and are being shared out among the aristocracy but also nowadays among the bourgeoisie. Other than that there is not much difference. In the Netherlands people are still not chosen specifically for office because the political elite is determined to keep matters in their own hands." Political scientist Peter Mair from Leiden even speaks of a "cartel democracy" and his colleague from Maastricht, Nico Baakman, made matters worse. Politicians, he argued "must have proved that, regardless of their political color, they have been socialized within the system. They have to be able to change position, make compromises and keep their mouths shut. The system has no use for people who are unruly".[24]

For many Dutch, Fortuyn and also van Gogh were the embodiments of this unruly personality. Both were radical reactions to a culture of political consensus in which sincere debate, about, among other things, integration and loyalty towards the values of Dutch society has been avoided. Van Gogh called himself a "professional kid" and behaved accordingly. Just like Fortuyn before him he opposed the complacency of artists, the media and especially politicians whom he blamed for being out of touch with reality. He also challenged the limits of freedom of the press and overstretched them. In his last interview he argued that there was no need for him to be afraid of being shot because, as he put it, his "arrogance" would protect him. "I think this has such charisma that the bullet won't come for me".[25] He was wrong.

It seems unlikely that his arrogance was particularly conducive to the integration of the Muslim population into Dutch society. It has polarized and dramatized the situation. The Muslim communities, the majority of which reject all religious violence, have to confront the question of whether they want to comply with the rules of Dutch society and how they intend to deal with the violent element in their grassroots. There were some alarming reactions from their side too: "After what had happened to Fortuyn, he should have seen this coming", a Muslim girl *not* wearing a head scarf ominously argued on Dutch television. In the meantime a kind of Cold War drags on between Muslims and non-Muslims in the Netherlands. Sybrand van Hulst, head of the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), said: "We should not think that the murder of van Gogh was the only assassination in the pipeline and that we can go on as normal: No way."[26] Sadly almost everybody agrees.

---

[24] Gerard van Westerloo, "De illusie van democratie", (The illusion of democracy), *M NRC-Handelsblad*. May 2002, pp. 30-36.

[25] Interview with Theo van Gogh on October 29, 2004. *RVU Educatieve Omroep*, http://www.rvu.nl/rvu.php?i=3&l=0&n=221.

[26] Rob Schoof and Michele de Waard, "Het ronselen voor de jihad gaat volop door"; Politiek sloeg volgens Sybrand van Hulst (AIVD) waarschuwingen te lang in de wind ("Recruiting for jihad continues unabatedly". According to Sybrand van Hulst (AIVD) politics disregarded warnings for too long), *NRC Handelsblad*, December 31, 2004. http://www.minbzk.nl/wwwaivdnl/actueel_publicaties/ander_nieuws/interview_met_hoofd.

Van Gogh's death and its aftermath made it very clear that the alleged tolerance and liberal stance of Dutch society should once and for all be relegated to the realm of fiction. This reality check might be considered overdue. It also remains to be seen if unlimited freedom to offend and state sponsored confessional education are desirable and if dual-citizenship and a rather tolerant policy of family reunion are conducive to the integration of Muslims into Dutch society. The Netherlands' political and cultural elites however, who share responsibility for the rise and fall of both Fortuyn and van Gogh, would be well advised not to use the argument of "Islamic encroachment" to avoid the hard question of how to breathe new life into an old and multiethnic democracy. It is safe to assume that both Muslims and non-Muslims would benefit from such a rejuvenation.

The murder of Dutch film maker Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist caused a world-wide commotion and brought several problematic issues to the surface that demand answers. Firstly, are there any parallels between the killing of Van Gogh and that of right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn, both of them being popular critics of Islam, and secondly, did Van Gogh, who used very offensive language against Islam, cross the line of journalistic decency and freedom of speech? A third question deserving attention is what is the position of Muslims in Dutch society and, finally, what does the assassination of van Gogh and its aftermath say about Dutch society. The author examines these questions which are not only important to the Netherlands, but may also stimulate debate elsewhere.